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Write Your Life Story Now

By John Williams

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## About the Author

John Williams has written several e-books about a variety of subjects.

He became interested in writing when a friend asked him to help prepare and publish his autobiography. The book was over 300 pages and took several months. But, its publication on the Internet was a great success and, most importantly, helped the author fulfill a dream that he had believed would never be realized.

Thinking back to that experience gave John the idea to write this book.

John said, "I've learned a lot since that first book and believe that "Write Your Story Now!" will help anyone who wants to write about their own experiences or those of family members or other people who are close to them."

"I give the readers all the simple, proven steps that anyone can follow to put together their book and either publish it themselves or offer it to a publisher."

"I've had a lot of experience with electronic books and share some great ideas about how my readers can reduce their costs and the time involved in producing their finished book by using the Internet."

John also gives some useful tips about ensuring that you get value for the time and money you invest in your book.

You may think that writing and publishing your story is too costly or time-consuming. But, John has written several books and will help you make your own story a reality even if you have no special skills or training and are concerned about the time, expense and stress involved in the project.

## Introduction

This book has been written to help anyone that wants to write their own life story or about the lives and times of people close to them or their ancestors.

Only you can decide the purpose behind your book. You need to have this clear in your mind before you start work on the project, because it will govern the way you proceed and the tools and other resources which you will need.

Do you want to:

- Q Provide a keepsake to pass on to future generations of your family
- Q Satisfy or encourage an interest in your family's history and accomplishments in the wider community
- Q Have your book published by a regular publisher
- Q Produce a limited number of copies for distribution to family and other interested people
- Q Produce the book as a companion to your genealogical research

Each of these options has different requirements. You will save yourself time and stress if you work out your main goal early.

That will also help if you need to get the cooperation of other people, both family members and others, with whom you are not in regular contact. If you have your goal clear in your mind, you will be able to explain your approach easily to others and almost certainly ensure their support and cooperation.

## Why Write *Your* Story?

This is a question which only you can answer. But, you can be sure that your life and your view of the events and people involved really are important enough to be worth the time and effort needed to record as much as possible of it in permanent form.

Some people want a record of their life and times just for the benefit of their family, and perhaps a close friend or two.

You, or people that you knew very well, may have been closely involved in historically significant events or have significant achievements in their own lives which could be of interest to the wider community and even people around the World.

If you don't record you and your family's part in the history of your country, who will?



Your story, despite any real or imagined faults, could be very valuable to later generations, even if only for the perspective you offer about events, the way of life and people of your time. As the gap between the events you remember and the experiences of your children and later generations increases, it becomes harder for those people to understand the values and other motivations which drove the people of your time.



## Begin Now!



When you plan to write your story or that of your family, I strongly recommend that you get started as soon as possible.

It is also important that you let your wider family know that you are doing it.

This can have great benefits:

It commits you to complete the task. This will help to get you started.

It may encourage family members who are willing and able to help you to contact you.

It can reduce the possibility of the accidental loss of valuable documents, photos and other information which you may not even know about when you start.

### *When to Begin?*

The important thing is not where to begin but when – **NOW** is the best time!

I understand that you want to be fully prepared and have everything near at hand.

But, as with the old saying, “Time waits for no man (or woman)!”

Every day, documents and photos are lost, people forget about events which they experienced and which may not have seemed important at the time, so they had not bothered to make any notes about it. But, in later years, their personal memories of those events would have been of great interest to their family. Those recollections might also have been of interest to historians and researchers too.

I have been listening to reports of the floods in various parts of Australia this year and that brought to mind my late mother talking about the floods which she experienced as a small child in the 1920’s!

People die unexpectedly. They often take with them information and personal

reminisces which are not recorded anywhere.

Arthur Hailey, the American author is credited with a very appropriate statement about this, "Every death is like the burning of a library."

You may never even know that someone in your family had photos, letters and other ephemera which would have been of great value to you for preparing and confirming sometimes very important details of your story because they thought it was useless junk and threw it out days before you contacted them.

## What's Stopping You?

I hope that this section will help to encourage you to get moving with your book and perhaps clear away some concerns that you may have about going ahead with this project.

I have talked and corresponded with many people that have said they wanted to write a family or personal history. I will try clear away the main reasons which they have mentioned as holding them back.

### *No Writing Skills or Training*

Please don't let yourself be intimidated about taking on this sort of project just because you do not have any formal training or qualifications which you feel you may need to create and publish your book.

I know many people that have produced their own successful book (some have done several) without any formal training or study.

Modern technology is making it much easier. The main quality you need is desire which can help to keep you motivated until you start to see some results from your writing.

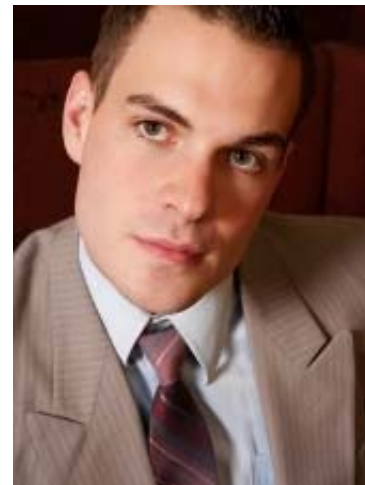
Before you begin, you might want to read some other people's biographies or family histories to see how they have done theirs.

The important thing to remember is that your readers will be looking for interesting information and anecdotes rather than judging your book on your style and command of your language.

### *Missing Information*

Some people believe that a family history or personal biography is beyond their ability because they don't remember enough of the important details.

They feel that their efforts would be incomplete and a waste of everybody's time.



My answer to that suggestion is that no book is ever perfect. It's a comforting thought that every edition of important reference books are likely to contain some errors!

If you produce your book as an ebook or get copies printed as you need them by a Print On Demand service, you can always make changes if you learn that there are important errors which should be corrected.

If the book is produced by a commercial publisher, there is likely to be a significant amount of research and proof-reading before it is actually put into print.

I expect that you will be pleasantly surprised by the support and generosity from other members of your wider family and people that have been involved with your story if you showed them that you were serious about producing this type of book for everybody to enjoy and learn from.

### ***Upsetting People***

You might have a strong desire to produce your family history but also feel some serious concerns that you might upset some members of your wider family by restarting old arguments or unintentionally revealing information which might upset or offend them.

If you have these feelings, I believe you have the right attitude to be able to produce a fair and balanced story.

If you know about any grievances which still linger from old disputes, and you are prepared to talk reasonably with all involved about what should or should not be part of the written record, you probably will get everybody's agreement to go ahead with your book.

Remember that the book is not a way to revive old disputes but more to acknowledge and celebrate the efforts and successes of your family through the years.

### ***Poor Quality Writing or Presentation***

Please forget the idea that you need any special training or qualification to write about your own life and times.

This is one subject on which you can consider yourself the world's leading expert.

Remember that the people who will be reading this book will want to know what you know, not how well you were taught to write.

**Tell your story in your words.** Your way of expressing yourself will help enormously to make your story come alive when it is read in the years to come. **“Your words, your way”** will be more effective than almost anyone else could achieve with any special writing techniques.

If you are still thinking that your writing or the presentation of your book will not be good enough, you have two options.

- 1) You can enlist other family members to help you with those parts of the project that you do not feel you can handle by yourself.
- 2) You can pay somebody to do those tasks or assist you to do them yourself so that you improve your ability and gain more confidence for any future writing that you do.

I suggest that you focus on the first option because the second option, though it may seem much easier, is likely to be expensive, require much more time and involve more stress before the project is complete and the book is published.

When you start the project, watch for members of your wider family who show great interest in the book or have the skills which you believe you don't.

When you find somebody with the interest or a relevant skill, ask them if they would have the time and desire to help you with the production of the book?

You might be pleasantly surprised at the positive reaction which that sort of question gets.

But, you are actually giving them a great compliment. They know that the project is important to you and your question shows that you recognize their

ability and interest.

Of course, they may be someone that you do not get along with. You have to decide whether the clash between your personalities is stronger than your desire to have them help with the book.

### ***What will Your Family or Friends Think?***

If you are concerned about how other people, whether close friends, family or perhaps the people that you work with, will view your personal history project, I have good news for you.

Most people outside of your close family will probably not care much one way or the other. Those who do take an interest or offer an opinion about the proposed book are likely to be supportive or perhaps a little envious.

Most people, at some time or other, have the desire to write a book of some kind. Of course, very few ever get past the stage of dreaming about it.

When they find out that someone they know is working seriously towards producing an original book, only the meanest are likely to react in any sort of negative way.

If anybody does suggest that the book is a bad idea or maybe that you're the worst possible person to undertake such a project, just remember the advice of a famous British literary agent.

She said that some of the most successful authors she ever met told her that they also had negative reactions from people that they had expected to support their early literary efforts.

But, instead of being discouraged and upset by the negativity they received, they turned that experience into a motivational prod which helped them with their writing.

Because they wanted to show that the naysayers were wrong, they used the negativity as motivation to do an even better job and show everyone that they could produce a great book!

### *Lack of Time*

Another excuse which many people believe is justification for discarding the idea of ever producing their own book is that they don't have enough time to do a proper job of it.

They are ignoring these simple points:

Writers like J.K. Rowling, Isaac Asimov, John Creasy and Earl Stanley Gardner have demonstrated that people with enough desire can produce readable and even exceptional books under the most trying circumstances.

All of these writers only had the same number of hours each day as we do. Some of them wrote so many books that they had to use two or more pen names because there were too many books to be published under one author's name.

Also, most of the above literary legends did not have access to word processors, home computers or other technological wonders.

Your book can be as long or short as you feel is needed to tell the story.

With all our advantages, it's surely possible for us to produce one book within whatever timeframe we choose, isn't it?

**It isn't really a lack of time that holds  
most would-be authors back.  
It's a lack of focus.**

If you focus on the book and the potential benefits for yourself and the members of your wider family which can come from it, then you will start to look for ways that you can fit the various stages of its production into your regular schedule.

Maybe you could reduce the amount of time you spend watching TV or in some other generally unproductive pastime, just for a month or so.

That would be enough time to get your book started. Then, you would have a better idea of how long the whole project might take and the amount of time and effort which you would have to do.

One of the most important tips I got was to write for some specified amount of time every day. If you write for just one hour a day (or even thirty minutes) you can write a book in less than a year, probably much less.

There are many other ways that you can consider using to find the time you might need.

If you are a morning person, you could perhaps get up half an hour early or, if you are more productive late in the day, just try going to bed half an hour later. If you do this, say, four days a week then you would have two hours for your writing apart from any that you could find during your regular routine.

Every goal we have will require us to adjust our schedule and our viewpoint for the time which it takes us to reach it.

The main point is that any sort of delay in starting your project will probably mean that you lose the chance to get some information or mementos from some people in your wider family.

This will mean that your project will take you longer and require more effort to get the same quality results that you might have got more easily with their assistance.



## Get Help

There is no reason that you need to do everything which is involved in creating your book yourself.

Trying to do everything can produce many undesirable results:

- 8 Your book may never be finished.
- 8 Your health may be affected.
- 8 You may get so busy that you have problems with other family members.
- 8 Your book may not be as good as you intended because you become stressed by taking on too much of the work involved by yourself.

Think about asking other family members for help but please don't put pressure on anyone or be upset if they cannot help you.

That will cause ill feeling which may result in serious problems later on. Treat them with respect and there is always the chance that they might change their mind later on.

I've heard of writers who got polite rejection to their requests when they were just starting on their project. But, when the other people saw that they made a genuine effort to produce a quality story, some of them became much more willing to help them.

### Professional Help

There are many parts to preparing, producing and publishing your Life Story. Many of the tasks could be done more easily and in less time if you pay for assistance of people who have the skills and experience or even just the time which you lack.

Finding the right person will take time and care because mistakes in selection can cause serious problems.

Everyone that you use, whether they are giving you free help or changing you a substantial amount, should be either someone you can work

comfortably with or someone that can provide exceptional value for which you are prepared to put up with any clashes between your personalities.

Everyone that you use must be someone you trust.

The person you select should have experience with similar projects.

If they offer references, follow them up. If they don't offer any references from satisfied customers, be a bit cautious.

The suggestions below are my opinions but not legal or professional advice:

Make sure that you have a written and signed agreement which states, among whatever other conditions you want, that they sign over all rights in the work they do for you to you without any conditions or reservations. **Use your lawyer's form of words.**

You must also get a written undertaking that any creative work, such as writing or artwork is 100% original with them and, again, that they sign over all rights in the work they do for you to you without any conditions or reservations. **Use your lawyer's form of words.**

Get a lawyer to check all written agreements before you agree to them or sign them.

Your budget is an important consideration, but you must expect to pay a reasonable rate for the work involved. After all, this is a project which will be passed on through your family for many years to come.

You may be able to get referrals from:

- ✓ The members of your writers' group,
- ✓ Staff in the research section of your library
- ✓ Students at a local college who are studying relevant courses.  
Some can be very good but you need to check that they can produce material which is suitable for your purpose.
- ✓ The local Genealogical Society

Teachers are sometimes very good choices for doing many of these tasks. Many have good research and writing skills.

Writers will usually charge on the basis of the number of words they produce for you. Editors may also do that. That may be a better system for you than paying someone on an hourly basis because you will know up-front how much the task is likely to cost you.

Artists or graphic designers who you pay to produce your cover illustrations and perhaps other pictures for your book will charge either by the hour or by the job.

It might cost you much more if they quote on a time basis but you can get an estimate. Remember that any estimate is not a firm offer.

**Illustrations:** I know many people want to design their own covers and maybe do other illustrations. Think about this carefully. You may be able to do appealing pictures which people will enjoy looking at. But, most of us will produce a better book and save a lot of time and aggravation if we pay someone who is trained and experienced in this sort of work.

The best idea might be to find someone you can work with and give them suggestions about what the illustrations, including the cover, might contain.

Then, leave it to them and don't be upset if their output is not exactly like you thought it should be. As long as it is of professional standard, it will probably get a better response from readers because professionals usually have a better understanding of design and the use of colors.

**Do it Yourself:** If you decide to do your own cover, please keep it simple without too many elements. I also suggest that you look at covers of books in your library and bookshops to see how the professionals do it. If you see some that really seem outstanding to you, use them as a guide for yours. Then, get some (hopefully) impartial feedback from other people before deciding on your final design.

If you attract the interest of a publisher, they will usually want to assign the cover and any other illustrations to an artist that they have confidence in.

Demanding or even suggesting that they use your Aunt Margaret to illustrate the book may kill any interest they have in publishing your book!

There are some web sites, such as eLance.com <http://www.elance.com/> where you might find writers and graphic artists that could help add a professional touch to your book. You must check carefully all the information supplied to you. These sites charge a fee and may offer an escrow service where you deposit the payment which you and the writer or artist have agreed on with the service until the specified task is completed to your satisfaction.

**Research:** You or some other family member is probably the best person to do this. I know that it can be time consuming and frustrating but it can also be an uplifting experience when you finally locate some important piece of information or a document. And just imagine the thrill of locating some relative whom you did not know about or had lost contact with long ago!

I would always do some of the research myself before even considering getting professional help with this.

You need to be able to give them some guidelines and know about how long the work they charge you for should take.

**Ghostwriting:** If you sincerely feel that you cannot write the story yourself, you could find an experienced writer to write the final draft from your notes.

I understand that the writing can seem difficult when you start, but it could also become one of the most enjoyable and satisfying parts of the whole project when you start to really get into the meat of your story.

But, many people use a ghost-writer because they are too busy or inexperienced with writing.



Whoever you choose for that task must be someone that you are confident can produce a book which you will be very happy to pay for and put your name on. They must also be someone that you have believe will complete the work in the agreed time with minimum fuss and keep

your information confidential.

A ghostwriter will probably work closely with you, at least until they have a good knowledge of the material and your attitude about the material.

If they don't know how you express yourself, the book is unlikely to “sound” like you wrote it.

**Transcription:** If you don't want to tackle the physical task of writing so much, you could still produce the text for your book personally by recording yourself speaking the material and getting a transcriptionist to covert your audio to written text.

You need to confirm that the text file they produce for you will be in a format that your word processor can use because you will need to check the text and probably fix some small, inevitable errors.

You may find advertisements in your newspaper and on the Internet.

You might find someone by approaching a local secretarial school or service.

You should ensure that you will get the transcribed text on disk as well as in printed form.

## **Be Careful About Copyright**

One significant problem is copyright infringement. You must be sure that neither you nor anyone that helps to produce your book uses anyone’s copyright material.

You can check written material by putting small sections into an Internet Search Engine and checking any material which shows up. You can use a site called <http://www.copyscape.com> to check for duplicate material.

These methods can help but, because there is so much material so there cannot be any guarantee that everything will be located through these methods.

You need to be able to check and then trust the sources of the material you use.

If you want to use copyright material, ask first and get a written reply from the actual copyright holder or their authorized representative. Penalties for proven infringement can be many thousands of dollars but you really don’t want you, your book or your family to be tainted even with just an accusation of using someone else’s material without permission.

There is a lot of material on the Internet which is offered as Public Domain or with “Private Label Rights” (meaning that you can use or adapt it in almost any way you wish). Unfortunately, not all of that material is correctly labeled and using the wrong material can leave you liable even if someone told you it was okay.

There is a lot of misinformation about Copyright, especially on the Internet.

The best source about copyright as it relates to you is your own legal advisor. You may also get information from your Government’s law-related web sites and Nolo, a publisher of legal reference books at <http://www.nolo.com/>.

### ***Using Photos of People***

Wherever possible, get permission form the people in the picture to use it as well as from the person that owns the copyright of the picture

## Contracts

You should get any contract you are offered reviewed by a lawyer, preferably one that has experience with book contracts. Some writer’s organizations have sets of guidelines which they provide to their members or they may have arranged for their Members to get special rates for consultations with particular professional advisors. Such services can save you the more than the cost of your annual subscription.

It is too late to object after you have signed a contract. Some publishers will take all rights and give you little or nothing in return if you let them. You probably won’t know the potential value of those subsidiary rights, so you should have a professional that you trust review the contract.

Don’t let anyone rush you into signing anything.

### *An Internet Trap*

**Anything you put on the Internet is likely to be misused.**

You need be careful about what you put on the Internet about your book. Any pictures and text are likely to be copied and mis-used without your permission. Don’t put high quality copies of pictures you intend to use in your book on the Net. Put a watermark on any pictures but those can sometimes be removed.

Check what rights to your material you might be giving the owner of the publication or web site before submitting any part of your book to them. you do. They will have Terms of Use in some form and you need to be aware of them. Some will assume all rights in all forms for all time without any compensation to you!

Do you understand now why so many companies ask you to submit pictures and text about any important events you witness?!

## Benefits of Telling Your Story

Some readers might think that being recognized as an author would be the best benefit or perhaps the possibility of making a few dollars from their book. I believe those are both great but you will find that the interaction with other people and, in many cases, the close relationships which develop are usually more than sufficient for you to feel fully satisfied that the effort and time you invest in creating your life story or family history is worthwhile.

Some readers of this ebook may wonder if their computer skills are sufficient for this sort of project?

You can improve your computer skills while you do your research and prepare your book!

From experience, I know that this the best way inexperienced people can be motivated to become better at using their computers is for them to have a project which they are truly interested in.

What could be more interesting for you than the chance to produce your own book which will be a permanent record of your time and accomplishments and will also entertain and inform future generations of your family?

Seeing your story take shape as a book will motivate you like very few things could. You will become more comfortable in all aspects of using your computer as you begin to see some positive results.

Your increased ability to use the power of your computer will help you with all your other computer based activity for years to come. That will also give you the power to help other people improve their skills and take advantage of future developments in technology.

Your story could be very valuable for helping to make clear to younger members of your family the motivation, expectations and actions of people in the earlier generations and your own.

You get a chance to re-examine and re-evaluate actions of other people which had a great impact on your life. Some of them may have caused you great distress at the time and been hard to understand. But, with the benefit





of hindsight and away from the pressures which affected all of you at the time, you may find it much easier to understand and move on from any regrets which you still have about them.

Writing your story yourself in your own words will make it especially valuable to those people who actually know you. They will get more pleasure from the book you write your way than they ever could from anything written by someone who doesn't really know you or them very well.

## Stage One - Preparation

You need to do some thinking about what your book will include and what research you will need to do.

Keep this to a minimum so that you maintain your enthusiasm and maximize the time you have for the active preparation of your book.

If you let the initial preparation period keep growing, which it is likely to do, you may never get your book produced in any form.

It can be very easy to become disillusioned with the whole idea and move on to something else. Or, you may become one of those would-be writers who are always talking about the book, play or screenplay they're going to write "one day".

If you can get started on some simple practical task which will be necessary to get your project moving as soon as possible, your dream of producing and distributing your book is much more likely to become a reality.

Even if you only move forward very slowly, you will find that your enthusiasm will increase as you complete the first parts of your project.

### *Keep a Diary*

You will find a diary or some record of your progress with the preparation of your book very valuable. You could do this on your computer if that is easier.

I do this with each book I write. If you keep this record on your computer, you can easily change the order of different parts of the project if something happens which causes a delay to your current arrangements.

It's usually better to have all the book related information, including appointments and contacts, in a specific file. The sheer amount of material could easily take over your regular diary, if you have one. Just copy details of any appointments to your regular diary when they are close.

The Diary itself could even be a Chapter in the final version of your book. That would interest your readers and could also be a subtler encouragement for some of those who read your story to write their own as well!

## Research Tips

However good your memory is it’s almost certain that you will have to do some checking to confirm details about incidents and dates.

You may also want to add some references to major events which could have directly affected or been on the minds of the people you write about, so that your readers will be able to better understand why those people did things the way that they did.

Making sure that the information you provide is accurate is essential.

The need to do some research might seem a bit scary but you will probably find it much easier than you might think. There are many people and organizations which are waiting to help you. Some, of course, charge fees for some or all of their services, but there are also many great sources of free information.

### Your Local Library

Most publicly funded libraries are platinum standard sources for information and help which many people undervalue. Even when they are hobbled by low funding due to the current economy, the local library in most areas will have many sources of reliable information beyond the books and other publications on its shelves.

Most libraries can also obtain books or other publications from other libraries in the same state or country for you to borrow for a limited time.

They may also have material which can help your research on microfilm or other media.

But, the greatest assets in any library are usually the dedicated and enthusiastic staff. I have been to many libraries and always found that the staff is ready and very willing to help you.

You just have to ask for their guidance and be patient and understanding of the high workload they all have.

They will usually have lists of organizations of all kinds with the current

contact details for the best people to contact at each one.

All of this can help you save a lot of time and effort when you need to verify or revise information which you have been given and also help you locate much more than you were aware of. This can add to the reference value of your book or just make it more interesting for a general reader.

Your library staff may be able to help you with advice about where you can find and access Public records of all kinds. Because they get a lot of questions from people doing various kinds of research, they may even have information about the actual person you need to contact in various departments.

### **The Internet**

You will probably be a bit overwhelmed by the amount of information which is available at the click of a mouse from the Internet.

When I was preparing my friend’s autobiography, we were able to check details with people in various countries by email – most requests were answered in less than twenty four hours which was much better than waiting for a week or more to exchange airmail letters.

I wish that we had been able to phone through the Internet with VOIP, but that was not as widely available or easy to set up as it is now.

While you are looking for information on the Internet, keep in mind that all sources are not equal.

Many well-known sites are interesting to read but their content may not always be accurate or up-to-date.

Wikipedia <http://www.wikipedia.org/> is widely known and contains information on almost every subject. But, despite the sincere and on-going efforts of the people involved, the information on the site should always be checked thoroughly.

One of the main problems is that many of the files can be edited and changed by almost anyone. This has tempted many people to change details on some entries to suit their own agendas rather than to correct any errors.

That is often so that the information is more accurate, but sometimes the changes are just made to ensure that the entry is aligned with the views of the person who made the changes to it.

Few schools and no publishers that I know of will accept information which has been sourced from Wikipedia because of this problem.

Some people use the information from articles on web sites and in article directories for their research. Many of these are well-researched and accurate. But, many of the articles are written with the aim of promoting a company or product and may contain factual errors or bias.

Again, always check for independent verification of the information for your own peace of mind and to ensure you do not pass on false information in your book.

Please remember there are some risks which come along with the potential benefits which our fast access to the multitude of resources on the Internet give you. Being aware of the potential flaws and taking any necessary precautions to deal with them is very important, especially when you are visiting web sites which you don't usually go to or if you are sharing computer files with people that you do not know well.

Because you might be looking for help with your family history, it is very easy to give out information which could be used inappropriately. I have never had any problems with people in organizations which I have contacted but the risk is very real.

Please be careful to only give people the information which they need to deal with your requests and ensure that you have verified they are the person they say they are.

If you are contacted by people you don't know, check their details with a third party before giving out any sensitive information.

Misuse of your personal information may be seen as a way to defraud you, to hack into your web site or email account or to stalk you.

Don't open any files which you receive, even if they are from people you

know, without checking them with your own anti-virus and spyware programs to ensure they are safe.

It is worthwhile checking that the person whose name is on the message actually sent them to you because people do get their email accounts hacked. Any email may not have been sent by the person you thought sent it.

After that grim stuff, let’s think about something much more pleasant.

## Mining Other People’s Memories



The memories and other resources which other people, especially family members, may be willing to share with you and, eventually, your readers, can be very valuable and help you to produce the best possible book.

It is essential to discuss with other members of the wider family any occasions or events which affected them as well as you. Sometimes, you will find that some of these people have better recall of those events than you.

If they are older than you or more closely related to people that were involved, they may be able and willing to share their perspective and knowledge. This may give you a better understanding of the reasons why those people acted as they did at that time.

I suggest that you are very clear with everybody that you ask to help you about what you are doing and what you intend to do with the information which they may provide to you.

You need to gain and respect their trust that you will not let them down.

It is very important that you make notes about:

- ❑ Any undertakings which you give to anyone regarding information, mementos or documents which they lend to you,
- ❑ Whether you will identify them in the book and
- ❑ Any information which you agree to use only for your research and not to share with anyone in the book or in any other way.

Some people will want to be identified in the book and some may not.

Your credibility depends on this sort of undertaking. If they trust you, there is always the chance that they may help you to make contact with other people or organizations which also have information that could be valuable to you.

Sometimes, someone might ask you to show them the material from your discussion with them that you are going to put in your book before it is produced.

This is usually not a problem but someone might ask for you to change or remove some material from your book.

You should make an agreement with them during your first discussion that they will be able to review the material and suggest any changes which they think are important, but the final decision on what is included must be yours.



## Interviewing

Interviewing is not easy to do well but the potential value of the information which you might get from it means that it is worth whatever effort and time is required to do it when the opportunity arises.



Prepare carefully and be ready to invest whatever time is necessary when you get the opportunity to talk with somebody who may be important to your story or a valuable source of information.

Although most interviews are best done face to face when that is possible, you can use your VOIP connection or regular phone to interview people that live farther away from you.

I suggest that you always ask people whether they can spare the time to discuss the information you are collecting. I would never want to impose on their goodwill too much when I was working on this type of project.

Always identify yourself fully to each person you contact if you don't know them well and mention during your first conversation anyone that suggested you contact them.

Ask the person you want information from whether they are happy to be interviewed or would prefer if you just sent them a few written questions.

You should always make contact with the person as early as possible so that you each have as much leeway as possible for setting the date and time of your discussion.

Don't be disappointed and, especially, don't show any disappointment if someone that you contact turns down your request for a discussion. This will almost certainly happen from time to time.

The best that you can hope for is that you might get them to respond to a set of written questions or perhaps give you contact details for someone else that might be able to give you the information that you want.

If you show disappointment or anger at their refusal, they are unlikely to help you in any way then or at any time in the future. If you are respectful of the decision, there may be a good chance that they will agree to help you at another time.

It is very easy, of course, to send somebody a list of questions and ask them to send their replies and any comments back to you by e-mail or letter. I have only used this method when there has been no possibility of a proper interview. One great advantage of talking with someone is that one question may lead to other interesting comments and suggestions from them which they are less likely to add to a list of written questions.

I think the list of questions method is useful mostly when you want information from professional people who have a limited time and are used to filling in forms.

When it is for a personal project of this kind, many people find the list process very impersonal.

The people I know that have used it to say that they often get less useful information this way.

But, sometimes it is necessary to use this method for the convenience of the person who has the information or because you cannot arrange a time which is suitable for both of you to discuss the details.

I suggest that you prepare a fact sheet about each person that you seek information from for your book. With that sheet, I would also have a list of questions that you want to ask.

Leave room between the questions where you can make notes after the interview.

I would not put a list of questions in front of somebody unless they have specifically asked for me to do that. I believe that you will get much better results by memorizing the basic details of the questions and asking them in whatever order seems appropriate during your discussion without referring to your notes.

Let the other person take the discussion in whatever direction suits them as long as you make sure you have time to cover all the points which are most important to you.

Sometimes, there will be interruptions or the other person may have to leave before you have covered some of the points which you believe are important. Try to arrange another time for those questions or ask if you can send them an e-mail which they can respond to when they have time available.

Some people have told me that they got better results when they arranged an informal gathering of their relatives, where they could interact with several at the same time and get everyone's impressions and memories of particular events which the family had been involved in.

This is a great way to get information and corroboration at the same time while everyone relaxed with snacks and drinks.

One problem is that you will have to try to remember what is said because a notebook or any kind of recorder would look out of place unless you had everyone's agreement to use it on that occasion.

Before leaving someone with whom you have a discussion like this, always thank them for their time and help.

Then, ask them if they want you to acknowledge their assistance in the book and also if they would like you to send them a copy of the book. Of course, you would only do that if they had been cooperative and you knew the costs which would be involved in getting a copy to them.

Then, always ask them if there is anything they would like you to add to the material you discussed or anyone they think that you should contact that may be able to help make the book better.

You could also ask them, “Is there anything which you think has been mis-reported or misunderstood by me or other family members?” Asking this sort of question may encourage them to give you their views about something which they may not otherwise mention because they don't want to say anything which might upset anyone.

When you show that you are open-minded and they have learned to trust you, you may get more information than you otherwise would.

All this can help to make your book more interesting and inclusive.

## Lists

Lists are an unexciting but essential part of your book project.

They will help you make sure that you have quick access to all of your materials when you are putting your book together.

You need to list everything which you have which is relevant to the project.

I suggest you gather and organize all the material which you have in your own home before you start looking elsewhere.

You should make notes about each item and:

- 1)** It's relevance to your story
- 2)** Where it is stored
- 3)** That you have copied or photographed it and put the original item away in a safe place
- 4)** Who owns the item (if it is not yours), so that you can find and return it to them promptly
- 5)** Where it is mentioned in the book
- 6)** That you have included an acknowledgement of their generosity in loaning you the items or supplying information

I would not be too specific about the monetary value of any items in the actual book, especially if the book is likely to be circulated outside of your immediate family.

## Using a Timeline and a Mind Map

I believe that preparing a time line and a mind map will ensure you get the best results with this sort of project.

**Your Timeline:** The timeline will make it easier for you to sketch out the time period which you will need to produce your book.

It lists the important events (milestones) in the writing and production of your book.

Just mark the important milestones between starting and completing your book.

These might include:

- Completing particular Chapters
- Getting confirmation about certain facts from other people
- Getting documents or other material from other people (be sure to thank them).

Your “milestones” will help you to check your progress, ensure that you don’t forget any commitments or other tasks and keep you motivated.

**Your Mindmap:** This is a diagram which makes it easy to record large amounts of information and mark or change the relationship between various items as you add through more material at a later time.

You can make your mind map on a large sheet of blank paper (the larger the better), on a whiteboard or by using one of the many computer programs which are available.

Whichever system you use, you start by drawing a circle in the centre of your page and labeling it with the name of your project or your first chapter.

Then, as you add other items to the page, each one having its own circle, you draw connecting lines between those items which are related.

As you expand your diagram and keep adding more information, you will find that this method helps you to understand the relationship and relative

importance of the various parts.

The mindmap will help you to keep track of the relationships between the people who are featured in your book and the events with which they are connected.

You can use each of the major events shown on the mind map as a highlight of a different chapter of your book.

A carefully prepared mindmap will help to avoid leaving out any important incidents or people!

One feature of the computer programs which produce mindmaps is that you can move an item, or a group of related items, from one section to another very easily. But, of course, you can also do that on your paper-based mind map by re-drawing this section you want to move on a small piece and pasting it into the new position on your sheet. Then, just paste a piece of blank paper over the original item(s).

## **Your Family Tree**

If someone in your wider family is actively interested in genealogy and has made a family tree, you should ask them if they are willing to help you with your book.

You may be able to save a lot of your time by getting the basic details of each branch of the earlier generations of your family from them. They will also probably be willing to share contact details of other family members with you.

In return, you may be able to assist them fill in any gaps in their research through your contacts and discussion with family members that you have contacted if they have not done so themselves.

The person who constructed the family tree has probably gathered a lot of information which they may have recorded but not actually used for their genealogy. If they are agreeable, you may find this a great help in checking your research and also adding extra details to your book.



## Tools

### *Your Computer*

Your computer and the Internet connection you used to buy and download this ebook are probably the most useful tools which have ever been available for someone preparing a life story or a broader family history.

The friend whose autobiography I edited and helped to publish was fairly computer-phobic. He said that he had got through 80 years without having to use a computer directly! While we pulled his ten years of electronic typing into ebook form, he learned to use the basic features of his computer. He certainly appreciated the time we saved by getting email replies from his friends in other countries instead of having to wait for regular mail.

I hope that you can see the potential and will use your computer to the greatest extent possible. It will make your task much easier even if you don't have much experience with computers or the Internet.

You don't need anything fancy in the way of hardware or need to buy any new software (computer programs) to use in producing your book. If there is some type of program which you need to get, there are usually low-cost and even free programs which will be enough for most purposes. I will mention a few suitable programs which I consider are good quality and probably have all or most of the features which you might need.

### *Keep Yourself Healthy*

I suggest that you check the quality of the computer screen and the lighting in the area. Inadequate or low quality images and lighting can cause you considerable discomfort and affect your vision over time.

Another important, but often neglected factor, is how you sit when you are at your computer. Poor posture can encourage the gradual development of other health problems. Some of them can become very serious.

This page

[http://www.ergonomics.com.au/pages/400\\_useful\\_info/420\\_how\\_to\\_sit.htm](http://www.ergonomics.com.au/pages/400_useful_info/420_how_to_sit.htm) has some general advice, similar to what I do. But, you can see

from the illustrations that it may not be up-to-date.

**Please check with your own doctor or health professional about their current recommendations to avoid problems.**

I can tell you from personal experience and from my research that the potential risks should be avoided. People that spend too much time at their computer without exercising, taking care of their posture, maintaining a reasonable level of water intake and rest breaks can develop health problems which can reduce their productivity, their general well-being and, in serious cases, put their general health under severe strain.

### *Your Printer*

Almost any computer printer bought in the last couple of years will do for most readers' needs.

I use Hewlett Packard and Canon printers but many other companies also provide quality equipment and good printed output.

If you are going to print the pages for the copies of your book yourself and then bind them, you will need a printer which is robust enough to handle that much work and probably heavier paper than the usual 80 gsm office copy paper.

You might want to consider a robust laser printer. Check the costs of each type and also the quality of the print and rate of output of pages.

You should also carefully check the cost of the ink cartridges for the particular printer you have or are considering buying. I think that manufacturers supply printers at near cost and probably make the majority of their profit from the ink refills.

You can get refills which are offered by companies other than the one which produced your brand of printer. There are some risks with these:

The warranty on your printer will be void if they find out you used a different brand of cartridge

You need to be sure that the quality of the printed pages and the usability of the printer will not be reduced

A friend claims that he saves money by buying a discontinued model of a printer instead of buying a set of refill cartridges for his old printer every couple of months!

I only use printers which have separate cartridges for each ink color because I use far more black ink than I use any of the colors.

You need to see examples of the output from the printer you buy. You can also check through the search engines or the web sites of various computer-related magazines for tests and reviews of the performance of the printer you are interested in.

**Be careful** – some reviews are thinly disguised advertisements and not impartial. Careful reading of the articles will often make that clear. Some may have a small [Advertisement] sticker somewhere on the page.

### *Your Scanner*

A scanner is very useful for transferring your pictures and other documents into your computer. You don't need a particularly high resolution picture for use in an ebook.

If you are going to have the book printed, you should check with the printer or publisher about the resolution they require with the pictures which you provide to them. They will probably be able to arrange for your pictures to be scanned at that resolution if your scanner cannot do it, or you could get them scanned at a local quick printer.

I use a printer which has a scanner incorporated in it. These machines are called multi-function printers and they usually cost no more (and often a bit less) than a separate scanner of comparable quality!

Portable scanners can be useful for copying documents which are located elsewhere, but the ones I have seen don't give the same quality results of the larger desktop machines.

You may have a digital camera which can get pictures of larger documents and small objects to be used in your book. These cameras can store many more pictures than you will get on one roll of film, so you can take more

pictures of each item and all the pictures can be transferred directly to your computer or by putting the memory card from your camera into a socket on your printer.

Some scanners and multi-function printers come with an O.C.R. (Optical Character Reading) computer program which you can use to convert printed documents which you scan into computer files which you can edit with your word processing program (Microsoft Word™, Open Office etc).

These can be very good value because the O.C.R. program would probably cost you significantly more if you have to buy it separately.

It's a good idea to take the time to check on the Internet for reviews by people that have used that particular version of the O.C.R. program in case it is not as good as advertised. You also need to be sure that you get a fully functioning program and not a Trial or Shareware version which will stop operating after a few weeks, unless you pay an extra fee for a full license.

This is a good time to mention a very important rule:

Don't send your only copy of any document or picture to anyone.

Always have copies made and send a copy.

Always use a copy of your original picture or document when preparing your book to reduce the risk of damage or loss.

You can expect that the only time you forget that rule, is the time your letter or parcel is lost in transit.

## Computer Programs

The two main types of computer programs which will be most useful for you are a word processor and a graphic editor.

### Word processing programs

There are many word processing programs which may be available as stand-alone programs or as part of “office suites” which contain the most useful types of programs for businesses and students.

Microsoft Word™ is usually supplied as part of Microsoft Office™. It is a very powerful program with a significant cost. The company also provides less powerful versions at lower cost which may only be used for non-commercial purposes.

But, you can also get an office suite with many features similar to Microsoft Office™ for free. It is called Open Office™ and can be downloaded from <http://www.openoffice.org> I know that this package is used by many writers and other people for their professional activities. It is owned and supported by Oracle.

Both of these suites are available in versions for the various Windows™ and Macintosh™ computer systems.

There are also many other suitable programs available which may be used for putting together your story.

**Outlining:** I have emphasized the benefits of creating an outline of your story before you begin to write the main text. Most word processing programs have some sort of outline format which makes it very easy to prepare the skeleton of your story.

A small text editing program called Note Tab from Fookes Software in Switzerland (<http://www.notetab.com>) has an outlining format too. If you do not like the outlining part of your word processing program, you might want to check out Note Tab. They offer a free version and two paid versions. Each one is very user-friendly and all have an outliner in them though, of course, the paid versions are more feature-rich.

which is very popular with

### **Text to Speech**

I also use **Dragon Naturally Speaking**™ from <http://www.nuance.com/> which converts what I say into text which I can edit in my word processing program. This program is only available for Windows™ computers.

An equivalent program for the Macintosh™ system is Dragon Dictate™ from <http://www.macspeech.com/>

Each of these programs can also be used to control some of the operations of your computer.

### **Picture Editing Programs**

You will also need a program to edit the pictures which you want to put into your book.

Most books about editing pictures will recommend either Photoshop from <http://www.adobe.com/> , which is very expensive, or Gimp from <http://www.gimp.org/downloads/> , which is free.

They are both very good programs, but Photoshop is more than the casual user will ever need and both Photoshop and Gimp will require that you invest some time to learn to use them. That may take days or even months, depending on what you want to do with your pictures and how experienced you are with your computer.

On my Windows computer, I mostly use “**Paint.net**” from <http://www.getpaint.net/>. This free program will probably do all that you want.

My recommendation for Mac users is **Pixelmator** from <http://www.pixelmator.com/>. This is not free but was available for just under \$USD 30 when I wrote this in early 2011. It is exceptional value in my opinion.

You can find free and low-cost programs all around the Internet but these programs are ones that I have used or they have been recommended to me

by people I know and trust.

Always scan any program or other file which you download from the Internet or get from any other source with your anti-virus and spyware programs before you open and use it on your computer. Even programs supplied by major reputable companies have sometimes been hacked and infected with dangerous files.

### **V.O.I.P. (Voice over Internet Protocol)**

This is a way that you can phone people in most other countries.

**Skype:** I use software provided by a company called Skype <http://www.skype.com/> with a headset (microphone and earphones) connected to your computer.

Costs are very low and quality of the connections is usually comparable to regular phone lines or even better!

With Skype, calls between two people that each have the free Skype membership and use their computers for the call are free. Rates for Skype to land-line phones are very reasonable too.

You need to arrange a time which suits you and the other person. Please always keep in mind that you may be in different time zones if you want them to provide you with information.

### **MindMap Software**

**Freemind:**

[http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)

This is one of the most popular free programs for producing Mindmaps.

You will need Java from <http://java.com/en/download/manual.jsp> if you want to run Freemind on Windows, Solaris or Linux computers.

If you have a Mac you will need Apple’s version of Java which you get through the Software Update feature in the Apple Menu on your computer.

## **Xmind and Xmind Pro**

<http://www.xmind.net/>

There are two versions; Xmind is dual-licensed for free use under the specified conditions.

Xmind Pro (currently \$USD 49) is a commercial, more powerful version.

## **iMindMap**

<http://www.thinkbuzan.com/intl/home>

This is the Mindmap software endorsed by Tony Buzan who is probably the most well-known exponent of mindmapping in the World.

There are four versions which cost from \$99 to \$395 per single license.



## Your Pictures

Before you begin to assemble photos, letters and other background materials, get some folders and plastic sleeves to store and protect them in.

Use good quality materials to protect and store your originals because they are probably impossible to replace.



Although I understand the reason for using recycled paper, I only use new paper. I know people that have had problems using recycled paper in their printers.

Each photo or group of photos should be accompanied by as much information about it as you can obtain. Don't write on the photos or use regular glues to fix them in your folders. They will probably damage the pictures or hasten their deterioration. Pressing your pen onto the back of the picture can cause ridges which will show in the picture itself. Investing in special glues which hold the pictures on acid-free backing but also allow you to easily remove them without damage can be a good idea.

### ***Don't discard any information.***

File everything away carefully where you can find it when and if you need it. You may find later on that some information is more relevant to your story than you thought it was before.

I have been told by a few people that they have regretted not being more careful in their filing of documents and pictures when they started their book because they have had to waste so much time later on, trying to find particular items or trying to confirm the identity of people in photographs etc. You won't always be able to judge the importance of some facts until you are well along with the assembly and writing of your book.

Even when you have completed your book, you may want to preserve all of the information and papers which you gathered during that period so that it

will be available to later generations.

- The basic information which people will want to know about the pictures which you put in your book includes:
- Who each person is and their relationship (if any) to you and other people that are important in your story
- Where the picture was taken
- The date when it was taken
- The reason for the people to be together at that point in time
- The significance of the occasion to your story

It's a good idea to make copies of any photos or other documents, store or return the originals and use the copies while you complete the book. You could scan the material and just store electronic copies on your computer as well as making at least one back-up copy on DVD or CD Rom.



Check you back-ups every 12 months at least. When I backup the information about a book I have prepared, I store the whole backup on two separate disks which are different brands. Maybe that's overdoing it but disks are cheap and that information is precious even if it is sometimes not very valuable.

Do not store important records on Flash drives – those stick-shaped devices which you can attach to your keyring or whatever. A technician told me that they are only intended for temporary storage when you are transferring files between computers. They are usually very reliable but CD Roms and DVD's are the preferred methods.

Never write on important photos or documents.

## Before You Begin

This section gives you some things to consider before you actually start what is usually the most interesting and exciting step; actually putting together your story.

Though everyone has a different background and upbringing, I can understand how you probably feel after my own experience and because of the discussions I’ve had with many other relatively inexperienced writers.

### *Where to Begin?*

My suggestion is to consider the people that will read your story and start with some part of it which will be of significant interest to them.

You need to grab the attention or they will not continue to read your work. If that happens, all of the effort which you put into it will be at least partly wasted.



The best tip that I can give you with regard to both your writing and the production of your book is to keep it simple. You are aiming to entertain and inform your readers, not win writing awards.

That will also help to reduce the possibility of any errors creeping in to your book.

With your biography or family history, you will have to include a lot of details, including times and dates, which will be important to the family members but often of less interest to other readers of your book.

To increase the appeal to people outside of your family, I suggest that you look for ways to show how those details reflect the culture and experience of the wider community in which your family spent their lives.

The worst mistake that you can make with your book is to be boring. This is usually caused by large sections that have lots of facts but no human interaction.

Even though your story is factual, you will get a more powerful response from readers when you involve their emotions. Remember that you are telling a story, not a dry report.

If you focus on the actions of the various characters in your story and their reactions to the events which they are part of, you have a good chance that your readers will connect with them and get much more enjoyment from the incidents and accidents which affect them.

If you can impart some of your own emotional reactions to the events which you describe and the effect on your family members, your readers will also be affected. But, please do that in a positive way where you can.

### *Sorry if I Offend You*

Some people write the books with the idea that they don't want to offend or upset anyone. That is an admirable idea but it's often leads to a deadly dull narrative which does not attract anyone's interest either.



It is quite possible that we will have to describe some things which happened in years past that will upset some readers due to the different viewpoints or standards which are now current.

But, trying to spare their feelings by not mentioning any such events is dishonest and unfair.

You could mention them without being judgmental and explain that the events were more acceptable at the time they occurred.

Most people will understand that you have included the information so that your book is a fair and true record and not to upset anyone or challenge their opinions.

Almost any book can be improved by careful use of light and dark. By that, I mean that you should try to vary your rhythm and even inject where possible some humor. But, don't avoid or play down anything which is significant,

whether good or bad.

In this sort of book it is almost impossible to avoid not having some sad or upsetting occurrences. Leaving them out would make your effort seem dishonest and incomplete.

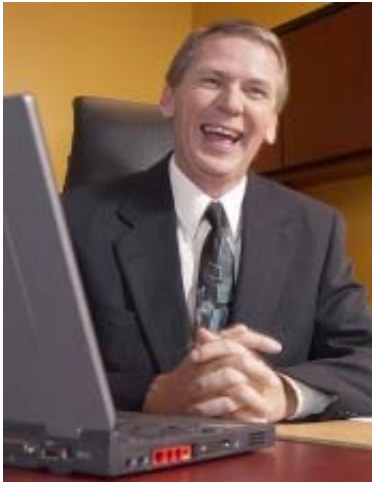
It is, of course, up to you to decide the level of detail and the point of view from which you describe any particular event.

Now, let's discuss the actual mechanics of writing and then producing your book.

## Writing Your Book

This is, at the same time, probably the most worrying part of the project and the most exciting for you, especially if you have had no practical experience in writing anything of significance since you left school.

When you are ready to begin, your first step should be to prepare a simple outline of your whole book rather than to start writing in detail straight away.



Please don't confuse your outline and your timeline which I suggested earlier. The **outline**, at its most basic, lists each Chapter and each significant event in your book. Many word processor programs have their own outline formats which can make it very easy for you to set out your outline and fill in whatever level of detail you feel you need.

I believe that any time you put into preparing a good outline before you start to write the rest of the book will be worthwhile. I used to get easily sidetracked with the books I wrote before I adopted this approach myself.

Your outline should include a mention of each major event and, where possible, notes about when the important characters appear, interact and leave your story.

Take time to check through your outline. Make any changes that are necessary and add any notes which you feel may help you during the writing phase.

When you begin to write, you will better understand the value of having prepared that outline. It helps you to stay on track and not waste valuable time and effort on writing too much material about relatively insignificant events or characters.

My next suggestion may seem very simple. But this one point will increase your productivity to a great degree.

## **No Editing Allowed**

When you are writing what will be the first draft of your story, do not stop or backtrack to edit or change in any way what you have written.

This is, of course, not the way we are taught to write our essays and other projects when we are at school. But, everyone that has tried this tip has told me that it has improved the results they get with whatever type of writing they are doing.

I actually found it very hard to stop myself editing while I was writing because I had been doing that for several years. But, I have found that the results I get by completing at least a chapter before even thinking about doing any editing of any kind has made me much more productive.

## **Editing Your Writing**

If you can afford to have your book edited by someone with appropriate experience, it will save you time and stress. But, I believe that most people can edit their own work so long as they give themselves plenty of time and remember to stay as detached as possible – as if you were editing someone else’s work.

You can edit your own writing fairly well but don’t start doing that as soon as you stop typing.

You will find, as I did, that you will be able to edit what you have written much better if you leave it for at least 24 hours before looking at it and trying to correct or improve it.

There is a lot of research which supports this suggestion. If you try to go back over the material which you have just written, you will probably miss some things which need changing because your mind will see what you thought you wrote rather than what is actually on the page or the computer screen.

That 24 hour rest between writing and review is usually enough to let you see what you actually wrote without any interference from your subconscious recollection of what you thought you had written.

Another simple suggestion which will usually help to improve your revision a lot is to read what you have written out loud. My experience is that this also helps me to read the material on the screen or the page more accurately.

You might want to ask some other adult in your family to review it as well. Some will probably decline because they may not have time.

Keep in mind that their feedback may be biased because they may not want to risk hurting your feelings.

If they do offer any suggestions, be very appreciative. They probably feel some hesitation but are willing to help you.

Don't be offended by whatever they say and don't take praise too seriously either. They may think that you just want them to say it's a masterpiece!

### **Writer's Block.**

I understand that many people feel they can't write sometimes. I don't know anything which will reduce those occurrences except to write.



If you write something – just about anything – and just keep going for a few minutes, you will start to feel better about writing some more of your book.

If you let your mind (the experts assure us that's where the block is produced from) start to build the block into a habitual response, writing anything will become harder each time. Getting something on paper or into your word processor is the best way to tackle it.

### ***More Writing Tips***

Please don't try to write for more than a concentrated half hour without a rest. In fact, you will probably find that writing for more than the suggested 30 minutes will be more tiring and produce lower quality material than if you take regular breaks after each session.

After each writing session, walk around and get some fresh air if possible. If



you drink a glass of water at each break and avoid coffee, tea or sodas, you will be more comfortable and productive as well.

These simple tips are really powerful. Because they don't cost anything and they are so simple make some people ignore them to the eventual cost.

## **Presenting Your Book**

### **Publishers Demand It**

Whether you are producing your book yourself or submitting it for publication, you should take the best possible care with its presentation.

If a reviewer finds your manuscript hard to read and not in line with their guidelines published on their website, they will discard it unread.

They cannot risk their health by trying to decipher hard to read material and they cannot afford the extra time that would be required because there are always many more submissions for them to review.

Carefully review and follow the presentation guidelines which the particular publisher provides on their website or in the writers' marketing guides.

When you submit your book, just include a brief cover letter with your contact details and any significant qualifications you have in the area covered by the book.

Also give details of any professional writing you have done, especially if you have completed any major projects previously.

Avoid any emotional or other irrelevant comments. Your aim is to be seen as a professional.

Usually, you will put your full contact details on the first page along with these details of your submission:

- Title
- Author's name
- Number of Words.
- Brief summary

Type double-spaced with some space between the paragraphs to make it easy for the reviewer(s) to add notes.

You will not get any electronic submissions returned. If you want printed submissions returned (only where the publisher has indicated they do this),

follow their guidelines such as providing filled-out address labels etc.

Don't use fancy fonts, colored backgrounds or other decorations.

Printed submissions should be printed on one side of the paper only. They should have no correction marks or mistakes.

Submit small copies of all pictures and other documents (NO ORIGINALS), preferably with several on each page. Specify if there are any which you do not own and, if so, what written permissions you have for their use.

**Be patient.** If you get a positive reply in less than six months, you've done well. If you get any reply, you're getting above average service. Many authors don't hear anything about their submission for more than a year!

I suggest that you contact the publisher with a polite enquiry and full details about your submission if you don't hear within three months. But, don't expect to get more than a form-based reply.

You can submit your book to more than one publisher unless they say they only look at exclusive submissions.

Some publishers will not publish stories which have been previously published in any form. This varies widely. Tell the publisher when submitting your book if you have published it as an ebook or had sections published in magazines or the Internet.

Direct submissions generally have much less chance of success than those through recognized Agents.

Many publishers say no to all direct submissions.

### **All Your Readers Deserve It**

Whether your readers get their copies for free or they pay for them, they deserve to get it in a form which is easy to read with minimum errors.

I generally use:

- 1) Letter format 8½ inch x 11 inch.
- 2) Verdana font 11 point

- 3)** 1<sup>1/2</sup> line spacing
- 4)** 5 pts between paragraphs.

This seems to suit most people whether they read the book on their computer monitor or print it out.

## Producing Your Book

I confess that my experience is mostly with electronic books but these suggestions are based on much more than my personal experience.

The three main ways of producing and distributing your book are:

- 1) Publishing it yourself in printed form
- 2) Publishing it as an electronic book
- 3) Submitting it to a regular print publisher

When your book is likely to have only limited appeal in the general market, you are probably wise to give more consideration to the second and third methods.

If you plan to publish your book yourself there are five basic choices for you.

**Do it yourself:** You can put your book together with your word processor program or a desktop publishing program. Then, you can print each copy as needed with your own computer printer.

These books can have a good appearance but would not usually look professional enough for resale.

**Local Printer:** You could get individual copies or small batches printed by a printer with an offset press at a reasonable cost.

These copies could be offered for sale but the cost of production would usually be too high.

**Commercial Photocopier:** You can get the copies printed as you need them by almost any office supplies store which has high-speed commercial photocopying equipment. Those stores can bind them with wire binding or plastic strips.

These books can have a reasonable appearance but are not suitable for resale unless the potential customer sees at least a photograph of the book in finished form before they actually place their order..

**P.O.D. (Print On Demand):** Another choice is to use a P.O.D. (Print On Demand) company to produce and print copies of your book as and when you

require them.

These companies offer different levels of service and have their own individual contracts which you should examine carefully before signing up with a particular printer.

**Subsidy (Vanity) Publisher:** Your next choice is to contact one of the vanity publishers who advertise in writers’ magazines and some general interest magazines as well. These companies will produce a specified number of copies of your book for a set fee.

They will not usually promote or distribute the book for you. This you will have to do yourself. At some time, they will probably offer to sell you the copies which they printed. You may think that you already have paid for them but you will probably find that you have paid for the design set up and printing but you don't actually own the copies unless you pay an extra fee. This method may be just what you want to do.

Just be aware that you are paying for your book to be produced, not promoted or distributed.

### **Submit To a Publisher**

This method is probably still the best way at this point in time to gain a reputation as a “real” author.

There are thousands of books published this way each year and it is getting harder for a new, unknown author to get their first book accepted and published. But, it has never been easy anyway.

Unless your story has wide appeal, it is likely to take considerable effort for an unknown author to get their manuscript even read by any publisher.

You could check a writers’ marketing guide for current details of what publishers are looking for. If they are not interested in biography, you will waste your time sending your draft to them.

Another way to find which publishers may be interested is to check the Biography sections in your local bookstores and your Library for books which have a similar type of subject to yours.

If you believe that your story is of sufficient general interest that it will return a profit to a regular print publisher, I hope you will submit it to them.

You will need to check the requirements of different publishers as listed on their own web sites or in the writers’ magazines or in the Guides which are printed annually that publish those details.

I have included some brief information about some of the better known guides in the resources Chapter near the end of this book. There are too many to detail in this book. All publishers offer writers’ guidelines on their sites.

Well-known and successful authors can submit a couple of chapters along with an extended outline to their regular publisher for consideration but you should expect to have to submit the completed manuscript for consideration. This is fair because a publisher has to be convinced that the story is salable in great numbers and that you can produce the full book. Some people can produce a couple of good chapters but that may have taken them years or they may never be able to maintain the quality for a book-length story.

### **Solicited and Unsolicited Manuscripts**

You may see in the guides or on the publishers’ web sites, something like, **“No Unsolicited Manuscripts, please.”**

You may think that you have no chance at all of having them consider your story. But, you still have a small chance. The message usually means that they only consider manuscripts from authors they know and those submitted through reputable authors’ agents.

Finding and getting the interest of a reputable Agent can be very difficult but this is the only way that you will get consideration from some publishers.

**Subsidized Publication:** Similarly, if a publisher asks you to subsidize the publication of your book, they are almost certainly a “subsidy” or “vanity” publisher who makes their money from these fees and may not actually promote or distribute the books which they produce.

Always read any contracts you are offered and Terms of Use on web sites. It

maybe boring but it can save you much misunderstanding, money and disappointment.

### ***Small and Specialist Publishers.***

If you feel that your book is most likely to be of interest to your wider family and people who live or have lived in your part of the country, you may want to either publish it yourself, using a local printer.

But, another possibility is to look for a small local publisher who might be interested in publishing it under their imprint and offer it to their regular customers and resellers. Who might be interested in the history of a local family or significant individual.

The financial return may be small but you could find the experience more enjoyable than trying to interest a major publisher and you could gain a substantial reputation as well as making many new friends in your own area.

### **Publish as an Ebook**

The fourth choice is to produce the book in electronic form. At this time, most of these books are produced in the same Adobe PDF (Portable Document Format) as this ebook, but other formats are becoming popular as well.

You can produce books in this format on your computer, sell them from your own website if you have one and deliver them as an electronic file by e-mail or by allowing the person who buys a copy to download it from your website.

This may sound complicated but it is quite within the capability of almost anyone.

If you use Open Office or a current version of Microsoft™ Word™, you can probably turn your word processing document into a PDF from within your word processor.

There are also many other programs which will do this sort of conversion. Some are free while the others offer a wide range of features at various prices.

Many programs are available in “shareware” or trial versions, so that you can download, install and use them for a period, usually up to thirty days, and



then either pay the price to continue to use the program or just uninstall it from your computer.

Always scan any program which you put on your computer with your antivirus and anti-malware programs.

If you do not use these protective programs, you are not just putting your own computer and all the information on it at risk. You also may pass on viruses and other problems to anyone that you share files or exchange emails with.

## Resources

### Publishers

Getting your book published by a print publisher will involve a lot of effort and probably a minimum of six months after they agree to look at the manuscript.

When I was looking for information about which print publishers were most business-like and responsive a few years ago, I asked a local bookseller who I knew fairly well for his feedback. He said Wiley were good to deal with.

#### **John Wiley and Sons Inc.**

<http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-301837.html>

I contacted this company about a project a few years ago and was very impressed. Unfortunately, the project was stopped by another party.

**Penguin Books** <http://www.penguin.com/>

### Writers' Market Guides

The writers' magazines have new listings each month but they are probably at least six weeks old when they reach your news-stand. The entries in the Writers' Guides books are probably several weeks old by the time they are published and their value reduces further as time goes on.

But the books and magazines also have articles related to writing, agents, publishers etc.

Some of the publishers of these magazine and books also offer subscription services through the Internet where you can subscribe and get frequently updates information about publishers and magazines' requirements.

You might want to check if your Library has these for you to borrow or even just to refer to in their reference section. The publishers of the books and magazines all have web sites with more current information but that probably won't cover all areas.

#### *Writers-Market*

<http://www.writersdigestshop.com/product/writers-market/> This is

probably the most well-known guide. Published by Writers Digest, a respected magazine for writers. They also publish a Deluxe version <http://www.writersdigestshop.com/product/writers-market-deluxe-edition/fiction?r=wrbhm080210Z7424>

and offer a web-based version at <http://www.writersmarket.com/> where the information about all kinds of publishers are available and details are updated daily.

If this interests you, be sure to check all the different versions as they may offer combination of web-site access and one of the printed versions at a cheaper combined rate.

### *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook*

<http://www.writersandartists.co.uk/> Still the most successful guide in Britain after 100 years

### *The Writers Handbook (online)*

<http://www.thewritershandbook.com/> Supplied in book form with markets and articles of interest to writers, with access to a website from July to the end of June. Published in the United Kingdom.

### *The Australian Writer's Marketplace*

<http://www.awmonline.com.au/> Offers all Australian addresses of interest to writers. I think they offer a subscription for regular updates too.

### *Agents*

I have not used an Agent yet, so I am only including contact details for three well-known Agents' organizations.

Although each of these organizations require their Members to abide by their Rules, they cannot guarantee that all the Agents do this all the time. No group of professionals can make such a guarantee about their Members.

You need to do some checking of your own when you are considering which Agent(s) to approach.

The best guide is personal referral from satisfied customers. You might find

one or more published authors in your local writers’ group that can give you some suggestions. Do an Internet search for feedback but remember that people’s opinions may not be reliable when you know nothing about them or their motivation for making their comments.

**Fees for Review:** If an agent requires you to pay a fee before they will consider your book, you probably should look for another Agent. Many of these agents probably make most of their money from these fees rather than from selling authors’ manuscripts to publishers.

**Association of Authors' Representatives.** <http://aaronline.org/> This organization is for Agents in the U.S.A. Its office is at 676-A 9th Ave, Suite 312, New York NY 10036 and it is volunteer-based.

#### **The Association of Authors' Agents**

<http://www.agentsassoc.co.uk/index.php/> is also volunteer-based and mainly exists to help its Agent Members.

**The Association of Authors' Agents does not offer any direct help to writers who are looking for an agent.**

But, if you are based in the United Kingdom, you may find their list of Members with their contact details useful:

[http://www.agentsassoc.co.uk/index.php/Directory\\_of\\_Members](http://www.agentsassoc.co.uk/index.php/Directory_of_Members)

It claims to have most of the literary Agents in the United Kingdom among its Members.

#### **Australia**

You might want to search for individual Agents and Agencies or check with your local writers’ groups.

The site of the only Agents’ organization I found seemed to be out of date. Copyright notices date back several years.

## Afterword

I hope that this ebook has given you a better understanding of what is involved in writing and producing your own family history or personal life story.

I believe that this is a great way to honor the previous generations of your family and to entertain and inform those who come after you.

It is also possible that the effort and time which you put into producing your book will help people in the future who are researching our times and trying to explain our attitudes and actions to the children.

This sort of project can have great benefits by keeping our minds active and our thoughts more positive.

If this sort of book becomes your first successful writing project, there is no reason that you should stop there.

I have found, as you will, that writing is a great hobby, a source of extra money or even a full-time income and a wonderful way to connect with all kinds of people directly and through the Internet.

If you have any questions related to writing your Life story or family history or writing, you can contact me through my web site

<http://www.ezyebook.com/wyls/>

I wish you great success and happiness with your project and your life.

***John Williams***

[Another eBookWholesaler Publication](#)