

**1. Definition:**

An autobiography is the story of a person's life as told by that person.

A biography is the story of a person's life written by another person.

Auto/biographies are usually written by/about prominent people and their life experiences and achievements. Unauthorised biographies are written without the permission of the person whose life is being described. Often the author of the biography is not acquainted with the person featured in his/her book.

A memoir is a piece of autobiographical writing, usually shorter than a comprehensive autobiography. A memoir often tries to capture certain moments or particular events in a person's past, rather than documenting every fact of their life and may be more emotional than a complete autobiography/biography.

**2. Purpose and Role of Writer:**

to inform or reveal details about a person's life for historical or personal reasons, or for profit

**3. Generic Features:**

**a) Structure and Organisation**

- book format, divided into chapters
- arrangement may be chronological or thematic e.g. Early Years, Schooldays
- content will outline significant events from the person's life e.g. *rites of passage*.

**b) Language**

- autobiography: personal; reflecting author's personality e.g. *I'll never forget...*
- biography: a degree of formality creates some distance between writer and reader e.g. *John was born...*
- autobiography and memoir: subjective, influenced by the opinion of the author e.g. *I expected the manager to evict him immediately...*
- biography: factual and objective. If the author wishes to influence the reader positively or negatively, s/he may use subjective language for this purpose.
- writing style: engages the reader through description and bringing the subject to life e.g. dialogue: *"Just this once," Bob growled...*

**c) Grammar**

- correct English in complete sentences
- first person for autobiography and memoir; third person for biography e.g. *When I was famous...; When the Beatles were at the height of their fame .....*
- past tense is more common because of content e.g. *The Beatles were the music phenomenon...*

**An extract from The Autobiography of a Rock Star**

I'll never forget my first gig. I was convinced at the time it would be my last.

A new club had opened in town so I got a job there as a bar attendant. I'd worked all over the country serving drinks in the last few years, trying to break into the music scene. So I was an ace cocktail shaker.

After a couple of weeks, I finally convinced my manager to let me have a place in the Saturday evening music line up.

"Just this once," Bob growled, "because I'm short of solo performers. But don't expect it to become a habit. And if you're really awful, you'll be off that stage after the first bar."

Well, when the evening came, I got through the first song no worries. I was on cloud nine by the time the audience had finished clapping. And then a little nondescript man stood up in the audience. He'd had a bit to drink, I think. "That's my song," he insisted, and climbed onto the stage.

I expected the manager to evict him immediately. But, wouldn't you know it? Bob was an old fan of this 'has been'. And the old boy could sing. It was back behind the bar for me.

"Stick to cocktails," I was told. I quit the job that night.

Years later, when I was famous, I ran into Bob. He apologised and he asked for my autograph.

**An extract from A Biography of John Lennon**

The Beatles were the music phenomenon of the twentieth century. And John Lennon was arguably the genius of the band, with his prolific song writing talents. Yet he had humble beginnings and his future did not look promising.

John was born in Liverpool in 1940. His parents, who were both quite musical, separated early in his life and he was brought up by an aunt and uncle. It seemed that he was destined for a career in art, before he discovered music. Although he failed his final high school exams narrowly, Lennon was admitted to the Liverpool Art College. Here he met his first wife Cynthia. Disruptive in class, he left art school a year before finishing the course.

It was his mother, Julia, who gave Lennon his first guitar. While still at high school, he formed his first band, The Quarrymen. He attracted Paul McCartney and later George Harrison to the group. For this reason, John Lennon is widely regarded as the first Beatle.

first person / conversational style / addresses audience

personal referents / subjective / opinionative comment.

dialogue creates authenticity and variety

development of story / descriptive style

story takes a negative turn

conclusion reveals theme of story and ironic ending

impersonal style / reader is distanced from writer / writer expresses personal opinion

factual detail / emotionally detached from subject and audience.

conclusion maintains formal tone with some opinionative comment/ writer's personality is not revealed