

Try not to have too many, as it becomes confusing for the reader. (It can be hard to reduce the numbers, but try.)

Why is this person in the book? There needs to be a "narrative reason" - their appearance helps tell the story and get the reader inside YOUR experience.

You know this person, but the reader doesn't. What descriptive elements can you weave in to help make them real in the reader's mind?

You are a character too! The reader needs to get a sense of personal things like how you look, what you wear, what you think, how you interact... but without you just telling them.

3. CHARACTERS - yes, they are/were real people. But to your reader, they are "characters" in a book.

4. CONVERSATION - dialogue makes a scene more real and vivid for the reader.

To help you remember what people said, tell the story to someone else, and record it.

Read dialogue aloud to find out if it sounds realistic.

If everyone in your book sounds the same, it means they sound like you. Think about the distinctives of the way that person talks/talked.

Consider including a statement at the front of your book to let readers know this is the product of your memory.

5. MEMORY AIDS to help you get back inside the events.

Your diary or journal. But don't just reproduce it. Use it to spark recollection.

Your old letters and emails can take you back in time and also give you a sense of what you talked about back then, and how you said it, and who you said it to.

Photo albums can be great memory joggers for people with visual minds. Use your voice recorder and talk yourself through what was happening.

If possible, go to places where things happened. You will be surprised what comes to mind when you are there among the same sights, sounds and smells.

Search news and "this day in history" records on the internet. See what else was going on at the same time.

2. THE SENSES - make it come alive in their minds.

What did you hear?

What did you see?

What did you SMELL? (The sense of smell is an especially strong communicator, and we often forget to include it.)

What did you touch and how did it feel?

What did you taste? People love to read about food, but other things have a taste as well - rain in the air, sweat, your baby's tummy when you kiss it.

How do the other "characters" in your story see you? Try not to sanitise their view of you. It's hard, but it makes for a stronger story!

To keep people in the story and help them grow with you, try to write from what you knew then, instead of inserting "but I know better now" along the way.

**The Secret to a Compelling Personal Story:
TAKE US INSIDE YOUR LIFE**

1. Help us get to know YOU.

Take care of yourself.

It is common to find this process draining, even if you are writing something "light"!

Make a point of getting social, psychological and/or spiritual support while you work through it.

Take a break and have a day or a week or a month off writing when it gets too much.

But many people do find it healing in the end!