

Completing the Exercise 1

Welcome to the Past Authoring (Autobiography) component of the self-authoring suite. This exercise is designed to help you develop a clearer sense of your past, by writing your own story. Understanding the defining moments of your life can help to illuminate your present situation, and make it easier to plan and determine your future direction.

During this exercise, you will be presented with a series of pages, providing information, or asking you to define and describe different periods or epochs of your life, and the experiences you had during those epochs.

You may proceed through the exercise by clicking the Next button.

You can go back to previous pages by clicking Previous.

Each time you click Next or Previous, the data you have entered on that page will be saved. You can also save your data while remaining on the same page by clicking Save. In addition, many of the pages where you are asked to write for longer periods of time will automatically save every minute or so.

You may quit the exercise any time by clicking Exit/Home or shutting down your browser. If the current page is a page you have been writing on, remember to click Save before exiting. The text that you entered on previous pages will have already been saved.

You can come back to the exercise later, and resume your work. All your previous work will be waiting for you, and you will be taken to the last point in the exercise that you had completed.

As a security measure, the server is designed to reject text that looks like Html. Avoid using text like "<div>", "<bigger>", and even "John<Bill" in your responses. Phrases like "John < Bill" are OK (note the space between "<" and "Bill").

Completing the Exercise 2

On many pages, you will not be able to successfully click Next or Previous unless you have provided a minimum of necessary text. If you do not, you will receive an error message, and the text box in question will be highlighted in red.

Text boxes also have a maximum length. Pay attention, as you write, to the numbers above the text boxes. Numbers like [180 / 1000] indicate that you have typed 180 characters out of a maximum allowable of 1000. When you go over the maximum, the numbers above the text box become red. Clicking Next, Previous, or Save will result in an error message and you will not be able to proceed to the Next or Previous page. To resolve this, edit your text until the number of characters is less than or equal to the maximum. These limitations have been established so that you do not get stalled at any point in the process.

We do encourage you to write in some detail, however, subject to those limitations. Our research indicates that better results are obtained as the amount written by participants increases.

There is a progress bar in the top right portion of the screen, which displays the percentage of the exercise that you have already completed. If you hover over the bar with the mouse, you can see approximately how much time it will still take to complete the exercise.

You may use the Index to jump to any page you have already completed. Clicking the [Index] link will open the index. Clicking it again will close it. Remember to click Save to save any work on the current page before using the index to jump to another page.

After you have completed the exercise, you will be taken to a Summary page. You can use that page to email yourself a copy of your writing.

Before proceeding with the writing, you will be asked to read about 1) memory, emotion and stress, 2) the benefits of writing (and of sleeping in between writing sessions), and 3) adopting the correct attitude for beneficial writing.

Memory, Emotion and Stress:

Your mind is always trying to determine the level of danger presented by your environment. When bad things happen to you, your mind and your body react by treating the environment as if it is dangerous, and preparing for emergency action. This preparation is stressful, and depletes you, mentally and physically.

If something bad has happened to you, in the past, your mind cannot be at peace until you have figured out how to avoid having the same thing happen to you again in the future. You can tell how well you have managed this by remembering different important events from the past. If you recall memories that make you feel ashamed, or guilty, or angry, or hurt, and these memories are more than a year and a half old, then your mind is not at peace, and you are still carrying the weight of your past.

Unresolved past issues make your mind and body react as if the day-to-day environment that you inhabit is permanently dangerous. Under such conditions, your body reacts to stress with more preparation for action: for fight or flight, which you may feel, respectively, as anger or fear and emotional pain. If this preparation becomes chronic, your mental and physical health can be damaged. This happens in part because your body produces more cortisol, a stress hormone, when you are endangered. Cortisol makes you ready to act, but your body gets the energy for such action by stealing from your future reserves. Cortisol shuts down your higher mental functions, inhibits your immune system, burns up your available energy and, over time, damages the brain areas responsible for memory and emotional control. Thus it is very important to keep your stress levels within reasonable boundaries.

Writing

Why write? Writing is a sophisticated form of thinking. Thinking prepares you to perceive properly and act intelligently. If you don't think things through, particularly difficult things, then you are likely to make serious mistakes and to hurt yourself and other people. When you write about personally important matters, you can start to identify the causes of events that might hurt and damage you. You can begin to understand how you might have to change the way you see and think to avoid unnecessary pain and suffering.

You have to mine the information that the past provides to ensure that the present and future emerge positively and productively.

It is best to do the writing that is associated with this exercise by entering into a reverie. A reverie is a state of contemplation, like a daydream. Normal focused goal-oriented thought tends to be narrow, precise and expressed in words. Image-laden thought - the movie that runs in your head - is more dream- or story-like. To complete this exercise properly, you have to daydream about the past, and let thoughts and images come to you, instead of controlling them. This can be frightening, if you start to remember unpleasant events from the past. However, it can be very useful to confront things that you are afraid of, voluntarily, particularly if your fears are stopping you from living properly in the present and the future.

Voluntarily facing the remembered things you fear or that you hate is the best way of dealing with them. Don't rush this exercise, or the ones that follow, if you decide to complete them, as well. They are not something to merely complete. You have to take your time. In a reverie, or a daydream, parts of your mind that haven't been able to speak because of your focused concentration or moral opinions have a chance to let themselves be known. These are parts of you that need a voice. If you take your time, then you can make contact with parts of yourself that have been shut away. You will need the abilities and energies that are contained within these shut-away parts to deal with the challenges of the present and the future.

Sleeping

It may be best to do this exercise, as well as the present and future authoring exercises, over several days. The research done on the relationship between writing and mental and physical health has demonstrated that sleeping and, more particularly, dreaming, can help you participate more deeply in the writing exercise and consolidate your new ideas.

So take your time and let yourself get deeply into the exercise.

Attitude While Writing

If you are rushed, or distracted, or bored, then you are not doing the writing in a manner that will benefit you. If you are writing about important events, you may find the exercise difficult and emotionally challenging, but it should not be boring. If you are rushed or distracted, then you are trying too hard to finish, or have not put enough time aside to do the writing.

It is very important to negotiate with yourself properly when trying to write about important things. Try to think through the fact that spending some time dealing with your past can benefit you in many ways. It can help you escape from the ghosts of the past. It can lower your level of stress. It can help you think more clearly now and in the future. It can help you get to know who you really are and how your life has affected you, positively and negatively. It can help you become healthier, mentally and physically. It can help you enjoy your life in the present, eliminate your resentment and misery, and prepare you to plan for the future.

It is worth putting in the time to reap such benefits.

Many times when a person is writing, they are writing for some other person or for some outside reason. If you have done this writing exercise properly you will be working primarily for yourself. What you produce should be a deeply personal document.

General Description

First, you will be asked to divide your life into seven different time periods or "epochs." These epochs can be as short or as long as you want, depending on how much you want to write about. One epoch might be "Grade School", for example, while a later epoch could be "First Year University".

If you have many significant experiences from a particular period of time, that period deserves to have its own epoch.

Next, you will be asked to identify the significant experiences that characterized each of the seven epochs. You can write about as few or as many experiences as you like for each epoch. Finally, you will be asked to describe how each of these experiences has shaped who you are today.

You can write as much as you want. People have written thousands of words while completing this exercise. Other people have written less.

NOTE: You will see fractional number codes such as $0/100$ throughout the exercise. The numerator of the fraction (0 in this case) refers to how many words you have written. It will change as you write. The denominator (100 in this case) refers to how many words you are allowed to write in total in that section.

Division of Your Life into Epochs

Please divide your experiences into seven time periods that represent your life so far:

Epoch 1

Delete this Epoch and Associated Experiences

Epoch Title

0 / 100

Epoch 2

Delete this Epoch and Associated Experiences

Epoch Title

0 / 100

Epoch 3

Delete this Epoch and Associated Experiences

Epoch Title

0 / 100

Epoch 4

Delete this Epoch and Associated Experiences

Epoch Title

0 / 100

Epoch 5

Delete this Epoch and Associated Experiences

Epoch Title

0 / 100

Epoch 6

Delete this Epoch and Associated Experiences

Epoch Title

0 / 100

Epoch 7

Delete this Epoch and Associated Experiences

Epoch Title

0 / 100

Epoch 1

Significant Experiences from this epoch

Please describe in detail up to six significant experiences that happened to you during this period of your life. You can describe positive and negative experiences. We recommend describing at least four significant experiences from each time period.

For each experience, provide a title (which will be used to refer to this experience later on) and a description of the experience. Later you will explore the impact this experience has had on your life. Here, limit your description to the event itself (approximately **1,000** characters).

NOTE: To use the next or previous buttons successfully, you must write at least one word in an "Experience Title" box.

Experience 1

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 2

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 3

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 4

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 5

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 6

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Epoch 2

Significant Experiences from this epoch

Please describe in detail up to six significant experiences that happened to you during this period of your life. You can describe positive and negative experiences. We recommend describing at least four significant experiences from each time period.

For each experience, provide a title (which will be used to refer to this experience later on) and a description of the experience. Later you will explore the impact this experience has had on your life. Here, limit your description to the event itself (approximately **1,000** characters).

NOTE: To use the next or previous buttons successfully, you must write at least one word in an "Experience Title" box.

Experience 1

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 2

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 3

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 4

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0/3000

Experience 5

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0/100

Experience Description

0/3000

Experience 6

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0/100

Experience Description

0/3000

Epoch 3

Significant Experiences from this epoch

Please describe in detail up to six significant experiences that happened to you during this period of your life. You can describe positive and negative experiences. We recommend describing at least four significant experiences from each time period.

For each experience, provide a title (which will be used to refer to this experience later on) and a description of the experience. Later you will explore the impact this experience has had on your life. Here, limit your description to the event itself (approximately **1,000** characters).

NOTE: To use the next or previous buttons successfully, you must write at least one word in an "Experience Title" box.

Experience 1

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 2

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 3

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

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Experience Description

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Experience 4

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

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Experience Description

0/3000

Experience 5

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0/100

Experience Description

0/3000

Experience 6

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0/100

Experience Description

0/3000

Epoch 4

Significant Experiences from this epoch

Please describe in detail up to six significant experiences that happened to you during this period of your life. You can describe positive and negative experiences. We recommend describing at least four significant experiences from each time period.

For each experience, provide a title (which will be used to refer to this experience later on) and a description of the experience. Later you will explore the impact this experience has had on your life. Here, limit your description to the event itself (approximately **1,000** characters).

NOTE: To use the next or previous buttons successfully, you must write at least one word in an "Experience Title" box.

Experience 1

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 2

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 3

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 4

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0/3000

Experience 5

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0/100

Experience Description

0/3000

Experience 6

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0/100

Experience Description

0/3000

Epoch 5

Significant Experiences from this epoch

Please describe in detail up to six significant experiences that happened to you during this period of your life. You can describe positive and negative experiences. We recommend describing at least four significant experiences from each time period.

For each experience, provide a title (which will be used to refer to this experience later on) and a description of the experience. Later you will explore the impact this experience has had on your life. Here, limit your description to the event itself (approximately **1,000** characters).

NOTE: To use the next or previous buttons successfully, you must write at least one word in an "Experience Title" box.

Experience 1

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 2

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 3

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0 / 3000

Experience 4

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0 / 100

Experience Description

0/3000

Experience 5

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0/100

Experience Description

0/3000

Experience 6

Delete this Experience and Associated Essays

Experience Title

0/100

Experience Description

0/3000

1

Epoch 1

Analysis of Effects of Experiences

Please outline how this experience has shaped your life and contributed to making you who you are today. How has the experience changed your view of other people? Of the world? Write approximately **1,000** characters.

0 / 3000

1

Epoch 2

Analysis of Effects of Experiences

Please outline how this experience has shaped your life and contributed to making you who you are today. How has the experience changed your view of other people? Of the world? Write approximately **1,000** characters.

0 / 3000

1

Epoch 3

Analysis of Effects of Experiences

Please outline how this experience has shaped your life and contributed to making you who you are today. How has the experience changed your view of other people? Of the world? Write approximately **1,000** characters.

0 / 3000

1

Epoch 4

Analysis of Effects of Experiences

Please outline how this experience has shaped your life and contributed to making you who you are today. How has the experience changed your view of other people? Of the world? Write approximately **1,000** characters.

0 / 3000

1

Epoch 5

Analysis of Effects of Experiences

Please outline how this experience has shaped your life and contributed to making you who you are today. How has the experience changed your view of other people? Of the world? Write approximately **1,000** characters.

0 / 3000

Ten Most Critical Life Experiences

You wrote about a number of experiences in the previous pages. They are all listed below. Choose the ten experiences that were most important in shaping your life. Each of these will be subjected to further analysis, to help you understand their significance.

Note: If you are revisiting this screen, deselecting an experience will remove the later analysis associated with it.

- 1
- 1
- 1
- 1
- 1
- 1
- 1
- 1

1

How did this experience come about? Was it primarily positive or negative? Were you helped or hurt by other people? What role did you play during this time period to shape the events that led to this experience? Were there things that you should have done differently? Were there important occurrences that were out of your control, or beyond your understanding at that time? Write approximately **1,000** characters.