

Write Your Life Story

Beginnings, Middles and Endings

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The Function of the Beginning

To Engage the Reader

Capture the reader's attention and encourage him to continue reading with an opening sentence or paragraph that presents something interesting, surprising, or intriguing

To Orient the Reader by Incorporating:

Who is involved in the event or experience

When the event or experience occurred, not just a month and year, but also your age at the time

Where the event or experience occurred

What your theme is about:

If you're developing a theme topic such the roles each child assumed in your family or how growing up in the city shaped you, incorporate that information in the opening paragraphs.

If you're telling a story about how a crisis, problem, or conflict resolved such as the time your house was destroyed by a flood or how you struggled to learn to read, illustrate the issue in the opening paragraphs.

Function of the Middle

How you develop the middle section of your piece depends on whether you're writing about a problem or developing ideas about a theme topic:

Middle When You're Writing about a Problem or Conflict

This section *develops your struggle* to resolve the problem or conflict. Specifically, it details how the problem unfolded over time. The beginning may indicate the circumstances that initiated the conflict, but the middle leads the reader through the dilemmas you faced, the difficult decisions you were forced to make, the solutions you tried, the moments of gratification, elation, frustration, doubt, and discouragement. All the significant and relevant events until the moment of resolution when you breathed a sigh of relief or claimed victory.

To develop the middle of a piece, think through the following questions:

What decisions did you make and what actions did you take to solve the problem? What were your thoughts and feelings before and after each decision?

Were there times when you made a decision or implemented a solution that made the problem worse? Why and how?

Did you try something that solved some aspects of the problem, but not others?

Did someone come forward to help, acting as a support and guide as you moved toward resolution?

How did you cope with worry, frustration, doubt, and discouragement?

Middle When You're Developing Ideas about a Theme

This section *develops the concepts or ideas related to the main topic of your theme* presented in the beginning. It elaborates on your theme with examples, thoughts, feelings, and interpretations.

Paragraph One—Presents your first example as well as thoughts or feelings about the topic. For example, in the opening paragraph(s) you might have indicated that your brother was the family comedian and you were the responsible, good kid. In this paragraph you might provide a specific example or two of what your brother said or did as the family comedian.

Paragraph Two—Digs deeper. This paragraph might present another example or indicate your thoughts, feelings, and reactions (and those of others) about your comedian brother in the context of your role as the responsible, good kid.

Paragraph Three—presents the most compelling example or thoughts, feelings and reactions. In fact, there might be a progression through the three paragraphs that climaxes in this third paragraph as detailing the best and/or worst aspects of having a comedian for a brother.

Function of the Ending

The ending represents the culmination of all the ideas and events presented in the beginning paragraphs and elaborated in the middle paragraphs. It flows directly from every sentence you've written to this point. The ending might:

Explore how your thoughts, feelings, and interpretations changed over time and why.

Leave the reader understanding the meaning of the experience or event.

Explore how the event, people, places or objects shaped you (and, perhaps, others) or changed the direction of your life.

Leave the reader with something to think about in his own life