

The Proof Angel

Guide to Writing a bio

Am I the only one to dread writing those "about me" sections? I know some people like to talk themselves, but my mind tends to go blank. Even if someone else will write a bio for you, it still needs reviewing, which means you need to have an idea of what you are expecting to see. For many people, like authors and speakers, bios are an important marketing tool to help you stand out from the crowd, particularly if your bio one of several displayed in an anthology or a conference brochure.

Look around and see what other people are doing

There are two aspects to think about:

- In your line of business or genre there will be certain similarities between the bios people present. It is good to comply with expectations, particularly if that means covering ground that everyone expects to see there. If you miss something that is standard, people may wonder why there is a gap in your experience.

- Look out for things you could say that make you a little different.

As you look around, see what is usual, what is dull, and what catches your eye.

Learn from the mistakes of others.

It is useful to make a list of what you need to cover at this stage, so you don't overlook anything.



The Proof Angel is the trading name of Sarah Perkins, freelance editor and proofreader.

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Decide where to draw the line

- Remember that whatever you choose to share about yourself, people will ask questions about it.
- If you are very candid, they may expect that from you all the time.
- Think about the longer term and decide what's right for you not only for now, but for the long term as well.

Make local connections

- Link yourself to places. People identify more easily with real people who come from, live in, or holiday regularly in places they know and love.
- It isn't very rational to try reading the work of a Scottish author because you've had lovely holidays there, or perhaps because the author was born in the same town as your Grandma, but people do react that way. We have probably all done it at some point.
- Make sure you mention any connection you have with anywhere large or glamorous. Get the benefit of those networks.

Keep it relevant

- In your standard bio, don't mention irrelevant points to sound cool. Try to mention things that enhance your professional reputation, and avoid distractions. Ask yourself if anyone is going to care about your favourite food, or whatever you are tempted to mention.
- Once you have marshalled the relevant points, ask yourself:
 - Does this point add anything, or does it repeat something that has already been covered? There is no need to mention everything. Just use the best things to give people the impression they need.
 - Does it justify the amount of space it takes up?
 - A statement that you have published x books and a link to them is better than listing all the titles.

- Saying you speak regularly at major conferences, perhaps with one example, is better than listing everything for the last few years.

- Remember that being relevant does not mean stating the obvious. If you write about collecting stamps, don't put in your bio that you are a keen collector. If your picture shows you with your cat, don't mention it in your bio.

- Each time you use your bio, try to personalise it just a little with something relevant for the article, conference etc.

Strike a happy medium

- Don't sound like a used car salesman. Boasting and gloating turn people off, which is another reason not to list everything you ever did.

- On the other hand not having anything to say can be as bad as saying too much. If you aren't interested enough to write a few lines, why should people take an interest in you?

- Your work may be so great that it sells itself, but people will only know that if they give it a chance. They won't give it a chance if you put them off.

Should you use a picture?

In most cases the answer to this is yes, because:

- People like to deal with other people.
- Any sort of pictures liven up the text, whether it is in a brochure, on a website, or in a book.

If you use a picture, give it some thought. Decide:

- How do you want to sell yourself?
- What is suitable for your purpose?
- What fits the context?

Have a look to see what other people do to get some ideas.

- Think about things like:
 - What is a suitable background?
 - What should you wear?
 - What you should be doing in the picture?
- Find a good, reliable photographer, and make sure you explain what you need to achieve.

Reviewing your bio

Once you have finished your draft bio, put it aside for a while. When you come back to it again you will be fresh, and you will see things in a more objective way:

- Have you covered everything you need to say?
- Have you given enough priority to the important points?
- Have you over emphasised anything?
- Is everything relevant?