

Let Me Help You

Sell Your Homework

12-Week Course of Study:

*24 Ways to Write
Articles*

Lesson 12

**BIOGRAPHY
AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

By Professor Dick Bohrer, M.Sc., M.A.

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24 Ways to
Sell Your Homework:
Articles

LESSON 1	Master Your Library
LESSON 2	Phrase Sentences/Short sentences
LESSON 3	Simple humor A-B-C Sheer nonsense The parody
LESSON 4	Novelties Question and answer How-To Diary Tales Retold
LESSON 5	Conversational Chronological Narrative Chronological reverse Slice of Life
LESSON 6	Frame & flashback Plant and pick-up Series Cycle
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LESSON 11	Problem and solution Sunk and saved
LESSON 12	Biography Autobiography

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BIOGRAPHY

The well written biography is a reader's peep through the keyhole of life.

All of us love the safety, certainty and enjoyment of vicarious living. Good biography lets us live many men's lives.

But how do you pull it off?

You ask, who's the reader? Adult? Youngster? Woman?

You ask, what does he expect? Drama? Inspiration? Solutions to problems? Escape?

You ask, how long will he read? Through the hook? The first paragraph? The first page?

It's all up to you.

You've got to know your subject and you've got to make him/her human. No man is a saint.

Jeremiah, the prophet, wrote, "The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked." This is not to say your sketch must be X-rated to attract readers. By no means. It means everyone has feet of clay. Everyone is human.

As you study your subject—even to the point of assuming his identity—you will find his secret of life and you'll tell it.

How deeply did he feel?

How devastating were his defeats?

How did he rise from and transcend them?

What were his warts?

John Mason Brown, biographer, put it well: "You cease living your own life when you start writing someone else's. . . . Without your being aware of it, you are no longer alone within yourself. Your heart and mind have a new tenant."

Choose a subject who will interest your readers. Perhaps his familiarity as a leader will sell your article. But do more than chronicle his life. Research it. Your local librarian will help you.

If you choose your mother or another relative to avoid the research, think through your subject's life to find tension.

Don't whitewash. No editor wants lily-whites. Find the feet of clay. Find the principle of life.

Limit your focus to a time of desperation or success or emptiness or romance. How did he/she react? How is that reaction a lesson to us all? Set your hook there.

Be true to the times when the person lived. Don't fill his mouth with modern slang when he died fifty years ago. Look for paradoxes.

Do people think he loved humanity?

Was he really a skunk in private?

Did he invent the wheel?

Did he also invent lies?

Was he the sunshine of the office and the shadow of the home?

How did his kids turn out?

Your first sentence should indicate

your main point.

Lord Acton wrote: “Churchill had more in common with Hitler than one would like to believe.”

This kind of writing gets reader attention. Think and write like this.

For this assignment, choose a relative or close friend. If you don’t want the world to know his/her identity, change the name.

Write the article in narrative form. Tell us the story of an incident in his life. En route to the climax, give us a brief chronology of his life. Tell an anecdote or several that prove you lived with a Greek god (or a dimwit). James Thurber wrote hilarious stories about his relatives. He wasn’t afraid to confess their warts and warbles.

And this is marvelous training for fiction writing. Many novelists people their plots with their friends and relatives. By doing so, they know they have real people—solid characters who seem to live and breathe. They know what that person is like, how he gestures when he talks, how he intones his words, how he reacts in crises.

Orient your article to a national magazine. Study the religious market or the women’s market or sports magazines. Perhaps you know someone whose story would be marvelously suited for one of these.

But you’ve got to have a good first sentence.

You’ve got to write with charm.

You’ve got to tell a significant story about a very real human being.

Notice that emphasis on “signifi-

cance.” It means nothing to readers that Aunt Tilly took you to the zoo on Saturdays and bought you spun sugar. So what?

But if Aunt Tilly was a bag lady who earned six dollars a week picking up trash

If she was house-bound taking care of an obstinate dying husband and this was her only chance for a return to humanity then you begin to find significance.

Remember, in any given shorter article, begin as close to the ending as you can get. Use flashback to fill in needed details or use asides. These are little explanations that supply background and local color without stopping the flow of action. In this way you don’t bog the reader down with a story that’s slow to get started.

Start with action: When Aunt Patty dove into Lake Hopatcong off the end of the Pagoda restaurant dock, nobody laughed. Explain that she was fulfilling a lifetime goal. As you tell about it, you are writing biography.

And don’t forget to establish your relationship to that person. The reader has to know what viewpoint he’s reading. You are the adoring nephew or you are the friend or you are the neighbor next door who spent your life peeping under the shade.

But, remember, it is her story, not yours. Write about her and her achievements, her character, her joys and sorrows.

Remember also, you are a craftsman.

You can handle this story in one of the many ways we've already discussed.

Did your Aunt Pat have two great loves? Use double barrel.

Did she go through a period of deep depression as a young teen? Use diary.

Is she a clever talker who keeps people in stitches? Use conversational.

Did she live in a colorful place where everyone was a walking story in himself? Write slice of life.

Did she have a problem that caused her great anguish for a time? Use problem and solution or chronological narrative.

Does she have an unusual view of life? Use question and answer.

I am not playing games with these varying structures. I'm here to make you a professional writer who is in command of the tools of his trade. Take the table of contents out of this book and post it near your computer. Run your finger down the list when you have an assignment due Monday and you need a nudge to get started. Fit the topic to a style and you've got your "hop-skip-and-a-jump." Take off and fly.

Also, with biography, you can mix the fruit.

1. Start with an anecdotal narrative, giving a significant and reader-appealing story to hook interest.

2. When that ends, tell another, zeroing in again on the theme you've chosen.

3. Then give the biography in as many words as you need.

4. Give another anecdote.

5. End with a summary statement

or paragraph showing how your hero learned a lesson or proved a point or stood against opposition. Or whatever.

This will be your proof of the pudding, as it were. It's your full statement of why your character did what he did or it's the analysis and critique of the value of his acts.

I handled a major book-length biography, *Lion of God*, this way. It traced the life of Dr. John G. Mitchell, long-time Bible teacher and founder of the Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon. I drew the structure of many of the chapters from the table of contents of these 12 lessons.

When writing biography, make it a point to supply "take-away value." We want to be a better person because we've read your story. We want something we won't forget, something that will enhance all our tomorrows from what you have written.

The biographical structure article does not have to begin with an anecdote. You may begin with the biographical sketch. You may begin with statements of what other people thought of him.

I did this with an article I wrote for "Moody Monthly" magazine.

I'd done a book for Moody Press that was a rewrite of a well known biography, *Borden of Yale*, '09 by Mrs. Howard Taylor. The public sales were down and the publishers wanted a more modern version.

I rewrote it, using the testimonials

Mrs. Taylor had scattered through her book.

Each chapter gathered everything a given person had said about Bill Borden and became a narrative of Bill's life as that person saw it.

"Moody Monthly" magazine editors asked me to condense the book into an article for an upcoming issue.

I began the article with a review of what critical people thought of Bill. Then I questioned the critics. Were they right?

Then I presented a biographical sketch of his life—a fairly uneventful life until the end (that was one of the difficulties I found in writing the book—he was such an ordinary person that his life had no calamities).

The conclusion reviews what admirers (the other side of the critical coin) thought of him.

We end with a poem, a favorite of his, that condensed his whole story in 16 short lines and then we turn on the critics with two short questions.

Here it is:

**'WHAT A WASTE,'
PEOPLE SAID**

Bill Borden had just sailed for Cairo, Egypt, en route to a mission field among Moslems in Chinese Mongolia. He was only 25.

CRITIC I

People thought he was throwing his life away.

After all, he had everything a

young man could want—and more. He was good-looking, single, popular, well educated (Yale and Princeton Seminary), successful (he sat on important boards); and he was wealthy.

By today's values, he was worth \$40 million.

But what he did with his money before he left for China was what astonished everybody.

He apportioned his inheritance among Christian schools (including Moody Bible Institute) and mission boards. He had no heirs. His widowed mother, his brother, and his two sisters each had as much as he.

So, since he had given God his life and wouldn't need the money in China, he gave it all away.

CRITIC II

"Sheer waste," people said.

It was 1912. With that much money, he could have bought himself a seat on the Chicago (his home town) Board of Trade. He could have put together a stock market and real estate portfolio that would have made him one of the wealthiest men in the nation.

He chose instead to sail for China.

But he never got there.

CRITIC III

'Total waste,' people said.

QUESTION I

But was it?

QUESTION II

Was he the kind of person who would merely flip away what God had given him and just walk off?

QUESTION III

Or was he some kind of super-saint with his head in the clouds?

ANSWER

Not Bill.

BIOGRAPHY BEGINS HERE IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

His parents did bring him up in a mansion on Chicago's Gold Coast, a wealthy suburb within walking distance of Moody Church. His father, an attorney, was active in real estate after the Chicago fire. It was from this, not milk, that the family fortune grew.

But at Yale, Bill was merely one of the boys. He roughoused with his friends, went out for sports (football, baseball, wrestling, and crew); and he made physical exercise a ritual.

In studies, he worked hard. His Phi Beta Kappa honor society at Yale voted him president his senior year.

Among members of his graduating class of nearly 300, he was voted third for "being the hardest worker," fourth for the "most energetic," ninth as "the most to be admired," and seventh as the "one who had done the most for Yale."

ANALYSIS

But something was different about Borden. His roommates tried to figure it out. They finally agreed it was because he had already focused his life before he ever came to Yale.

WE WANT TO KNOW WHAT MADE HIM TICK SO WE BEGIN A FLASHBACK

And they were right. His mother and his pastor had made a marked impression on his early years.

A spiritual woman, his mother brought Bill up (she called him William) loving the Savior and obeying His Word. From his childhood, she had consecrated him to the Lord. His call to missionary service had come, she felt, as an answer to her many prayers.

But it wasn't until he graduated from high school that he woke up to what the Gospel really meant in matters of commitment. He was in England at the tail end of a ten-month world tour his parents had given him. They wanted him to get a good look at the world before he settled down to his studies at Yale.

With Walter Erdman, a young Princeton Seminary graduate, as chaperone, Bill sailed from San Francisco in September 1904 when he was 17. The following July they reached London and discovered that Bill's pastor from Moody Church, the Rev. Dr. R. A. Torrey, was just concluding five months of meetings. They promptly went to hear him.

He spoke from I John on five ways

a person can have assurance that he is born again.

Bill wrote his mother, "His sermon was meant to straighten things out. I know that my own ideas were somewhat hazy, and I wasn't at all sure about it. But I am now."

In another meeting, Dr. Torrey gave an invitation to those who had never publicly indicated that they had surrendered all to Christ. Bill stood up with several others and later wrote home:

"We sang the chorus: 'I surrender all, I surrender all; All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.'"

Torrey spoke to those who stood, giving them five points for daily living: 1) Look always to Jesus, 2) Keep confessing Jesus everywhere, 3) Keep studying God's Word, 4) Keep praying every day, 5) Go to work.

Bill wrote his mother, "The first four I am doing and the fifth I will do."

A biographer (Mrs. Howard Taylor) wrote later of this experience in his life:

"A deep conviction that to accept Christ as Savior means to accept Him as Lord was part of this experience, and a conviction leading to action. Personal work was the outcome. It was no easier for Borden at seventeen to witness for Christ than it is for other young fellows of his age. He was reserved by nature. But he had taken a step that must have consequences."

It did.

END OF FLASHBACK

During Bill's freshman year at Yale, the Student Volunteer Movement, an organization formed to stimulate interest in missions, held its national convention in Nashville, Tennessee. It attracted 4,000 delegates from colleges and universities across the country, Bill among them. Foreign missionaries from 26 countries spoke. One representing the Moslem world reached Bill's heart.

Samuel Zwemer, a missionary statesman, described the sweep of Moslem influence and control through both the Near and the Far East. He said those 70 million people were not lost because they had proved too fanatical or because they refused to listen.

He placed the blame on the fact that "none of us has ever had the courage to go to those lands and win them to Jesus Christ."

He said that there were more Moslems in China than in Persia, Egypt and Arabia, the home and cradle of Islam. He said that no one missionary had gone to China to take the message of Christ to them.

"We do not plead for missions," he said. "We simply bring the facts before you and ask for a verdict."

Then he quoted Proverbs 24:11-12: "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? And he that keepeth thy

soul, doth not he know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?"

Bill left Nashville committed in heart to seeking God's will about taking the Gospel to the Moslem world.

He knew he needed to begin at once to reach out to the unsaved. With friends in New Haven, Yale's town, he founded and privately funded a mission for down-and-out men. He spent many hours there witnessing.

One man who was converted there said of Bill, "He could talk to anyone, didn't matter who they was. And he'd get down with his arms round the poor burly bum and hug him up. I know he must have done for hundreds just what he done for me."

For two summers, Bill waited tables during a Bible conference at Northfield, Mass. He never did it if someone needed to work to meet expenses. And he never explained why he volunteered. He certainly didn't need the money. But he had a servant's heart.

And he was a man of prayer.

FRIEND

A friend said, "How easy he was to pray with. He was a jolly fellow—delighted to get hold of a man and crack his ribs. He could be jolly with the rest; yet, when the crowd was gone, it would be just as natural for him to say, 'Come into the bedroom

and let's have prayer together.'

"Bill was so simple in his prayer life, so natural, so trustful. He was the easiest man to pray with I have ever known."

FRIEND

Harriet Day, a long-time friend, said of him, "It was always an opportune time to speak with Bill of the deepest things. His spiritual life affected his entire life—the heartiness and wholesomeness of his fun as well as his religious activities."

FRIEND

Another friend said, "The secret of William Borden's life was his belief in the sufficiency and abiding presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. For him this was more than a belief—it was a reality."

But he was not so heavenly minded that he had no wish for things.

CLASSMATE

A Princeton classmate said, "I've been told that he felt one of his temptations was to own a car. He never purchased one because he thought that for him it would be an unjustifiable luxury.

"I remember one Saturday afternoon in New York going with him to the auto show in a hall at Madison Square Garden. He knew all the various makes and pointed out to me the advantages of the different cars."

MOTHER

His mother said, "I think William's real reason for the stand he took about a car was that he depreciated the luxury seen in the lives of so many Christians. He didn't feel justified in using his money, which he held distinctly as a stewardship, for any such purpose."

Public transportation then was sufficient for all his needs.

On his graduation from Yale, Bill applied to the China Inland Mission for service to Moslems in China. But the Board decided he needed more Bible training and recommended he do graduate work at Princeton seminary. He promptly enrolled.

A year later, he applied to the C.I.M. again and was accepted.

The very day two years after that that he took his last examination at Princeton, he began to make plans for a three-month tour of duty with the Student Volunteer Movement in which he would recruit students for missionary service overseas. He was to speak especially on the need in the Moslem world before he himself would sail for Egypt on his way to China.

The mission felt that a few months at Cairo, in the language school, would help him in his study of Arabic and of the Koran and of the Moslem mind in general. He had set his sights on Kansu, a lonely, far-off province in northwest China with its three million Moslems among a population of Mongols, Tibetans, and Chinese.

A friend asked him in a joking way when he was going to marry.

Bill said he thought it was cruel for a man who was going into one of the most difficult of missionary fields to ask any girl to go with him, because women always fared the worst—often succumbing when the man survived. He said he had no intention of marrying—that it would hinder his highest efficiency in the field he had in view.

And he felt the same way about his wealth. He divided his inheritance, giving one-fourth for use in Chicago, another quarter on other parts of the homeland, the third portion for work in China, and the remainder for work in other foreign countries.

He gave \$100,000 each to National Bible Institute of New York and to Moody Bible Institute. On today's scale, those were \$4 million gifts.

He asked that \$100,000 of the \$250,000 he left to the China Inland Mission be invested in order that the interest might be used for elderly retired missionaries. Even mission leaders were surprised that one so young would be concerned with others so old.

Bill never mentioned to anyone—not even his mother—that he was cutting all cords and giving his life totally to Christ.

Yet even she wondered, she admitted later, on the eve of his departure for Egypt, if he had done the right thing in giving up *everything* he owned.

“In the quiet of my room that night, worn and weary and sad, I fell asleep asking myself again and again, ‘Is it, after all, worth while?’

“And in the morning, as I awoke to consciousness, a still small voice was speaking in my heart, answering the question with these words: ‘God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. . . .’”

The thought strengthened her for that day—his departure day (the last day she would see him alive)—and for all the days to come.

She wrote later, “Each day, from his childhood, William and I had prayed that the will of God might be done in his life. And, as we parted on the Mauretania, we prayed again. I wonder if it occurred to him later, as it did to me, that we had prayed that he might be taken to China and made a blessing among its millions of Moslems—but only ‘if it be Thy will.’”

It turned out not to be God’s will.

Bill contracted cerebral meningitis in Cairo and died.

The news literally shocked the world. Newspapers in every country told his story. Accounts of his life and death were written in many languages. A version for Chinese Moslems reached the very ones he himself had longed to reach.

ADMIRER I

An editorial in a Richmond paper said, “His investment has borne rich returns already and will continue to

yield its peculiar fruit. There are thousands of talented and favored young men who will, in the light of Borden’s conception of investment values, come to a new view of Christian service.”

ADMIRER II

Another editor wrote, “It was not the million dollars that came to this young American which made his life a victory and his death a world-wide call to young men and women to learn the secret of that victory.

“It was in things that every man can share that William Borden found the way to the life which is Christ and the death which is gain. And China and the Moslem world shall yet share that gain, as his burning torch is used to kindle in other lives the fires of a like passion for Jesus Christ.”

Among Bill’s papers at the end was a poem his mother had given him on his 17th birthday. He had kept it near him all the rest of his life.

It summed up what he did and what he was:

“Just as I am, Thine own to be,
Friend of the young, who lovest me,
To consecrate myself to Thee—
O Jesus Christ, I come.

“In the glad morning of my days,
My life to give, my vows to pay,
With no reserve and no delay—
With all my heart, I come.

**‘I would live ever in the light,
I would work ever for the right,
I would serve Thee with all my
might—**

Therefore to Thee I come.

**“Just as I am, young, strong and
free,**

**To be the best that I can be
For truth and righteousness and
Thee—**

Lord of my life, I come.’

QUESTION I

Waste?

QUESTION II

Was it?

Again, my apology for presenting a very long example of the point at hand. But it is a biographical article and you need to know that I can practice what I preach.

This had a little plant-and-pick-up in it. After Critic III, the first question is: “But was it?” That’s the plant. The very last line of the article, “Was it?” (above) was the pick-up. Those two questions tie the article together.

Between them we had a flashback within a flashback. His whole life was the flashback after the three critics and three questions. But within that was the exploring of how he had settled his priorities at such a young age, and I marked that as the flashback.

From there we went into his missionary call and how he prepared to answer it as he finished his education.

We picked up the points we’d made in the introduction and expanded on them.

Since we’d mentioned that he was single, we had him give his opinion about marriage. Since we’d said he’d given his money away, we told how and when and to whom.

The article ends with his mother’s reassurance that if God had given His only begotten Son, surely she could give her boy. We tell briefly how he died, give the report of two admirers, tell the secret of his life in the poem and end with two questions.

Actually, you’ve had several biographical articles in the examples that have been included in this book. The Bing Crosby story was a full chronology and the biographer was a close friend.

The Jack Nicklaus story could have been written by a friend. It tells the things a friend would know and recognize and value. But a good researcher with a feeling for people could put that story together. He selected quotes that were right to the point—like the one that Jack doesn’t hit the ball as much as others do.

The information about his boyhood could have come from interviewing Jack’s father. He got his material on Jack’s marriage from his wife, most likely. Newspaper articles would chronicle his career—including his business and weight problems. Sports writers do learn those things and do include them in articles and columns.

And, certainly, he interviewed the

Golden Bear himself.

Sue Duffy told us she interviewed Kelly Duncan. She gave us a thought by thought chronicle of the tragedy Kelly lived through.

That article and the Nicklaus article can cover only the time from birth to the time of writing—obviously, because the subject is still living. The Crosby and Borden stories could cover the entire life because both men have lived their life here and passed on into eternity.

Since my rendition of Borden's life was taken from the book, *Borden of Yale, '09* by Mrs. Howard Taylor, I did my research among its pages and culled the story I wrote. The book I wrote was published by Moody Press and is now out of print. The article I took from my book is here.

Did I deliberately plan before I wrote it that I would have three critics and three questions at the beginning and two admirers and two questions at the end?

No. But I spent a long time putting

that article together, and I've been a long time writing in general and teaching writing to others. By now good structure comes fairly naturally.

I certainly hope Bill's story doesn't read like a contrived piece. When we look at a garment, we should not be conscious of the stitches. When we read an article, we should not be distracted by the pattern of its structure.

Now, you've learned another technique. Earlier, you were given an assignment. You have a biographical article to write. Many editors—especially those publishing the Sunday school take-home papers—are looking for 1000-word biographical sketches. Take the double-anecdote-beginning and let's get started. Decide on a line of reasoning—a story line—that you'll develop.

Your anecdotes will show that what you say is true. If your Leilani was the most unforgettable character in your life, show through your stories the how and why and when and where.

Send me a copy, okay?

GRAMMAR

Circle the correct answer

1. A noun following a linking verb is a direct object. True False
2. Prepositional phrases may act as adjective phrases or adverb phrases True False
3. Adjective clauses are used to modify verbs. True False
4. A gerund does the work of a noun. True False
5. Verbs in sentences are limited to one word. True False
6. Words in the objective case can be the subject of the sentence. True False
7. Words like “someone” and “anyone” are nouns. True False
8. All participles end in “ing.” True False
9. Adverb clauses follow the word they modify. True False
10. Only the words “and” and “but” are used to connect compound sentences True False
11. A compound sentence always contains at least one adjective or adverb or noun clause. True False
12. To subordinate a clause is to put it in a form that can stand alone as a sentence. True False
13. A preposition standing alone becomes an adverb. True False
14. Noun clauses modify nouns. True False
15. A sentence containing a dependent clause is called a complex sentence. True False
16. Pronouns come in three cases: nominative, objective and possessive. True False
17. A word that is half verb and half adverb is called a participle. True False
18. You ask “whom?” or “what?” to find the subject. True False
19. A semicolon must separate the compound sentences when you have a compound-complex sentence. True False
20. Linking verbs are weak verbs. True False

Answers: 1. False. 2. True. 3. False. 4. True. 5. False. 6. False. 7. False. 8. False. 9. False. 10. False. 11. False. 12. False. 13. True. 14. False. 15. True. 16. True. 17. False. 18. False. 19. False. 20. True.
(EASY ENGLISH, p. 151)

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Of all things you will ever write about, you will write what you KNOW when you write your own life.

You are the only person inside that shell of yours. Only you know what you're really like, what you've really thought, what you've really done.

An autobiographical article, like a book, will show the growth and change of a character (yourself) in transition. Were there no growth, no maturing, the character would have no charm, no mystique, no story. An autobiographical article stops time. It centers on a personal experience that occurred at a point in time. Obviously, it will have a narrator—you.

Some people fear the "I's." They don't like to write "I" after "I" because it looks as if they're seeking to glorify themselves or to evoke pity. But when the "I" is a participant in vigorous action or in candid revelation, the reader doesn't notice the "I's." Honesty does to readers what honey does to flies.

But no autobiographical article is exclusively about the narrator. Other people play their part in his life and will invade any retelling of it. They don't distract. They enhance. The interplay of character with character gives the authenticity we seek in an article like this. Mention all characters

early on.

"Oh," you say, "I don't have anything to write about. Nothing interesting ever happened to me."

Don't prejudge any incident as "too insignificant." If it sticks out in your mind as memorable or if it was a turning point in your life, it is significant. Even if it illustrates a minor point of human interest, tell it. Tell it clearly so we can relive it.

Look back at the article by Mary Roelofs Stott. A typical housewife with a grown family, she wanted to do no more than swim across a lake. Yes, it was a long swim but, physically, it was no more than that. What put Mary at the head of the class, as it were, is that she paid attention to details. We were there!

Near the beginning of your autobiographical article, hint at the reason that makes the incident you are presenting special.

Is there a problem you're solving? a conflict that needs resolution? an obstacle that needs conquering? or even just a point of character that needs examining.

Was there something that wanted to keep the you from succeeding?

Hint at it early and then develop it. The hinting is called, "foreshadowing," and it piques curiosity. Total surprise undermines believability. Foreshadowing supports it.

- Remember, don't ramble.

- Limit the subject to a single occasion.
- Get the action going quickly.
- Include relevant conversation.
- Don't digress.
- Identify time and place.
- Write naturally. There's the charm.

But I find that some of the finest articles have a firm intensity about them. The author has something that must be told, a confession that must be shared, a sermon that must be preached. That intensity brings out the action verbs. It creates a momentum that carries the reader along.

Some articles don't include anecdotes. The writer, in revealing his story gives you total honesty. He doesn't need to say on such and such a day I did this. But his autobiography tells you what he thinks and why he thinks it, how he acts and why he does so.

Here are two related articles— related because both are written by folk who have given their life to Christian work. The first, "Chaste by Choice," by Rosalie de Rosset, a Moody Bible Institute professor, opens a door immediately into private matters of the heart. The writer identifies herself by giving her age. Then she describes battles of the heart and tells how she, a single person, copes. She doesn't give us anecdotes and she doesn't need to. But we know her well when we reach her last word.

The second article is a chronological told-to narrative told by a man who by his inattention to something important caused a tragedy that resulted in

the deaths of seven people. The writer does not use anecdotes. Instead, he gives us a story line—a chronological narrative.

He also opens his door to private matters of the heart; and we know him well, too, when we reach his last word.

Both authors write with a candor often lacking these days. We Christian writers can put on Sunday clothes along with the rest. We present only the good image—the nice things. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God knows the heart.

Writer, when you write your stories, please give us heart.

Chaste by Choice!

by Rosalie De Rosset

I am 33, mentally and physically healthy, reasonably content, and single. Because I am single, I am also chaste by choice and conviction. I am not more given to sexual temptation than the average person, but neither am I less susceptible to it. I have the normal amount of sexual energy for a person of my age with the feelings that attend it.

By chaste I mean chaste; I do not engage in sexual activity. Furthermore, I do not indulge in the games too often played by singles wishing to relieve their boredom while remaining technically short of the line.

I do not flirt with married men, have occasional flings with single men, or develop unhealthy attachments to other women. Not being an athlete, I am not prone to sublima-

tion by means of hard exercise. As a lifetime member of Weight Watchers, I am scared to overeat. I overspend only occasionally. And I hate cold showers.

I am not a saint. Then how do I do it? I have heard that question in the church for years from both marrieds and singles. Asked with wonderment and speculative doubt, the query's implication emerges: if, indeed, the truth is being told, something is amiss. Fear, perhaps; a lack of the *joie de vivre*; early problems with father or mother; frigidity?

Clearly, if one is single and chaste, he/she must at least be fighting the demon of lust on an hourly basis. An occasional lapse reassures the inquisitive of one's normality; compassion and understanding abound for the fallen single.

There is little praise for the consistently sexually controlled single. Too often, it is mixed with granulated pity or powdered condescension. Ironically, while discipline and self-control are encouraged and admired in scholarship, athletics, music, and ministry, their absence is strangely excused in sexual matters.

The secular myth has infiltrated the Christian consciousness: our sexual urges are overpowering and irresistible. There will come the moment when we "simply cannot help ourselves," when "madness" will overtake us, when "it will be bigger than us."

To resist the madness is somehow

a failure to comprehend true sexuality, to be pronounced neuter—if not audibly, then certainly subconsciously.

How do chaste singles do it? Very simply (not easily), we keep our commitment to our convictions. I offer this suggestion in our defense. It is just possible that we too are tempted strongly, that we too could lose control at a minute's notice, that our weakness is as great as the next person's. It is even possible that good sense, grace, or learning our lesson early on has kept us out of all the heady ecstasy.

Goals, hard work, solid friendships, and taking God at His word have played a part. Taking one day at a time, understanding our own natures, and knowing what to avoid all probably help. Believing that God has given us our singleness at the moment, that our condition is not an accident or a cosmic joke, also figures in. More obviously, perhaps we have learned that no one gets everything he wants. Everyone has an itch he can't scratch, regardless of position or circumstance.

Chastity is a requisite of Christian singleness. Furthermore, chastity is possible. There will always be somebody to suggest that such thinking is legalistic, unreasonable, and unlikely to succeed. My reply can only be: "When it's bigger than I am, so is God."

Miss de Rosset (pronounced *Rozay*) was an assistant professor of commu-

nications at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago when she wrote that article.

The following autobiographical article in frame and flashback gives more attention to the flashback than the frame. Use this device when a past event has a significant present effect.

FAILURE!

by Craig Nimmo
with Robert Griffin

Normally I'm a happy freckle-faced redhead, but that day my world turned upside down. Grief washed over me in suffocating waves. The sight of those seven caskets in a grimly-accusing row was almost more than I could bear. I didn't think I could stand it. I was responsible. They were dead because of my error. I was a failure.

I'll never forget the moment I first heard the news.

It was almost suppertime.

Nearly everyone at Ukarum-pa, Wycliffe's Center in Papua New Guinea's beautiful highlands, was beginning to unwind after a long and busy day. We had wrapped things up at the hangar where I'm a maintenance engineer for Jungle Aviation and Radio Service. I had gone home. Two planes were still out but would be home before dark. The flight dispatcher was at the hangar standing by for their radio calls and would help the pilots tuck the planes away.

I wasn't home long, had just gotten my ham rig warmed up for a lit-

tle pre-supper gab session, when the phone interrupted me. It was John on the radio at the hangar.

He hit me with it cold.

"Craig, the Aztec just crashed at Nadzab. Paul Carlson was going to Lae and saw it from the Cessna. He says it looks bad."

I couldn't believe it. It couldn't be! Not our plane.

Paul told me about it a little later while I listened in numbed silence. He was near Nadzab, an abandoned World War II airfield about halfway on the 40-minute run to Lae, when he heard Doug Hunt call the Lae tower, "Mayday, mayday, mayday! I have a fire in my starboard engine and am now feathering. I'll try for a landing at Nadzab."

Paul and his three passengers strained their eyes to spot the Aztec, which they knew was somewhere behind them and to the left. They all saw it at the same time, frightful orange and white flames streaming from the right engine, and a long trail of ugly black smoke tracing Doug's desperate dive for safety. Paul laid the Cessna up on a wing tip and dove to follow it down.

Paul thought Doug had it made. The Aztec was just off the end of the runway, lined up on final approach, when suddenly there was a brilliant flash of fire and the right wing bent upward. A scant hundred feet from the safety of the ground the plane rolled violently to the right and crashed. There were no survivors.

Seven people perished instantly.

Too stupefied to feel emotion, I stumbled off in a daze. My thoughts ran in tortured circles. Did I do something wrong? I was one of two aircraft mechanics maintaining the Aztec, as well as three other planes. I tried to think through the previous two days' activities.

The events had been routine. We had pulled a 100-hour inspection on the Aztec. Nothing unusual. The same preventive maintenance had given us twenty-five years of bush flying all over the world without a fatality. I had performed this kind of inspection so many times I knew just what to do. My main job was inspecting the right engine, the one that caught fire. That had to be the key. Was there something I had—or hadn't—done?

A new man had helped me on the inspection. He was doing the magnetos while I was underneath the engine replacing the carburetor fuel filter screen. I had just hooked up the fuel line again and twisted the B-nut finger tight when he asked for a hand with the mags. I got out from under the engine to help and . . . that had to be it! I never finished tightening that nut with a wrench.

I was stunned. My practice of always making a final inspection of everything I do had failed. How could I have missed that nut! The lack of a final twist of the wrench on that fuel line meant a fine spray of gasoline could escape. It went unno-

ted on the post inspection run up, but after several hours of flying, the nut must have loosened more, and then . . . WHOOSH!

Fire!

I ran to catch Ken Wiggers, our chief pilot. In the midst of tears and grief I told him it had to be my fault. The whole thing was my fault.

Sure enough, a subsequent inspection of the engine by the Department of Civil Aviation proved it. The nut on the fuel line was only finger tight. My failure to tighten that nut cost seven people—my close friends and co-workers—their lives.

The funeral was a ghastly ordeal. The sight of those caskets lined up in the little open-sided tropical church hit me like a blow to the stomach. I wanted nothing but to get out of there.

At the grave site I felt totally wretched. How could I face my friends? How could I face myself? I was overwhelmed with guilt. I was a failure.

The next few days were the worst I've ever endured.

Jim Entz, our chief mechanic, was at the crash site helping Civil Aviation people clean up the wreckage, leaving me responsible for the engine change in one of our other planes. It was the last thing I wanted, but there was no choice.

I remember going from the hangar into the engine shop to get the turbocharger. I started to pick it up from the bench, but couldn't. I was repulsed. I leaned on the bench and

sobbed. I couldn't do it. I couldn't work on planes. I had just sent seven people to eternity.

Love got me through that week. Two of our pilots assigned to help with the engine change sensed the turmoil in my mind. We stopped and prayed when I bogged down emotionally, and they encouraged me. Their prayers and loving forgiveness buoyed me. I'm sure that almost everyone knew the cause of the accident; but I never sensed rejection by anyone—only their unspoken, very real love.

But it wasn't over yet. I wanted to talk with Doug's wife, Glennis, and the rest of the family, but I was afraid. What would she say? I couldn't face her, but the longer I put it off the harder it got.

On the day Lynda, the Hunts' oldest daughter, and Ken, Doug's brother, were scheduled to return home to New Zealand, I was working at the hangar as usual. The weather was bad—rain, low overcast, and poor visibility. While waiting for it to lift, the family had coffee in the pilot's lounge.

I felt the Lord telling me to go talk to them.

Nervous and heart-sick, I hesitantly pushed the door open and asked everyone but the family to leave the room. No one spoke; they just got up and left.

I closed the door and opened my broken heart. I wept and wept. My voice choked with sobs. I asked their forgiveness.

"That hand there," I said, as I held out my quivering right hand, "took Doug's life."

Glennis reached out to take my hand in both of hers. The warmth of her love and forgiveness flowed over my aching heart like a balm.

On the other side, Doug's brother Ken sat with his arm around me. It was the most significant step in the healing process over the next few years. In their warm forgiveness, the misery I clutched so tightly began slowly to drop away.

And, that wasn't all. I knew forgiveness from everyone around me—my co-workers, and most importantly, the pilots who continued to entrust themselves to my skill and workmanship. I knew their loving acceptance. The body of Christ was showing forgiveness to a member that was hurting.

I could have been the failure I thought I was.

If it weren't for God's grace, I'd be cowering in despair—the eighth fatality of the Aztec crash. That would really be failure.

Thank God—for His grace.

(Reprinted from Beyond, publication of JAARS, a department of Wycliffe Bible Translators.

Craig Nimmo is an aircraft mechanic with Wycliffe's Jungle Aviation and Radio Service.

Robert Griffin is editor of Beyond and Information Director for JAARS.)

Two people—a woman and a man—have opened their hearts. Both articles illustrate God's love and grace. These folk have dipped into their own minds

and experiences to share with the reader what they think and what they have gone through. One cannot do this if he does not have insight—the ability to look at himself and retell what he sees—and compassion, the heart to see that others need to share in the experience themselves

Many would-be writers are tied up in the thought that “no one would be interested in what I have to say” kinds of thinking. But that is so wrong!

People do want to look behind the curtains of our lives to see how we meet crises and make decisions. People respect honesty and openness

Miss de Rosset shared a very sensitive and private area of her life and, by so doing, opened our eyes to see how she was coping with a problem all of us have.

Mr. Nimmo shared his deep guilt and grief after an accident he inadvertently caused sent seven people to their deaths.

Exodus 36:1 speaks to us writers and artists—we who create. It says we must be “wisehearted” folk “in whom the LORD (has) put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary.”

Out of our treasuries we’re to bring things new and old. These we polish to all the brightness possible. What we’ve been given, we share. And we need to offer humbly back to Him who gave it, everything we create.

The autobiographical article—and all these articles—allow you an opportu-

nity to craft the experiences the Lord has given you so you can minister to your family and to people you’ll never meet. Create a family memory book. You all will treasure it in years to come.

Don’t say: “Oh, we never did anything to write about.” Your going to school, to church, to picnics, to shop, to eat out, to funerals, to parties—tell these things.

Include how you feel about them and what you see other people doing and saying and feeling. Tell who is there and what they said and how they acted.

Writing like this will increase your perception of life and truth. Great writers are great see-ers and hear-ers and feel-ers.

When depression hits you, write.

When temptation hits you, write.

Write out of your grief and guilt and joy.

Write out of living another day.

What you think is Lake-Woebegone-ordinary, someone else may think is very original and compelling.

But one next-to-last word.

Selling what you write isn’t everything. Money isn’t much. You can earn more washing floors. Many churches, schools, newspapers, organizations, corporations need material for their publications, material they can use for free. Keep your eye open for them. If they take your work, you can identify yourself as a “published writer” when you send a query to a magazine that pays.

Ministry is what is important. You can minister what Christ has done in you and for you—appealingly and with enthusiasm and love. Your humanness and candor can bring solutions and healing therapy to troubled readers.

Money you spend.

A letter from a reader telling you that your story changed his or her life—that you will give you joy forever.

Like artists who must go back and dab again and again at pictures they’ve finished, I keep thinking of items I should include. I don’t want you to get away with some things not mentioned.

Here are some of those items:

Item: Writers have access to a number of other structures than we have included in this text. THEN AND NOW simply begins a narration of events THEN and concludes with a narration of consequential events NOW.

CAUSE AND EFFECT explores the cause in depth and then the effect without switching back and forth.

SYMPOSIUM is written like a play. It has several people discussing one topic.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS is an unstructured recording of rambling thoughts concerning one or related topics.

CONFESSION like problem and solution dwells on “my failures” until I see the light.

PROPAGANDA ignores logic and presents only one side.

Item: Queries we turned down when I edited a national Christian magazine

assumed too much. They treated the editor as if he were a relative. Or they tried to sell us an article idea we’d already printed.

Or they assumed we would take secular material. Or they offered trivial or overly scholarly ideas.

My executive director said we want material that will interest ordinary people and that will enhance their tomorrows. In other words, something with “take away” value.

Read Reader’s Digest and imagine you are the editor. Here are some sample first sentences. Consider each one as if it were the first sentence of that writer’s query letter to you. Which of the following would you buy?

- Two sons. Twelve seasons. Hundreds of games. It’s all over. I’m through. They say I’m too old to coach kids.
- My son seemed bright enough, responsive enough; but he didn’t talk until he was four.
- When you find your head bobbing during the boss’s slide show, it’s time to look up some remedies that work.
- My garage looks pretty good at the moment. My wife and the neighbors don’t think so, but I do.
- I can’t believe it. My son’s only 21. Already he’s grossing a million dollars a year in a business I thought was dumb. I’ve never earned that much, and I’m not dumb.
- Much of my childhood in Plainfield, New Jersey, was excruciatingly lonely.

- A slight chill bit the night air as I walked with the traffic along a dark country road. When I woke in the gutter, I had no feeling in my legs.
- When Alice Jones dove into that wave, she never dreamed a rip-tide swept that beach.
- Fixing toilet fixtures is easy. Why can't women figure it out?
- In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth, but there was no mother-in-law in the Garden of Eden.
- Listen, my children, and you shall hear of the midnight rites, appalled, revered (Bill Hunter writing "Midnight Movie Madness" for *American Way* magazine).

Regarding the two sons, 12 seasons, hundreds of games, you would examine the query to see whether it was an old man bemoaning the end of his usefulness in life or a launch into an escape that proved he was up to the challenge. If that is not there, reject it.

Regarding the silent boy, here again look for a "we met the challenge and look at our boy now" solution. If it's not in the query, reject it.

Regarding remedies that work, lots of sleepy heads will suddenly wake up. People like articles that give medical solutions. They don't need to pay for an office visit to get the good advice.

Regarding the garage, you perceive there is a thread of humor here. We all have disaster areas in our homes and the garage most likely is it. We love humor and we like help cleaning our

garage. Follow this one up.

Regarding the 21 year old boy who is earning a million dollars despite having a "dumb" father who advised him not to waste his time. Buy it. We want to know what dumb idea earned him the million.

Regarding the lonely boy, we want to know who he is. Is he someone famous? If not, we can find a million other kids who have had lonely lives.

But look deeper. Maybe there's a human interest story here that needs telling.

Regarding waking up in the gutter with no feeling in the legs. Yes! It could happen to all of us.

Regarding poor Alice. Yes. Here's an adventure story with a happy ending. Had she been swept out to sea, no one would have known what happened. Take it.

An easy-fix-it story for women? Yes. Ask for other easy-fix-it solutions in the follow-up article.

No mother-in-law in the Garden of Eden? Sounds like more humor. Yes.

Midnight rites, appalled, revered? Yes! Yes! This man is clever. Get him.

Leads in queries must be as compelling as leads in articles, and often you can use the same sentence in both your query and your article. Your lead must snag attention, establish your topic, set the tone and swing easily into the rest of your article.

Item. It helps to ask the editor for direction, letting him know that your work is not carved in stone. Many editors may

like your idea but want to point the article in a way more suited to their needs. Realize it takes two to tango.

Item: The frame in frame and flashback can also be used for a news feature where you select a person who is an onlooker, a witness, not an authority or expert, and use reference to him or her as the subject matter at the beginning and the end.

Begin with a common noun and follow it up in the second paragraph with a proper one:

A messenger boy standing on the corner of Park Avenue and 39th Street yesterday witnessed the gunning down of Mayor John Jones in a Mafia hit and run.

Billie Adams of 454 Eighth Street, delivering packages for United Parcel, observed the black sedan pull up beside the man next to him as someone rolled down the window and fired.

The lead reference to him and his part in the event will be longer than the concluding reference at the end of the article when you return to him. Generally he will be a witness to the event or a victim.

This is the general lead followed by a specific lead kind of beginning to an article.

Item. The framed story has four sections: the lead; the thesis statement that states in one sentence the essence of the whole article; the body which is the regular news story with its five w's and how and its quotations from witnesses

and experts; and the conclusion which brings back the person who occupied the lead of the article. Readers identify better when common folk people the lead.

Item: Interviewing children who have witnessed a death requires unusual tact and compassion. They respond better when the interview is kept matter of fact than if the interviewer were to gush and grieve. That behavior would likely upset the witness. Writing up such an interview would not have to be as objective. Readers respond to a more tender treatment.

Item. The last word.

Hopefully, you have downloaded each week's lessons and have studied and learned with me. I would enjoy hearing your reactions.

Should you wish to continue studying with me, I have two other "Sell Your Homework" courses of study for you. The one teaches you to write stories for children. The other teaches you to write your opinions for newspapers and magazines. It starts with letters to the editor and goes through performance reviews, book reviews, columns, advice, humor and more.

These lessons come out of 40 years of teaching people to write.

They come with every good wish that they will bring significant help and inspiration to you. May you be Psalm 45's "ready writer."

May the Lord grant that our words not be like the wood, hay and stubble that vanish under fire but like the gold,

silver and precious stones that in eternity will endure, bringing praise to Him who loves us and has made us His

very own.

Professor Dick