

# THE Transylvania TIMES

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## Ten things you must know before you publish your memoir



*Daphne Larkin (right) talks to former student Molly Devane about writing and publishing her comedic memoir on the many symptoms of her first pregnancy and about memoirs on the market. To read Devane's newsletter, go to [mollydevane.substack.com](https://mollydevane.substack.com).*

Writing memoirs has become increasingly popular in recent years because of growing interest, surging readership and plentiful publishing options. If you intend to sell your memoir, rather than reproduce a few copies for family and friends, here are 10 unwritten rules you should know long before you've finished writing your book.

### **•Read Memoirs on Your Subject**

It's a good idea to see how someone else has told a story like yours as well as to find out what's already on the market. For example, if you're writing about the loss of a loved one, you might read Joan Didion's "The Year of Magical Thinking" in which she describes her life after the death of her husband. Or, say your story is about your childhood during the fifties and sixties, you might check out Annie Dillard's "An American Childhood."

### **•Crack the Story Code**

Every narrative story from Homer's "Odyssey" to Jon Krakauer's "Into Thin Air" follows a story plot that begins with a flawed hero facing a life-changing event. As he begins to struggle with it, he's profoundly tested. By journey's end, whether he's succeeded or been defeated, our hero is transformed. Sound familiar? Think Cheryl Strayed's "WILD: Lost and Found on the Pacific Crest Trail" or Tobias Wolff's "This Boy's Life."

### **•Check Out Professional Writer's Publications**

Two excellent magazines that focus on interviews with writers and literary agents, the craft of writing, and advice on getting published are "Poets & Writers" and "Writer's Digest." A good resource for publishing information is "Writer's Market: A Guide to Getting Published" (Writer's Digest Books).

### **•Write the Right Number of Words**

A memoir should have between 60,000 to 100,000 words.

### **•Edit and Rewrite**

Writing a memoir is not a sprint, it's a long-distance run. You reach the finish line only after you've edited and edited, and rewritten and rewritten your book. Editing and rewriting is what separates the serious writer from the wannabe. Learn to love to edit and rewrite.

### **•Join Writing Class/Writing Group/Find Writing Partner**

Join a memoir writing class or a writing group, where you will get feedback about your story from others. Or find a compatible writing partner as some of my memoir writing students have done. At the least, ask a few trusted friends or family to read your copy. Consider editing suggestions, decide which work for you – and which don't – and make the changes that improve your manuscript.

### •Hire a Writing Coach and Editor

A professional writing coach will read your book and figure out what works, what doesn't, what's missing, what should be cut, and how to fix it. A copy editor will edit every line until your story reads smoothly, is grammatically correct, and the punctuation is right.

These folks aren't inexpensive, but well worth the money if you hope to attract a traditional publisher. The fact is nothing will ruin your chance to publish faster than a sloppily written manuscript with misspelled words, bad grammar, and off-the-wall punctuation. Even if you plan to self-publish, you'd better make sure your book is good enough to attract buyers – beside your mother.

### •Get a Literary Agent

If you hope to publish with a traditional publishing company, you'll need a literary agent to speak for you and your book. A good resource on the subject is "Guide to Literary Agents" (Writer's Digest Books), which includes a list of 127 agents who represent memoir.

### •Research Publishing Options

There are many publishing options, including indie or self-publishing, hybrid publishing (something between self-publishing and traditional publishing), and traditional publishing. For more information, check out Jane Friedman's chart on "Key Book Publishing Paths: 2023-2024" at [www.janefriedman.com](http://www.janefriedman.com).

### •Decide if You Want to Publish

While there are many great reasons to write your memoir, there are a few very good reasons to hold off on publishing or even not publish at all. Jill Ker Conway waited to publish her memoir, "The Road From Coorain" about her difficult childhood on a sheep farm in the Australian outback until after her mother died.

Sometimes, just letting time pass before publishing can make all the difference. Consider Prince Harry. I doubt his goal was to further estrange his royal relatives, but in fact that has most likely been the result with his recently published memoir "Spare." Had he waited a few years, his perspective might have changed or even softened, and his book might have been a very different one.

*Daphne Larkin is an award-winning book author, columnist and magazine writer who teaches Memoir Writing at the Transylvania County Library and the Blue Ridge Community College. Her next class will be at the Community College on the Brevard campus from June 7 to July 26. Registration is now open for that class, which will meet on Wednesday from 3 to 5 p.m., and be limited to 10 students. For more information, contact Daphne Larkin at [daphne@daphnelarkin.com](mailto:daphne@daphnelarkin.com).*