

Story Questions Freebie



The hardest part about transformation and growth is finding the right questions to ask, so you can build yourself a roadmap. This applies to us in real life as individuals, but it also applies to the characters we write, (including ourselves as the main character of our memoir).

Answering the right questions gives us clarity. Asking the wrong questions just confuses us. And almost invariably, the right questions relate to :

1. "What am I afraid of?"
2. "Why am I avoiding this?"
3. "What benefit do I get out of avoiding this?"

We could go into the whole character development thing about emotional wounds, emotional flaws and the inner monologue that sabotages our best intentions, but basically, those three questions, if we go deep enough, will reveal the root causes of our bad habits and negative behaviours. And it's those negative behaviours and habits that create conflict in our stories and our characters, even when they are us.

Start with:

- What do I want? What is it I need to do? (Character's main goal. Identify problem or challenge)
- Why am I avoiding this? (Obstacle, what's stopping me?)
- What am I afraid of? (Identify the main fear)
- What is it about this situation that scares me? (Identify specifics of the fear — rejection, abandonment, commitment, judgement, ridicule, unworthiness, ineptitude, etc.)
- What else scares me? (More and deeper specifics. Whose voice do I hear?)
- What else? (Keep digging until you can't think of anything more.)

Then go on to: (The second section is more relevant to fiction, but it also helps with character motivation in memoir. Events and situations in memoir are often exaggerated to illustrate a point more effectively.)

- What's the worst that could happen? (Over the top scenario)
- What else could happen? (More fallout)
- What if it did happen, what would it change? (Identify outcome(s) and alternate scenarios where the worst doesn't happen)
- How likely is it that this will happen? (On a scale of one to ten. Itemize possible outcomes and write your character's reactions towards each one.)

And finally:

- What do I need to do to prevent this? (Action, behaviour to take, habit to change)
- What are the individual steps that I need to take. (Starting with the end in mind, list all the obstacles preventing you or your character from accomplishing the intended goal, both internal (mental/emotional) and external (physical).
- What do I need to do to get past the first obstacle? (Pick the most obvious obstacle and the action to take)
- The next?
- And so on?

By breaking down your story into a series of obstacles, both external (physical) and internal (mental and emotional), your character can overcome each of them in turn until either he reaches one which takes him down, or he accomplishes his goal.



P.S.: Oops, I almost forgot. There's one more question that you must ask about every part of your story, and it's this:

- Does it matter?

If a sentence, a scene, an event, in fact, anything you want to include in your memoir doesn't have meaning, significance or importance to the character, or relate in some way to the main point of your story, leave it out, no matter how beautifully written. If it doesn't matter, don't include it.