

TIPS ON WRITING AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, BIOGRAPHY, OR PROFILE

1. *Know your subject.* No biography, autobiography, or profile can have a strong impact if the writer does not have a thorough knowledge of his or her subject. Make sure your information comes from a variety of sources so that you have a clear knowledge of and insight into your subject, and are not unduly influenced by one perspective. For example, if you are interviewing someone in order to write their profile, also try to interview others who know that person.
2. *Have an appreciation for your subject.* Appreciation does not necessarily have to be positive and glowing. You can appreciate a person's achievements without necessarily liking that person. Because appreciation determines your attitude toward your subject, it is significant in creating the work's voice and tone. For example, Mary Nemeth's appreciation of Nelly McClung is evident in the care she takes to give the reader insight into McClung's personal as well as her professional life.
3. *Get beneath the surface.* Even the most ordinary individual becomes interesting in the hands of a skilled observer. Look for an angle, an insight, an experience that reveals the individual beneath the surface. Remember, a short anecdote reveals far more about an individual than a lot of dry data or surface information.
4. *Consider the best way to present your material.* You must organize your material to help reveal the character and achieve the greatest dramatic and emotional impact on your reader. Generally, the order for a biography, autobiography, or profile is chronological, but not necessarily.
5. *Use language that is appropriate to your subject and your intended audience.* The language you use should reflect your subject. For example, compare the language used in the Nelly McClung profile with that used in the Dr. Norman Bethune profile. As well, when writing a biography or biographical profile, you should let the subject speak for himself or herself in addition to others who might know or have known the individual. Quotations and dialogue add a sense of truth to the work.

The Tips on Writing a Narrative Essay (p. 160) might also be of help.