Knowing the Difference between an Autobiography and a Memoir
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Part of the Memoir Writing For Dummies Cheat Sheet

Many people interchangeably use the terms “autobiography” and “memoir.” Although Amazon and many brick-and-mortar bookstores put them in the same category, they are quite different. Here’s how they are different.

An autobiography
- Focuses on the trajectory of an entire life
- Starts at the beginning and progresses chronologically to the end
- Feels more like a historical document; tons of fact-checking and very specific dates/information
- Strives for factual, historical truths
- Typically is written by famous people

A memoir
- Focuses on a key aspect, theme, event, or choice in a life
- Starts anywhere and can deftly move around in time and place
- Feels more personal; less intense fact-checking
- Strives for emotional truths
- Can be written by anyone

Both are based in truth. Both are highly marketable in the publishing world. And both require a good deal of research, which can range from phone interviews and trips to places you once lived, to sitting back into a comfy chair and doing some deep, focused remembering. Yet as you can see, there are significant and crucial differences between an autobiography and a memoir.

http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/learning-the-difference-between-an-autobiography-and-memoir.html