



Strengthen Your Brain by Sharing Your Story: Get Started with 6 Tips

Everybody has a story to tell and a unique voice for telling it. Our life's story is what makes us individuals — someone special, someone unique. Writing your memoirs is both a gift to yourself and others. It can stimulate your brain while also being your legacy to future generations.

Research strongly demonstrates that using the brain to master new, creative skills can help keep the mind nimble and exercised. Bjorn Vlaskamp, a Senior Scientist, Brain, Behavior & Cognition at Philips Research in Eindhoven, The Netherlands, explains that it is possible to overcome physiological inefficiency in the tissues of the aging brain by recruiting additional brain resources from other areas. "You can do that by giving the brain new challenges — by giving the brain a regular intellectual workout," he says.

The process of capturing and sharing your autobiography also creates an extraordinary legacy to be shared today and passed along to generations to follow — a treasured piece of family heritage. So what are some useful steps to get started with this very worthwhile effort?

Create a Working Group

Join with family members or friends to organize, advise, and react to your work. Meet on a regular schedule to make sure you stick with the job.

Many communities and organizations offer well-organized programs to help seniors plan, produce and share their biographies: for example Memory Projects, a service of the City of Boston. Such programs can get you off to a fast and easy start and match you with groups of other interested seniors.

Create a Summary Outline

Your biography can be as long or as short as you wish, but don't sell yourself short. Your life has been filled with interesting people, places, stories, and events, so plan on sharing a lot of them.

Start with a list of topics that you want your biography to address, and organize those topics into a brief outline. Then flesh them out one at a time: Childhood memories; interesting friends and activities; your greatest challenges and satisfactions. Little by little, your life experience will emerge as you add your life's contents to the outline.

Carry a Notebook

This way, you will always be prepared to jot down fleeting memories or ideas to add to your story.

Set Deadlines — and Do Your Best to Meet Them

You're a writer now. Push to write one or two pages a day, and in a month or two you'll be amazed at the ground you've covered in such a short amount of time. Be sure to be realistic about your deadlines so you can achieve your goals.

Welcome Advice

Look beyond your working group to get additional feedback. Know any school English teachers or professional writers? Pick their brains and seek their help.

Share Your Results

Writing your life's story is personally satisfying but it is also a gift to others. Share copies with those you most care about and be sure your grandchildren have copies of their own.