

Step by Step Instructions for Writing the First Draft of a Memoir

1. Make a pot of strong coffee. *Note: do not be tempted to substitute tea for coffee. Motivation and creativity will be affected.*
 2. *This step is critical.* After turning on your device, you'll need to give it a moment to warm up before opening its word processing program. Use this time to shop online for possible outfits to wear to book-signings, in-person readings and television interviews that may be scheduled after the publication of your memoir. Continue for up to two hours if necessary. You may need to buy a few different outfits, as different types of events will necessitate different style choices. For example, the outfit you might wear to host Saturday Night Live will be entirely different from the outfit you would wear when doing a Ted talk. You also want to consider a red carpet gown to wear to the premiere of any movies based on your memoir and at least one event honoring you at the Kennedy Center. Don't be afraid to extend this time to three hours or more if it falls on an Amazon Prime Day or Nordstrom's annual sale.
 3. Refill coffee.
 4. Choose a topic or theme for your memoir. The autobiographical nature of memoirs can make this a challenge. To my thinking, acceptable themes can be spiritual ("The Power of Now" by Eckhart Tolle), travel ("Eat, Pray,
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Love" by Elizabeth Gilbert), coming of age ("My Unexpected Life" by Jennifer Gashner), and—more often than one might think—celebrity autobiography ("Quincy" by Quincy Jones). A universally relatable theme or topic is not as important as you might think. Now is the time to distinguish yourself. Abandon the stifling effects of restraint, reason or sensibility. Don't allow the potential of your memoir to be suppressed by realism, facts or chronological or historical accuracy. In my experience, the best memoirs are aspirational. Dare to dream. And avoid cliches. Avoid them like the plague. Be in it to win it. Go big or go home.

5. Before moving on to the next step, it's time to take a break. Refill your coffee, have a snack, meditate. Take a nap.
 6. Every author who has risen to the challenge of writing a memoir is familiar with the next step and the painstaking attention to detail it requires. It is time to select the appropriate font. Do not rush this step. Font selection has a direct and obvious effect on the financial success of a memoir. If you begin to tire before completing this step, take a break and revisit the shopping carts for the various online retail sites you visited in step two and verify that your purchases have been confirmed.
 7. After finalizing your font selection, it is time to start writing. Do not rush into free-flowing prose. First, create an outline. Some choose to visualize their outline by placing large cardboard squares on the living room floor or sidewalk, if it is not raining or windy. I like to use 8x10 sheets of paper, with each representing a segment of my life broken down into bullet points. Some choose ^{to} break down their outline into
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post-it notes, which are then placed on a corkboard. There are *no* bad ideas, creating an outline may help to “zoom out” and visualize the direction of your story.

8. Now it's time to take a break, have a snack, call a friend, watch a movie, or organize the garage.
 9. When you feel sufficiently rested, begin writing your story. Reference your outline often, and remember: the first draft is truly your first draft, and will not be perfect.
 10. Write.
 11. Your completed first draft should be imperfect. Seriously. This is good news, as it means you are probably done with the first draft, even though you are far from satisfied with it. Don't worry. It will be cleaned up and edited later. Say goodbye for now and pat yourself on the back. You have finished the hardest part of this!
 12. Now is the time to celebrate! Put your story down and do something to clear your mind. Go outside and take a walk on the beach, go for a run, take a swim, go for a bike ride. But wherever you go, be really careful. If you get into an accident, you'll risk having your kids later discover your first draft and mistake it for a final draft. You'll want to be remembered for having at least a little talent.
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