

The Memoir Writing Workbook

Memories into Memoir

The Route to Creativity

Back-Work

Back-work is the route to connecting with your life story; it is the key to writing creatively.

Back-work is the *art* of developing and planning your story. All writing entails back-work. It is a very important element in the creative process. Planning and development are the vital elements that will pay dividends as you write your memoir.

What you are striving to achieve in writing your memoir – which is creative non-fiction – is getting your story on paper in the most creative way possible. The more you develop your story – the more back-work you are willing to do – the more creative your writing will become, and the more you will connect to what you want to write about.

When you start out on any journey, you usually have a destination in mind. This helps you choose the directions and route you are going to take to complete your journey. You know your destination and therefore your direction.

It is exactly the same in writing. Before you start writing your story you must know your destination so that you can carefully plan the direction your journey will take. It is like working backwards so that you can go forward.

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In writing you need to know the ending of your story before you begin writing, so that you have a destination. You will then know where you are going, where you will end up, and what route you will take to get there. To arrive at this point requires story development, ie back-work.

You have already started to do back-work on your memoir. From completing all of the previous exercises, you now have a greater understanding of what was going on in your life and the people that were important to you throughout the events, occasions and experiences that you have associated with to date.

You have recalled many memories from your life that were significant to you. All of this back-work will help you define what your memoir will be about. You are not yet ready to fully outline your memoir, but you have started the back-work that will bring you to your destination.

I've met many people in workshops who've started to write stories, both fiction and creative non-fiction, but have then got stuck. They did not know what to do with their story, how to continue, or even what to think about to make it work. This is because they had not done or completed the back-work that was necessary *before* they started to write. They did not know their destination and therefore the direction of their story was hazy, incomplete, and basically all over the place. They were undecided as to which route to follow; they did not understand how to go forward and could not continue with their story.

I do not believe in writing blocks. Writers only fall prey to writer's block when they have not worked out their story before

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they start to write. In many cases it happens because the writer does not fully understand what they have to *think* about – to solve, to address, to include – to make their story complete.

As mentioned previously, there are rules, elements, guidelines and principles associated with every form of writing – be it journalism, fiction writing, screenplay writing or memoir writing. *Before you can break the rules you have to know the rules.* It is only when you understand these rules that you can truly develop your story.

By completing this workbook you are learning in easy stages the principles of memoir writing – what you have to *think* about in order to creatively complete your memoir.

One of the greatest benefits of back-work is that it makes you develop your story in detail, which in turn enables your writing to flow. Back-work takes the struggle out of writing and allows you to be creative as you write. You will not be sitting for hours thinking about Mr Smith and what he looked like, since you will already have recalled all that you can remember about Mr Smith as you knew him when you were 20 years old.

This is your key to writing creatively. Instead of getting stuck on details and stopping to ask yourself questions about Mr Smith as you are writing, you will be able to creatively describe Mr Smith so that your description is alive and attention-grabbing.

Back-work works!

Note: *Understanding and knowing your characters, the events*

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in your life, the culture you belonged to, the environment and the theme of your story allows you to engage creatively with your writing. It will help you to avoid the trap of sitting, thinking and struggling over what to write next.

This is not to say that your memoir will not change direction as you write. It will – but for the better. Your story will take twists and turns that surprise you along the way, routes you were not expecting to travel. You will recall something that you had completely forgotten, incorporating it to enliven your story further. You may even consider a different ending to your memoir. But no matter what you decide to alter and include as you write, it is because you have a direction before you start that permits you to travel forward, unhindered, into the creative process – discovering and enhancing your ability to write creatively.

Your memoir will take surprise twists and turns as you engage with the creative process in your writing journey.