THE
20 TOP TIPS
FOR WRITING MEMOIR

By Marion Roach Smith
YOU NEED TO START WRITING MEMOIR and you need to do it today. Let me help you. Here are my 20 top tips for writing memoir. They will take you through a definition of memoir, knowing the difference between memoir and autobiography, how to get started writing memoir, how to write someone else’s story, how to structure a memoir and much more.

And then, because I know you will want more, I have added at the end of this page the 20 top tips from well-published authors and included excerpts from their recent books. I reached out to these authors and asked them to write these posts just for you. Enjoy.

The Memoir Project’s 20 Top Tips

1. **What is Memoir?** Memoir is a three-legged stool, designed specifically to hold up your story. In other words, it has requirements – four, to be precise: your story and three others – and learning them will allow you to write this wondrous form.

2. **How to Define Memoir?** One great way to define memoir is to think of the crime procedural. Let me explain.

3. **What is the Difference Between Memoir and Autobiography?** Knowing the difference between memoir and autobiography is essential to writing successfully in either genre, and yet it is probably the single most misunderstood aspect of both

4. **What are the Basic Components of a Memoir?** How to write a powerful memoir in three simple steps.

5. **What to Read to Learn to Write Memoir.** These are the best books on writing I’ve ever read.

6. **All Memoir Must Include Transcendence.** What goes into a memoir? Many wonderful things, though one of them is transcendence. Something has to shift. To change. To grow.

7. **How to Start Writing Every Day.** The greatest challenge to your writing is that you need a writing practice. You are not writing every day. Let’s change that.

8. **How To Plan Out A Book.** Here are the five simple steps to planning your memoir.
9. **How to Write Someone Else’s Story.** Writing someone else’s memoir, or writing someone else into your own, is a huge responsibility. Learn to do it well.

10. **How To Structure a Memoir.** Memoir structure is based on your argument, which is based on something you know after something you’ve experienced. Let me explain.

11. **The Very Best Writing Punch List.** What is your writing punch list? Haven’t got one? Try mine.

12. **My Single Greatest Piece of Writing Advice is This: Write With Intent.** Give up all of those time-wasting writing prompts and useless writing exercises and learn to write with intent. Your writing career will flourish.

13. **How To Write Memoir About Family Abuse.** Writing memoir in the #MeToo movement has taught us many things. Let’s review them.

14. **How To Write Good Characterization in Memoir.** How to describe people in memoir? What are the tricks to getting character right on the page?

15. **How to Beat Writer’s Block With Structure.** Book structure is the key to never getting stuck in your memoir writing.

16. **Who is the Narrator of Your Memoir?** Knowing who narrates a memoir is a huge decision. Let me help you make it.

17. **How to Write About Your Relatives in Memoir.** How to write about family? Here are some top tips for your memoir writing.


19. **How to Write Less and Say More.** To write good memoir, write sparingly. Here is some guidance.

20. **When is a Memoir Finished?** A memoir is finished when you have proved your argument.

**And here is your bonus tip**

**How to Write an Op-ed.** Just what is an op-ed and how do you write one? Are op-eds memoir and if so, just how much memoir goes into an op-ed or online opinion piece? I bet you did not know how much we all want to read your take on today’s issues. Learn now to do so here.
20 Tips from Other Well-Published Authors

As I wrote above, I asked the very best memoir writers in the world for their twenty top tips for writing memoir, and they’ve written them — for you, and included excerpts from their most recent books as examples of how to write memoir. I’ve put them in the order you’ll need them to write memoir of any length. Use them as an at-home course. Share them with friends. Come back to them again and again.

Don’t have time to read them all, and want a quick course in writing memoir? Then, in this order, read 1, 2, 5, 9 & 20 and write on. But write. The world is waiting to read your work.

1. A definition of memoir
2. How to begin a memoir
3. Finding the message in your memoir
4. How to write about an exceptional life experience
5. How to write a first draft
6. How to write about your family
7. How to recall details from your life
8. How to access the details of your life
9. How to write great characterization of yourself and others
10. When to fictionalize a memoir
11. How to tell the truth when writing memoir
12. More on telling the truth when writing memoir
13. How to quiet the voices in your head and write a memoir you’d like to read
14. The truth and consequence of writing memoir
15. How to take a personal topic and make it public
16. What to leave in your memoir
17. Writing from a question you want answered
18. What to share when writing memoir
19. Know your audience when writing memoir
20. How to execute the perfect rewrite