



Memory Deep-Dive Instructions: Starting Your Memory Basket



I often hear folks — especially older folks (like me) say they have trouble remembering the events in their lives. Be assured that the memories are still there, buried under decades of newer memories.

I have a friend who is a metal detectorist. He searches beaches and fields with his metal detector, looking for artifacts and lost items. When his detector beeps, he digs until he finds the treasure — or piece of junk.

Uncovering your memories works the same way: you just need a tool for rediscovering them. The Memory Basket is such a tool. No other exercise opens up your memory as quickly as the Memory Basket. The process is simple, and, as a first step, it's essential.

Mining Your Memories

I live in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Southwest Virginia, which have a long history of lead mining. The process for extracting ore from rock is **Exploration, Discovery, Development, and Production.**



Like mining for ore, **Exploration** is the first step in mining your memories. You'll grab paper and pen and create a list of events, relationships, successes, failures, — anything — from your past. Use your photo albums to jumpstart the process. After all, if an event was important enough to warrant a photo, it is clearly something you wanted to remember. Jot down whatever pops into your mind.

This is a brainstorming exercise. Let your mind wander wherever it will go. Make short memory notes (three to five words is sufficient), one note per line. When you write a new memory, start a new line. Don't write in complete sentences.

Include enough info to make the notes clear when you return to them. For example, the lone word "knife" may confuse you in the future: what knife were you talking about? But, if you wrote "Cub Scout Knife 1960," you will likely remember the tale.

Let the logic of your Memory Basket be internal. Don't force yourself to be chronological ("what I did in elementary school") or thematic ("my time in the military"), and do not strive for cause-and-effect relationships ("because this happened, that followed") unless the memories come that way spontaneously.

Don't censor anything. Censoring can result in a less thorough list — and be less beneficial to your storytelling — than if you practiced free association and allowed your imagination to carry you anywhere it may. If you think about it, write it down. Don't say, "Oh, this isn't any good," or "I don't want to talk about that." Remember, at this point, you are in the **Exploration** phase. As in lead mining, you'll discard most of the "useless rock" (your questionable memories) in the **Discovery, Development, and Production**.



Your Memory Basket is always a work in progress. The more you remember and record, the more you'll recall. You'll return to your Memory Basket often as you write your stories.

A Memory Basket includes both big items and small ones. Any of the following are on-target for a Memory Basket:

- Mom died.
- I got married.
- My paper route.
- Schwinn bike
- First time camping
- My garage band
- Trip to Alaska

The list is for you. You're the only one for whom it needs to have meaning. No one else will see it unless you share it.

Your Memory Basket should be fairly long. Most folks spend two or three weeks compiling a basic list. You'll find yourself adding to it regularly as more memories occur to you. You'll never finish it.



This Memory Basket will go in your three-ring binder. It will act as a source of inspiration and a tremendous time saver. You won't need time to develop a topic when you write. All you have to do is pick an item on the list and write about it.

Practical Application

Write down at least twenty memories to start your Memory Basket (fifty would be better, and a hundred preferable). Place these pages in your three-ring binder.

Every day, add memories to your list. Don't stop until you have five hundred items. This sounds daunting, but you'll be surprised how quickly the basket fills up.

From time to time, review your Memory Basket. Add, delete, combine, or expand until you have a list representing your life.

Memory Basket Self-Assessment

1. How many memories did you add to your list?
2. Did you find the process challenging or easy?
3. What did you like/dislike about the Memory Basket exercise?