

The Lifewriting Notebook

Start with a three-ring binder with 10–12 tabbed index dividers. You may wish to organize the notebook chronologically or thematically.

Chronologically

Label your dividers by decade or other period of years. Here are some sample index labels based on time:

DECADES	FIVE-YEAR PERIODS	MORE DESCRIPTIVE PERIODS
1944–1953	1944–1948	Early Years through Age 5
1954–1963	1949–1953	Elementary School
1964–1973	1954–1958	Junior High
1974–1983	1959–1963	High School
1984–1993	1964–1968	College Years
1994–2003	1969–1973	Early Teaching Years
		First Marriage with Paul
		Raising Paul and Jill
		Career Change/Move to Illinois
		Dealing with Paul's Death
		The Years with Joseph

Thematically

Label your dividers based on themes from your life or topics you would like to write about. Brainstorm some headings with your lifewriting group. Here are a few ideas:

- Relationships—Good and Bad
- Organizations I've Belonged to
- Important Happenings in My Life
- Lessons I've Learned
- Homes
- Choices I've Made
- Jobs and Bosses
- Humorous Happenings
- Journeys
- The Valley of Shadows
- Dreams for the Future
- Accomplishments
- Talents and Skills
- Habits—Good and Bad

Keep a section in the back for a list of published memoirs and autobiographies to read. Reading others' stories can be inspiring and provide ideas for your own memoirs. When you have read a good memoir, suggest it to group members so they can enjoy it as well.

You may also want to include pocket pages and page protectors for inserting photos, letters, and other mementos in the sections where they belong.

At the front of your notebook, place your detailed statement that tells why you are writing your memoirs. Reading this periodically will keep you focused on continuing to write.

Crucial Events

Create a list of the *Crucial Events* that have taken place in your life. (This may include, but is not limited to, births, deaths, marriages, adventures, and milestones) Leave some space on the page between each event.

In the space between events, jot down a few details about each event on the list: dates, places, people involved, etc.

At some point, you may wish to sort this list in chronological order, but that is not necessary now.

Pick at least one "Crucial Event" to write about. Be as specific as you can:

- Tell where you were.
- Who were the people involved? How did you feel about them?
- When did it happen? How old were you?
- Who or what caused the event to happen? Was it planned or a surprise?
- How did you react or behave? Expressing your feelings will give life to the story.
- Include some dialogue between people—even if you have to reconstruct what they were saying.
- Use expressions and sentences that sound like you. In memoir writing, the vernacular is preferred.

Keep this list in the front or back of your lifewriting notebook to use as a "memory kindler" for future stories.