

WRITING A PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY

When federal authorities charge a person with a felony, a conviction often follows. Later in the process, a federal probation officer conducts a presentence investigation, which culminates in a Presentence Investigation Report (PSR). That report typically presents a person through the narrow lens of the offense and related conduct, often in an unfavorable light.

For this reason, we encourage people to begin writing a personal biography. A biography provides an opportunity to show that a person is more than a criminal charge. One of the most difficult experiences in your life does not have to define the rest of it. By writing your biography, you begin documenting how you are taking responsibility, learning, and preparing for the next chapter of your life.

A personal biography is more than a summary of past events. In the Profiles course, your biography is a foundational document. It explains who you are, how you arrived at this point, and what you are doing now to prepare for a better future.

Many people avoid writing about their past because it is uncomfortable. Others focus only on the offense or only on accomplishments. Neither approach tells a complete or credible story. A strong biography reflects accountability, clarity, and direction.

THE PURPOSE OF A PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY

Your biography serves several important purposes:

- » It provides context for your background and life experiences
- » It demonstrates accountability for past decisions
- » It explains how your thinking has changed
- » It establishes the goals you are working toward

Most importantly, it helps you organize your own thinking. Writing forces you to slow down, reflect, and make sense of your story.

WRITING AS THE CEO OF YOUR LIFE

As the CEO of your life, you are responsible for explaining the story of the organization—you.

A CEO does not hide problems, exaggerate success, or blame others. A CEO presents facts, acknowledges mistakes, and explains how the organization is being restructured to perform better in the future.

Your biography should reflect that same mindset. It should answer three core questions:

- » Where did I come from?
- » What went wrong, and what responsibility do I take?
- » What am I doing now to build a better outcome?

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR BIOGRAPHY

A personal biography does not need to be perfect or complete on the first attempt. It should be honest and clear. And it should evolve. As time passes, write another version of your biography, showing your commitment to personal growth.

Most effective biographies include:

- » Background: family, upbringing, education, or early influences
- » Turning points: decisions or patterns that led to harmful outcomes
- » Accountability: acceptance of responsibility without minimizing or blaming
- » Growth: lessons learned and changes in thinking
- » Direction: goals and plans for the future

Your biography should explain how past experiences shaped you, without using them as excuses.

TONE AND STYLE

When writing your biography:

- » Use clear, straightforward language
- » Avoid exaggeration or justification
- » Focus on facts and reflection rather than emotion alone
- » Write in your own voice



This is not a legal document and not a sales pitch. It is a personal narrative grounded in accountability and preparation.

REVISITING AND UPDATING YOUR BIOGRAPHY

Your biography is not a one-time assignment. As you learn, grow, and refine your goals, you may update it.

Strong biographies evolve over time. Updates may reflect:

- » New insights
- » Increased clarity about goals
- » Changes in priorities
- » Lessons learned from setbacks

Updating your biography shows continued engagement and self-direction.

HOW THIS BIOGRAPHY SUPPORTS YOUR PROFILE

Your biography provides the foundation for everything else in your profile.

- » Journal entries add detail and daily context
- » Book reports demonstrate learning and critical thinking
- » Release plans show how ideas translate into action

Together, these components form a coherent record of preparation.

REFLECTION EXERCISES

Use the exercises below to begin writing or revising your biography. Your responses may be added directly to your profile.

REFLECTION EXERCISE 1: TELLING YOUR STORY CLEARLY

Begin by describing your background.

- » What experiences or influences shaped who you are today?
- » What patterns or decisions led you to this point?
- » What context is important for understanding your story?

Use your response to draft the background section of your biography.



REFLECTION EXERCISE 2: ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING

Focus on responsibility and growth.

- » What decisions do you take responsibility for?
- » What have you learned about yourself through this experience?
- » How has your thinking changed since those decisions?

Use your response to draft the accountability and growth section of your biography.

REFLECTION EXERCISE 3: DIRECTION AND PREPARATION

Look forward.

- » What kind of life are you preparing to build?
- » What values guide your decisions now?
- » What actions are you taking during incarceration to support that future?

Use your response to draft the future direction section of your biography or connect it to your release plan.

Your biography should start where you are. Reflect on your past, write honestly, and allow the document to grow as you develop your skills.

