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"Those who tell the stories, rule the world." – Plato

It's never too early or too late to begin telling your story.

Writing a delightful story can be learned, and certain elements can turn any writing into a fascinating read. Whether you're just discovering your story or looking to publish soon, let these elements boost your story IQ.

**Basic Story Elements**

**Characters**
Characters are the people in your story — without them, you have no story. They drive the action, move the plot, and are the reason tension rises and falls.

- **Protagonist**: the main character. Since this is your life story, you’ll be the protagonist.
- **Antagonist**: the character who opposes the protagonist.
- **Major characters**: these could be your closest friends, family, and confidantes, as well as those of your antagonist. They’ll be significant supports for the main characters.
- **Minor characters**: these characters won’t have a major role, but definitely played a part in your life story. They’ll help move the plot along without being the ones to add meaning and depth to the plot.

**Crux**
The crux of your story is the entire point of writing your story. This is the highest or lowest point in your story arc, and is the lesson or scenario that forms the entire basis of your life story.
Embrace Your Stories
Embracing your story means accepting and feeling comfortable discovering the uniqueness of your individual situation. It’s the first of the four major steps in telling your life story. As you work through your past stories, you allow yourself to feel compassion for your younger self and use your past experiences to create a more joyful future. Find all four major steps to telling your stories here.

Life Theme Discovery
Discovering your life theme is another elemental activity before you begin actually writing your life stories. Often our life themes are hidden, even to ourselves. Teasing out your true-life theme clarifies your past and future, and it allows you to enhance it...change it.

Mine Your Past
Your past experiences, both good and bad, are woven into who you are today. You can look back with a more mature point of view. Mining your past for wisdom you didn’t even realize you learned, through specific exercises, is useful to making your story more beautiful going forward. It also affords hope to others who are about to go through similar events.

Milestones
Significant events, stages, or developments in your life create the outline as you begin to rough out your story. Brainstorming these milestones is one of the first activities in life storytelling. The more you brainstorm up front, the easier it will be to take each one and write a scene from it.

Plot
The plot of your life story creates your storyline. It’s the sequence of events that follows the story arc to transport your reader from beginning to end.
You have many options when ordering the events of your life story. Two of the major plot lines are:
- Chronological plot order shows the specific events in your life story in the exact order in which they took place. It follows a first A, then B, last C order structure.
- Logical order shows the relationship between life events, noting that C happened because of B.
The plot of your life story creates your storyline. It’s the sequence of events that follows the story arc to transport your reader from beginning to end.
### Resolution
This is the ending of your story, the point at which the crux is made obvious, and the lesson is revealed. It ties up any loose ends that were opened during the plot, and allows the reader to feel satisfied with the ending of your life story.

### Scene
One specific moment in time (day, hour, minute even) that represents a part of your life story. A scene is written with texture and draws the reader into experiencing that moment with you through the senses: sounds, taste, touch, sight, smell, and feelings.

### Setting
The setting is situation in which your story takes place. It involves everything from the time period, time of day and time of year to the specific location of your life story. Each story has a specific context or environment it is played out in.

### Advanced Story Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Backstory</th>
<th>These are the events that happened before the specific components of your plot. They’re often shared through flashbacks. Strategic sharing of backstory invites the reader to greater understanding, but should be done sparingly.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cliffhanger</td>
<td>Cliffhangers are a sudden stop in action. Think about the season finale of your favorite show. You’re left with unresolved story lines that make you want to tune in for the next season. These are often incorporated at the end of a chapter, or at the end of a story that you want to continue writing.</td>
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### Enable Your Stories
This is the second of the four major steps in telling your life story. Enabling your stories means cultivating the variety and wealth of your life stories and crafting them into fascinating tales. Find all four major steps to telling your stories here.
### Hooks

The hook is a very short sentence or section that uses strong language to immediately capture the reader’s attention. This might be a surprising quote or fact, or an incredibly dramatic or unexpected scenario.

### Plot Device

Plot devices are tools used to advance your plot. The category encompasses a wide variety of writing tools, including inner dialogue, unwritten details that your readers will want to learn, a situation that the reader would never expect, or diversions that keep your readers excited but also anxious to get back to the plot.

### Plot Twist

This is a very unexpected change in the plot’s direction. In your life story, it might be a life change that your family, friends, and readers never thought you (or another story character) would make. Or it could be a sudden change in circumstances such as an accident, illness, loss of money, or another surprising event.

### Story Arc

The story arc is the direction your story moves as you take readers from one point to another. It follows the trajectory of your life, with increasing and decreasing tension. Common story arc patterns include:

- Rise, fall, rise
- Rise, fall
- Fall, rise
- Fall, rise, fall
- Overall rise
- Overall fall

### Tension

Tension is the element that draws your reader in emotionally to your life story. It’s a more difficult element to master in fiction, but for your life story, you’ll look at the parts of your life when you felt anxiety, stress, fear, nervousness, or worry. When events went bad. A story with only positive events bores readers. Increasing and decreasing tension is an important part of creating a cohesive story arc.
Writing Elements

**Analogies**
Analogies present a logical, rational comparison to help explain a challenging concept. It transfers meaning from a well-understood idea to a little-understood knowledge to provide greater reasoning.

**Cliché**
Clichés are often overused, but these statements of the obvious can be powerful when used sparingly. They can help a reader form a stronger connection to the piece since they tend to be widely understood.

**Characterization**
Direct or indirect characterization is what you’ll use to show your readers the personalities, beliefs, and thoughts of your characters; the tool you’ll use to paint a picture of each character in your reader’s mind. Direct characterization involves coming out and stating these characteristics; indirect characterization will show the reader circumstances and responses by the characters and let them draw inferences about the character’s personality.

**Dialogue**
Dialogue is the conversation between characters. You can use dialogue to expand or add depth to your story arc while moving the plot along. It also provides personality of your characters. Dialogue captures the essence of the conversation – not every single word needs to be written down.

**Hyperbole**
This technique is similar to analogy and cliche in that you — and your reader — shouldn’t take the words literally, but should read them as a way to enhance your reader’s understanding. Hyperbole involves an extreme over-exaggeration.
Metaphor
Metaphors are an abstract way to explain a concept, often taking one thing and describing it as something entirely different. For example, you might write that “the wind was a howling wolf.”

Point of View - First Person
The point of view is the voice from which the story is told. It’s very important as you tell your story to keep this consistent; decide on a point of view before starting, and stick with that voice throughout your life story. In the first person point-of-view, the voice is told from the “I” point of view. Since this is your life story, this is often the most logical choice, but plenty have told their life stories in second or third person points of view.

Point of View - Second Person
This point of view might seem similar to the first person point of view, because the story is still being told from your perspective. However, rather than the “I” voice telling the story, the story is being told to “you.” This is more conversational, and the “you” is the recipient of the story.

Point of View - Third Person
This view has a few different sub-categories. All of them use “he,” “she,” “it,” and “they.” More specifically, this point of view is told by a narrator.

- Third person limited: The narrator can only tell the reader what one person is thinking and feeling.
- Third person omniscient (sometimes called third person unlimited): The narrator takes the reader inside the thoughts and emotions of each character.

Simile
Similes compare two unlike objects, often connecting them with the words “like” or “as.” For example, you might see someone write, “the sweltering summer was like being wrapped in a damp, wet towel.”
Descriptive Language

Immersing your reader in the scene you are setting for the story helps them understand your story from the inside out – and makes for a better story. You do this by writing sensory details such as: What smells would they encounter if they were right there with you? What would they see if they had your eyes at that moment in time? What sounds would they hear? What would they feel if they ran their hands over an object in the scene? What tastes would they experience?

Enhance Your Stories

This is the third of the four major steps in telling your life story. Enhancement is the step where you polish your stories to make them shine, perfect your narrative, and prepare it for publication. This is where editing and critique come into play. Find all four major steps to telling your stories here.

Get to the Point

Remove passive voice in your sentences by taking out instances where you’ve written a conjugation of the verb “to be” + another verb. For example, “the bird was seen by the students” is a passive way of saying “the students saw the bird.”

Grammar

Can’t forget grammar...although you don’t have to worry about this yourself. You can learn all the grammar and syntax rules or you could hire an editor to worry about that for you. In either case, grammar enhances readability so don’t skip this step.

Review Pronouns

Make sure each pronoun is clear. For example, “somebody who wants to win needs to make sure they practice” is incorrect, as somebody is singular and the pronoun they is plural. When you use the words he, she, it, they, and other pronouns, check to make sure your sentence is understandable to outside readers.
Subject Verb Agreement
Read through your story to make sure that your subjects and verbs are in agreement. As an example, writing “neither my mother nor my father were at my school play” is grammatically incorrect. The proper way to write this sentence would be “neither my mother nor my father was at my school play;” since they are single subjects, the verb must also be singular.

Write Clean
Remove any words or sentences that don’t engage the reader or enhance the story. Each word, sentence, and scene in your life story should move the reader through your story arc. It can be hard to emotionally detach yourself from what you’ve written about your life, but is a necessary step if you want to make sure everything fits. You’ll also want to check for:
- Filler words
- Excess punctuation
- Long sentences and paragraphs
- Adverbs that can be replaced with stronger verbs

Publishing and Other Elements

Alternative Types of Stories
Writing a book about your life is merely one small way to tell your life stories, or pieces of them. Have fun exploring various ways available to you – think outside the book. It may be travel writing, blogging, writing an article for a magazine, passing down family heritage, spiritual stories, a podcast, oral storytelling, and so many more.

Common Reading Level
Stories should be written clearly and edited well, but the element of being easy to understand is crucial if you want your story to reach people. You should write for a common reading level and ability. Having to think through complicated writing minimizes the readers’ story experience. This goes for everything from the sentence length and word choice to the way you position your story’s scenes.
Elevate Your Stories

Elevating your stories is the fourth and final of the major steps in telling your life stories. This includes building your author platform, choosing how to release your story into the world (and the many possible ways to do this may surprise you). This is the exciting finale to your stories. Find all four major steps to telling your stories here.

Emotion

Whether you project sadness, humor, pain, or joy, your life story needs to include the human element of emotion. A re-telling of facts might give you an honest, chronological story, but it won’t necessarily keep your readers engaged. Take your readers on the same emotional ride you took so they can experience it vicariously through your story.

Platform

Your author platform is the virtual stage that you proclaim your story. That could include social media, speaking gigs, contacts, blogs, media exposure, your personality, events you participate in, and much more. Your platform should be built before your book is out – and continue for the foreseeable future.

Relatability

While your story should be real, it should be told in a way that your readers can relate to. Engaging readers means drawing them. Your word choices, style, and plot should depict your story in a way that readers understand. This is why sharing your fears and failures increases your credibility – your readers have fears and failures too.

Truthfulness

Much has been written over the past few years about the importance of honesty in a person’s life story. In many cases, reality is more fantastical than fiction. Stick to the truth in your life story (including the truth “as you remember it”) and you’ll write a story that truly affects the lives of your readers.