

Write Your Life Story

Solutions to the Most Frequent Obstacles to Completing a Life Story

Terry Northcutt

Below you will read about solutions to the most frequently encountered obstacles to completing a life story project. Read through them, then create a plan for each of the obstacles you think might hinder your progress on your life story project.

Difficulty Finding the Time—Solutions

Begin with a Schedule

Life is busy, so busy that unless you schedule a time to write, it's unlikely you'll begin or finish your life story project. Most people don't like the word "schedule", but don't stop reading yet. A schedule clarifies when you'll work, where you'll work, and for how long you'll work. It assures you that you'll have time to do chores that need to be done such as laundry and lawn mowing as well as time with friends, family, hobbies. and your life story project. With a schedule in place you also know that your life story project will move forward on a steady basis.

By a schedule I don't mean you have to write at the same time every day, you don't have to write two hours every day, nor do I think you have to

produce so many words or pages at each sitting. But deciding on a specific time and place to write several times a week is important. Stick with what you've decided. You might only work for thirty minutes, but that thirty minutes will accumulate as will your thoughts and words on the page. Keep going if the words are flowing—but don't work until your muscles ache, your neck is stiff, and writing becomes a painful task to avoid.

End Each Writing Session with a Plan for What to do Next

Try to end each session with an understanding of where you're headed next. If you've completed a theme or story look at the next and make notes about what you want to write by clustering, brainstorming, freewriting or some other method. If you are in the middle of a theme or story jot down where you want to go. If you're stuck, write down the problem. Your unconscious mind continues to work when you walk away from your desk. New information, solutions, sentences, and full paragraphs often occur while you're showering, walking the dog, or mowing the lawn.

Protect Your Writing Time

Understanding the difference between urgent demands and interruptions that can be deferred can help you protect your writing time. It ensures that in the thirty minutes you've scheduled to write you'll make progress. A

ringing phone causes the body to react as though the call urgently requires your attention, but voicemail enables you to continue working. Guard your writing time by making it clear to others what you're trying to do and when you'll have time to socialize and meet other needs.

Avoidance and Inertia—Solution

Warm-up with Freewriting.

Recognize that when you first sit down to write, you'll often encounter an initial inertia. Read what you've written and your notes about where you want to go. Then just brainstorm, cluster, or freewrite for a few minutes. Athletes need to warm up and so do writers.

If you still find that you just don't feel like writing, spend the thirty minutes doing as many freewrites as you can on your theme. Don't try to improve or revise anything. When you return for your next writing session, you'll probably find some of what you wrote is helpful and be in a better position to begin.

You might need to do some research before the next writing session: figuring out the date or the approximate age you were when an event occurred; clarifying information by talking to a relative or friend, revisiting a

place you lived, etc. Be careful not to become overinvolved in research or to use it to avoid writing your theme. If possible, try to complete a rough draft to shape your theme before becoming too involved with research. Just leave a blank space or a few questions marks for whatever you need to research. On the other hand, if you find yourself completely blocked, do the research and then continue writing.

Fear of Judgment and Doubts about Writing Ability--Solutions

Accept Yourself as a Work in Progress

Accept yourself as a work in progress, that is, accept where you are today and know that as you continue to work and learn, your confidence in what you're writing will improve. You don't have to share your stories until you're ready. There are no life and death mistakes in writing. Revision is a necessary and ongoing process even for professional writers. Revision and delaying when you share your themes are essential for being able to write your stories free from judgment and criticism.

Throughout the course you'll learn the essential elements of the writing craft that will increase your confidence.

Celebrate small bits of progress and mastery of the craft.

This provides confidence that you can write your stories and complete your life story project. Writing in short sprints of thirty minutes ensures you'll have progress to celebrate.

Find Support

One person or a group that meets on a consistent basis provides not just a deadline to complete a single two-page story, but also encouragement, motivation, connection, and enjoyment as you progress on your life story journey.

Difficult Stories with Painful Feelings--Solution

Pacing and Lifestyle Balance

You'll receive a second article entitled *Writing Difficult Stories* that will address this obstacle in more depth. Briefly, writing difficult stories involves the following:

Pacing yourself, that is, writing painful stories for no longer than thirty minutes before doing something fun and interesting.

Maintaining a balanced life that includes your life story writing project, but also time for family, friends, hobbies, a good night's sleep, and regularly scheduled meals.

Understanding when anxiety and stress are escalating.

Understanding the types of activities that help you destress and lower your anxiety level.

Having a supportive person available to talk through concerns.

Wondering if Anybody Will be Interested—Solution

Find Joy in Writing Your Story for Yourself

This is a difficult concern to address. I could say that if your themes are interesting to you, that will be conveyed in your writing and create interest for your readers. I could also say that by mastering some basic writing craft elements your themes will engage readers. There is some truth in both of these statements. Unfortunately, human beings are a fickle lot.

Adolescents and young adults are focused on their futures. Adults building careers and raising children are focused on keeping up with everything that needs to be done each day. With retirement and empty nests, people have

time to reflect on their past. This inevitably includes the history of their parents and grandparents which raises questions about how and why things evolved in their lives as they did. But by that time, you may not be available to provide answers to their questions. So, even if you write a stellar family history, the people you most want to read it, may not take the time to read it or they may not have the maturity at that time to grasp the meaning of events in your life, why they're important to you, and why they're important to them.

If you write a life story, think initially about writing it for yourself. Think about writing it to record the highs and lows of your life so you can periodically relive the moments of humor, the special occasions, the achievements, and the difficult times when you surprised yourself by your strength, insight, judgment, and fortitude. Write it to understand the familial, cultural, and historical forces that surrounded you and how those forces in conjunction with your temperament and personality shaped your decisions, your life journey, and who you became. Find joy in embarking on your life story writing journey for yourself.

Later, when your children and grandchildren have sufficient life experience and are less absorbed with the future and the pressure of daily demands, what you've written will be there for them. Then the interest

conveyed through your writing and your mastery of the basic elements of the writing craft will engage them.

Feeling Overwhelmed—Solution

Focus on one Two-Page Story at a Time

The nine themes that tap the most significant areas of life and living create a roadmap for your life story project. They clarify where to begin and what to write next. Most people find that writing just two pages for each theme enables them to complete their life story project.

Having a list of nine themes and their associated questions enables you to return to your life story project if you're interrupted by unexpected events such as illness, the opportunity to travel, or a visit from family or friends for a week or two. With just nine themes to consider, it's easy to know exactly what you've completed and where to begin again. Returning to the project with a workable schedule ensures that you'll complete your life story.

Review the Article *Obstacles in Search of Solutions*. Below list obstacles you rated 3 (Moderate Problem) and 4 (Major Problem). List any other obstacles you think you might encounter. Below each obstacle listed write a solution. Anytime you discover you're not making progress on your

life story, review your mission statement and your list of obstacles and implement the appropriate solution. If the solutions don't seem to be working or you've encountered a new obstacle, take some time to think about what is getting in the way of progress and problem solve a new solution.

Obstacles and Solutions

Obstacle with Solution

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