

Remembering: Different tools to use to help you write a comprehensive biography

Writing a biography is a dream that many people share. And on the face of it, it does seem like the easiest type of story to write – that of your own life. You don't need to worry about establishing a complex plot line, or about spending months of time creating and getting to know your leading characters. No, this is all already created for you – you just simply need to regurgitate on paper your life experiences thus far.

All very well and good, but when it comes to writing down your life history, there are so many gaps that are difficult to fill. Unfortunately, remembering your own life just isn't as easy as it seems. There will be periods of your life and events that have happened within your life that you can't recall, or that you can't recall accurately – particularly relating to your earlier life.

Fortunately there are some great memory jogging techniques that can help you to clear your mind and focus on remembering missing facts or events. A few ideas are listed below:

1. Produce a timeline. Split your life into age ranges; i.e. 0-8, 9-17, 18-30, etc. Then start to write down everything that you can remember happening during these periods. Start with all of the major events in your life, such as education, moving house, family dramas, first loves, etc, and then start to break each major area down into smaller events.
2. Locate your old CVs. Anyone who has been in employment is likely to have written a CV at some point in their life, and most individuals will have written several. It can be helpful to dig out old CVs and look back at what they tell you about your life then. Not only is this a useful way to find out about where you were living, your work experience and your hobbies and interests, but it is also a useful way to hear how your tone of voice was at this stage in your life.
3. Build a family tree. This can help you slot all of your family members together into a nice and neat jigsaw puzzle, and it can also be a great memory jogger for recognising characteristics and stories associated with other family members.
4. Think of all of the roles you have undertaken in your life. This can include jobs as well as roles such as carer, wife, mother, father, sister, daughter etc. Think about why you define yourself by these roles, and think of important or significant events that have happened whilst you fulfilled each of these roles.
5. Use memorabilia to help jog your memory about events that have happened in the past. We often think of photos, but other ideas can be letters, clothes, items purchased or collected on holidays, etc.
6. Use lists or mind maps. Start with one word, such as 'wedding' and build a picture of everything that you can think of that is associated with this word for you. This could include random words, or could be stories or events that were surrounded with either your own wedding, or that of a loved one.