



Writing Tips

by Bryna René

Below are some tips to help you construct, write, and edit your story.

1. Choose your subject

Within the theme of the ebook you've chosen to submit for please choose an event, or a series of related events, which led you to where you are today. Concentrate on the pivotal moments—the “ah-ha!” moments—in which you discovered a higher truth, found greater clarity, or changed your direction for the better. Share the wisdom, insights and inspiration you have learned on your journey.

If you get stuck, ask yourself the following questions:

- What pivotal moment or moments changed your life or perspective on life?
- What struggles or adversity did you overcome in order to get where you are?
- What moment or moments taught you to appreciate your juicy life?
- What wonderful things happened when you decided to follow your heart?
- How do you feel your life experience can be inspirational to other women?
- What knowledge have you gained that you'd like to share with other women, and through what experiences did you acquire it?

2. Choose Your Angle

Remember that your story is intended to be inspiring and uplifting. Focus on what you learned from your experience, how your newfound knowledge helped you grow, and how your life changed for the better as a result of this experience. This isn't to say that you shouldn't write about the losses, setbacks, or stressful times you survived—after all, those were the catalysts for your evolution—but overall your story should come from a positive place, and end on a hopeful note.

3. Create Your Outline

If you're hyper-organized, your outline might look like the ones you used to create in school—but it's more likely to be a loose series of bullet points cataloging the events and anecdotes you want to include in your story. It could also take the form of a timeline or a flow chart. Some writers jot details on index cards and arrange them on a cork board, so they know exactly where they want to place each piece of the story.

Every story is composed of three distinct parts: beginning (or introduction), middle (body), and end (resolution). Breaking down your story into these three parts can help you format your outline and fill in any gaps.

- *Introduction: 10-15% of total word count.* This is where you introduce details about yourself—who you are, what you do—and hint at where your story is going. This lets the reader know what to expect, and hooks her interest. Only include those details which are pertinent to the development of your story; you don't need to divulge everything about yourself.
- *Body: 70-80% of total word count.* This is where the “action” of the story occurs. Your story should progress in chronological order, so the reader can follow the chain of events easily. Where were you, and how did you get to where you are now?
- *Resolution: 10-15% of total word count.* Here, the dramatic events of your story come to a close, and any loose ends are tied up. You might take a paragraph or two to reflect on events from your current perspective, and describe the ways in which your experiences have positively impacted your life and the lives of those you love.

If you're confident in the structure of your story, you might choose to jump right into the writing process, and not create an outline at all. But if you feel shaky, an outline can be a valuable tool to help you get clear on where you're

going—rather like the pencil sketch an artist makes on her canvas before she starts painting.

4. Fill in the Details

Once you've created your outline or "sketch," it's time to fill in the details. Try to remember as much as possible about your experiences, especially with regard to sensory details. What did the air smell like when you had the epiphany which led you to start your own business? What were you doing (or feeling, or thinking) at the moment you received that life-changing telephone call? Be as specific as you can. You want your readers to feel as though they were right there with you. Don't be afraid to bring the drama: that's what will hook your readers.

It's worth it to take an hour or two to reminisce with a pen in hand, and jot down any details and impressions that come to mind, even if you're not certain you will use them. This kind of "stream of consciousness" writing can bring up images from your subconscious mind; you may surprise yourself with what comes out on your paper.

It's important to remember that most of your readers will come into your story knowing nothing about you. Put yourself in their shoes: if you were reading your own story for the first time, what would you want to know? What details of emotion, sense, or scenery might make your story more real and relatable? If this cue seems a bit obtuse, imagine that you're telling your story simultaneously to your best friend and a complete stranger. What information would the stranger need in order to make sense of the events you're describing?

A few more pointers for detail work:

- If you don't have permission to use the names of people who were in your life when your story took place, change their names. If the person you're writing about played an antagonistic role in your story, you might consider changing other identifying details as well, in the interest of protecting everyone's privacy.
- Remember that this story is about you and your experiences. You don't need to give details or background on the other players, unless those details directly affect the outcome of your own story.
- Stay true to your experience. If you're fuzzy on the details for any reason, don't make them up. Instead, be truthful with your readers. For example, you might write something like, "I don't recall much about that summer. Maybe it was the stress, or the heat, but everything is a blur in my mind. What I *do* remember, though, is..."

5. Start Writing!

When you sit down to write your story, take the time to create a calm, supportive atmosphere. Meditate or just breathe deeply for a few minutes before you let your fingers land on the keyboard. Turn off your cell phone and close down your e-mail if you can; you want to minimize the chances of distraction. Light a soothing soy candle or incense. Ask your family to help you stay on track, and to respect your need for privacy while you write.

You might find that the moment you sit down, your story pours out of you in a rush, and you fill page upon page in a single stretch. Or, you might run dry after three or four sentences. Either way, try to respect your own process. Everyone writes differently. It may take a few days for you to find the pattern that works for you. Personally, I prefer to write in big chunks, just filling the page, letting the words flow without any thought for structure. Then, I spend the next session editing what I wrote in that first stream-of-consciousness burst. Separating the creative and analytical aspects of the writing process enables me to fully tap into my creativity. When I try to write and edit at the same time, my analytical, "left-brained" nature takes over and my creative side feels blocked.

You may find yourself deviating from your outline as your story unfolds on paper. Don't sweat it; remember, your outline is intended to be a helpful reference, not an obstacle to surmount. If you're happy with the new direction of your story, go with it. I've written several articles and even a few books that look nothing like the outlines from which they were created!

Your story should be written in first person—meaning, from the "I" point of view. Imagine that you're having a conversation with the reader.

In terms of tone, don't try to stylize your writing. Use words that come naturally to you—but do try to use descriptive terms. For example, instead of writing, "I was sad," you might choose to write, "I was devastated," or, "as you can imagine, that left me pretty down in the dumps," or even, "I fell into the grip of an unshakable depression." All three examples convey sadness, but to very different degrees.

I know it's easier said than done, but try not to let self-criticism or perfectionism get in the way of your process. Remember, not even Dickens wrote a perfect first draft! "Write down the bones," as they say, then give yourself some time to digest before diving back in.

When you're ready to edit, re-read your story from start to finish. Try to step out of your story and see it from the perspective of your readers. Does it flow smoothly? Are the events presented in the order in which they occurred, or do you jump back and forth across time? Do your word choices convey the truth of your emotional experience, or are there things left unsaid? Give yourself time to re-read your story at least twice before submitting it to Inspired Living: once for content, once for spelling and grammar.

No matter where your writing adventure takes you, let your authentic self shine through in your words.

I hope that the information in this report helps to make your personal writing process both accessible and enjoyable.

Bryna René is a freelance writer/editor in the Rhode Island area. She is the editor of Inspired Living's upcoming anthology *A Juicy, Joyful Life: Inspiration from Women who have Found the Sweetness in Every Day*. She is the co-author of *Clean Your Home Healthy: Green Cleaning Made Easy* (Morgan James, 2008) with Green Living Expert Candita Clayton, and is a contributing author for the upcoming book *Healthcare Dollars and Sense* with Dr. Tadeusz Szykowski. Her editorial services have helped numerous authors and business owners communicate their ideas effectively and eloquently. Although she specializes in non-fiction and business writing, Bryna occasionally dabbles in short fiction, and her work has been recognized in writing contests in both the U.S. and the U.K. When she's not at her computer, Bryna teaches vinyasa yoga at studios around Rhode Island.

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