

Structure of a Memoir Essay

Your memoir will be a personal narrative that includes a reflective element focusing on one major motif and theme. Although this memoir will not be as structured as to say it is a five-paragraph essay (it's many more), it does have five parts to it....

Introduction

1. **The Hook** – Start your essay with a statement about the story that grabs your reader's attention. You may want it to be a little vague to get the reader curious like, "It was all going downhill, and I couldn't stop it." Or you may want to dive in with dialogue. Your hook should not be a rhetorical question; the best hooks don't ask questions. Ex: "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." ~Dickens
2. **Set the Scene** – Provide the information necessary for your reader to understand the story that will develop. Who are the people involved? Where and when is it taking place? (This is a good place to use sensory details. It is not a place to interrupt your story-telling to say, "The important people are Gus and Jim..." but rather weave the information into the story.)
3. **Thesis Statement (Optional)**—Good writers include a thesis statement in a narrative though it is a different type of thesis than that in an expository or research essay. It can identify a theme that connects the story to the reader – think "Rattlesnake Hunt" by Marjorie K. Rawlings.

Body

1. **Plot**—Your story should have a plot to it: a beginning, middle, and end.
2. **Show Don't Tell** – Use sensory details to allow your reader to imagine himself/herself there at the scene. Use strong verbs to add to the setting, mood, and plot. For example, "My heart jumped as the dark shape of a brown grizzly lurched toward me out of the woods" provides more information about what the writer saw and felt than, "I saw a bear when I was hiking."
3. **Transitions** – In a memoir, a new paragraph marks a change in action or a move from action to reflection. Paragraphs should connect to each other despite this change. For example, the end of one paragraph might say, "I turned and ran, hoping the bear hadn't noticed me," and the start of the next may be, "There are many strategies to surviving an encounter with a bear: 'turn and run' is not one of them." The repetition of words connects the paragraphs. (Notice the change in tense; while the story itself should be past-tense, the reflection may be present.)

Conclusion - The Theme and Reflection What lesson did you learn? How has what happened affected your life now and in the future?