Features of Autobiography and Biography

The term Biography is used to refer to two types of non-fiction writing: Biography and Autobiography. This term is an example of the many words in English that have their origin in Ancient Greek or Latin. The original words from these old languages are referred to as the root words, out of which the English word has been derived.

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<th>AUTO</th>
<th>BIO</th>
<th>GRAPHY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autos</td>
<td>Bios</td>
<td>Graphos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greek root meaning: Self</td>
<td>Greek root meaning: Life</td>
<td>Greek root meaning: Writing</td>
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Some biographies are written by the subject themselves. The writer becomes the subject of the writing. These biographies are classified as autobiographies.

What effects do you think this would have on the writing about the person's life?

Consider how autobiographical writing would affect:
- the narrative point of view
- the presentation of the person (subject)
- the truthfulness of the biography

The subject of a biography is always the life of a particular individual.
- It can be the entire life of the person. This usually occurs in the case of someone famous in history after they have died.
- It can be just a part of someone's life. This occurs when the person is still living, but may have been involved in some particular event that is written about. Shorter accounts are called memoirs or anecdotes that single out particular episodes in someone's life.

Biographies are classified as non-fiction because they are about a real person, living or dead. A biography will be about real people, places and events. Although a biography is about one individual (the subject), it will explore the relationship between this individual and:
- other people parents, family, friends, intimate relationships, partners, associates
- the environment significant places that have had an influence on the person's life

The way the biography is written affects the value and the truth of what is recorded, and how it will affect and influence the reader.

There is an expectation that because biography is non-fiction, about a real person, it will be 'true', factual information. However, the following factors in the construction (the writing) of a biographical text will influence the degree to which the text has value for its truthfulness:
- the point of view
- the level and thoroughness of research
- the desire of the writer to tell the truth
- the way the material is organised
- what information and details the writer selects to put in (or leave out) of the text
- the words that the writer uses
- how much the writer
**Why write biography/autobiography?**

People write biographical text for an audience of other people, but often they also are mainly writing for themselves. Some of the reasons why people feel the need to write their autobiography or to write the biography of another person are listed below:

- record the facts of life
- inform other people about a life
- share experiences with other people
- entertain people
- move people's emotions in particular ways
- change people's values and attitudes, or present opinions or ideas about a particular subject
- inspire other people by telling about a life as an example
- enable a writer to make sense of their own life
- allow a writer to understand him or herself
- capture a particular moment in time
- might be an interest in social history.

**Why read biography/autobiography?**

Texts may be read for the same reasons that people write them. Below is a list of some of the reasons people read biographical texts:

The reader:

- has an interest in a particular person or subject
- has an interest in reading about real people, places and events that really happened
- wants to find out some specific information
• might identify with the subject of the text
• might have had similar a experience, problem or struggle and want to see how somebody else has dealt with it
• wants to be entertained by a ‘true life’ story
• want to know what somebody else's ideas, opinions, values and attitudes are for comparison with themselves.
• has an interest in social history.