

# The Three-Act Memoir

*A worksheet for shaping the story only you can tell. Print this page. Write inside it.*

## How memoir uses three-act structure

Memoir is not autobiography. Autobiography is the chronology of a life; memoir is a chosen arc inside it. The three-act structure is the most reliable frame for shaping that arc, because it mirrors how lived experience actually breaks down: a stable world, a rupture, a new shape of self.

### Act One — Setup

Establish the world before the rupture. Who you were. What you believed. What you didn't yet know to question. End the act when the inciting incident lands — the moment from which there is no return to the world of Act One.

**Prompt:** In two or three sentences, name the version of yourself this book begins with.

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**Prompt:** What is the inciting incident — the event after which the old self could not survive intact?

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### Act Two — Confrontation & Turning Point

The longest act. You move through the new terrain. You make wrong moves. You learn what the rupture cost you and what it freed in you. The midpoint of Act Two is the moment you can no longer pretend the old life is recoverable.

**Prompt:** List three to five scenes from this period that you cannot leave out. (Not what was most painful — what was most revealing.)

1. 

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2. 

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3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Prompt:** Name the turning point. The moment a new way of seeing yourself became inevitable.

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### **Act Three — Resolution**

Not a tidy ending — a new equilibrium. The memoir does not promise the wound is closed. It promises the reader gets to see who you became around it.

**Prompt:** Who is the self the book is delivering by its final page? What do they know that the Act One self did not?

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**Prompt:** What is the single sentence the reader should be able to repeat back after closing the book?

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### **A reminder before you begin**

Memoir is not confession. It is testimony. The writer's job is not to relive the past but to *shape* it — to choose which moments carry the weight, and which to let go. That is the act of authorship.