

Grades 10, 11 & 12

BGCSE Language Arts Tutorials

Autobiography



Definitions

AUTOBIOGRAPHY is the story of someone's life written by that person.

BIOGRAPHY is the story of someone's life written by someone else.

Autobiography

An autobiography is written in the **first person** because it contains facts about the author's own experiences.

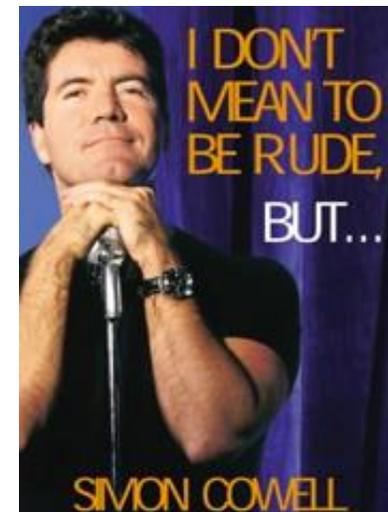
For example, "I was born in London in 1980."

An autobiography recounts **key incidents/events** in the author's life.

It is usually written in **chronological order**.

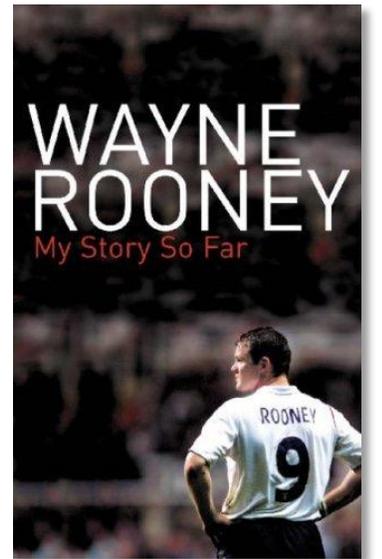
Some example extracts...

“The first time I was rude to someone I was four years old. Unfortunately, my mum was the victim. It was December 1963, less than a month after President Kennedy had been assassinated in America.”



Some example extracts...

“The scales in the club gym tell me I’ve put on a few more pounds than expected – seven. Seven! Then I remember – I drank a few bevvies while I was away. I’m stocky. I’m not like Ryan Giggs, all bone and lean muscle. But I gain weight quite easily. It’s not a problem though.”



Use of tense

Simon Cowell and Wayne Rooney use different tenses when writing about the past.

Cowell uses the past tense: “I *was* rude to someone.”

Rooney uses the present tense: “the scales...*tell* me.”

Logically, you should use the past tense when writing autobiographically...

Use of tense

However, the present tense offers immediacy and can be used as long as you are *CONSISTENT*.

The motorcycle came to a screeching halt in front of my house. I cringed as I saw my father peering at us through the window.

The motorcycle comes to a screeching halt in front of my house. I cringe as I see my father peering at us through the window.

Effective autobiography

Well written autobiography attracts the reader through the presentation of engaging events.

It is important to *write a lot about a little*, i.e. write in detail about specific events rather than try to cover a lot of different areas without developing what you write.

Effective autobiography

Listen to the short extract from the autobiography of Clive James on the next two slides.

As you listen, try to identify how James encourages the reader to engage with his story and how he uses language to bring his writing to life.

Effective autobiography

Disaster struck on the first day, when Carnaby was assigned to a different class. In quiet desperation I sought out his company in the playground, but he was always surrounded by lots of new friends. Soon enough I made new friends in my own class but not in the same way as Carnaby did. His natural authority was reinforced by early maturity. Either that year or the year after, his voice broke. He had acne for about two days and grew a foot taller. During this period almost everyone except me did something similar. I obstinately stayed small. Nobody looked up to me any longer. In that first year the only thing that made me worth knowing was my good marks. The teachers weren't brilliant but they were conscientious. At the half yearly

Effective autobiography

I was coping with physics and chemistry well enough while Mr. Ryan was still teaching them. But Mr. Ryan was due for retirement, an event which was hastened by an accident in the laboratory. He was showing us how careful you had to be when handling potassium in the presence of water. Certainly you had to be more careful than he was. The school's entire supply of potassium was ignited at once. Wreathed by dense smoke and lit by garish flames, the stunned Mr. Ryan looked like an ancient Greek god in receipt of bad news. The smoke enveloped us all. Windows being thrown open, it jetted into what passed for a playground, where it

Effective autobiography

Disaster struck on the first day, when Carnaby was assigned to a different class. In quiet desperation I sought out his company in the playground, but he was always surrounded by lots of new friends. Soon enough I made new friends in my own class but not in the same way as Carnaby did. His natural authority was reinforced by early maturity. Either that year or the year after, his voice broke. He had acne for about two days and grew a foot taller. During this period almost everyone except me did something similar. **I obstinately stayed small. Nobody looked up to me any longer.**

In that first year the only thing that made me worth knowing was my good marks.

The teachers weren't brilliant but they were conscientious. At the half yearly

Effective autobiography

I was coping with physics and chemistry well enough while Mr. Ryan was still teaching them. But Mr. Ryan was due for retirement, an event which was hastened by an accident in the laboratory. He was showing us how careful you had to be when handling potassium in the presence of water. **Certainly you had to be more careful than he was. The school's entire supply of potassium was ignited at once. Wreathed by dense smoke** and lit by **garish flames**, the stunned Mr. Ryan looked **like an ancient Greek god in receipt of bad news**. The smoke enveloped us all. Windows being thrown open, it jetted into what passed for a playground, where it hung

Planning an autobiography

You now need to plan for a written autobiographical task.

Think about a moment at school you remember vividly. This might be your first day, an event such as a sports competition, the day you met your best friend etc.

Spend some time remembering the event and make notes about what happened.

Autobiographical writing

Now write about the event in a way that will engage the reader.

Remember:

- First person
- Past tense
- Descriptive language
- Focus on detail

Aim to write at least 500 words.

Remember to paragraph!

You should carefully paragraph your writing. An easy way to remember when to start a new paragraph is to use the word:

TIPTOP

You start a new paragraph when you change **T**ime, **P**lace, **T**opic or **P**erson



For more help
Email info@thestudentshed.com