

Organizational Frame¹

Introduction As people get older, they often want to know more about their family heritage, but it may be hard for them to remember the stories and events their older family members shared. William Zinsser says writing down memories is important. He gives advice to his readers to help them be better memoir writers.	
Thesis In “How to Write a Memoir,” Zinsser develops two central ideas, be yourself and think small, by providing examples of his father’s writing and his own writing.	
Body Paragraph Focus 1 Zinsser says the goal of memoir writing is to be yourself and tell your own story. He develops this with examples from his father.	Body Paragraph Focus 2 Zinsser says writers should “think small” and write about feelings that will appeal to readers. He develops this with examples from his own writing.

Body Paragraph 1 One central idea that Zinsser develops throughout “How to Write a Memoir” is that memoir writers should not try to write with the goal of becoming a published author. He says that being yourself is more important than trying to be a writer. Zinsser develops this idea by providing an example of his father who wrote two family histories. He writes, “What my father did strikes me as a model for a family history that doesn’t aspire to be anything more; the idea of having it published wouldn’t have occurred to him” (2). Zinsser uses this example to advise the readers that they should write their family history in their own voice and as honestly as they remember it. Throughout the essay Zinsser provides examples about what his father wrote about their family history and how his father wrote effectively without trying to follow a certain form or rule. For example, “He wrote the way he talked, and now, when I read his sentences, I hear his personality and his humor, his idioms and usages, many of them an echo of his college years in the early 1900s. I also hear honesty” (2). Zinsser even says that there are many good reasons to write a memoir other than to publish a book.

Transition In addition to encouraging writers to “be themselves,” Zinsser also develops the idea of a writing about a “universal truth.”
2 He develops the idea “think small” and writing about about a vivid memory by providing examples from his own life. Zinsser shares his experience on the boxcar in Africa during WWII. He says, “But in my memoir I don’t write anything about the war itself. I just tell one story about one trip I took across North Africa after our troopship landed at Casablanca” (7). Zinsser describes how he focused on one memory that changed his life, which made the memory important to readers. He says that thinking small will help a writer focus on a universal truth that “readers will recognize from their own life” (7). Zinsser means that if the memory is strong enough to be clear in the writer’s’ description, then it must have had an effect on his or her life. That

¹ Based on [The Painted Essay™](#) from the Vermont Writing Collaborative

effect will appeal to readers who may have had a similar experience that impacted their lives. Zinsser develops his second central idea with an example from his own writing experience and shows how thinking small and telling important memories appeals to readers.

Conclusion

In “How to Write a Memoir” William Zinsser encourages people to be themselves and think small. He does this by providing examples and lessons he learned from his father’s and his own memoir writing experiences.

Exemplar Response:

As people get older, they often want to know more about their family heritage, but it may be hard for them to remember the stories and events their older family members shared. William Zinsser says writing down memories is important. He gives advice to his readers to help them be better memoir writers. In “How to Write a Memoir,” Zinsser develops two central ideas, be yourself and think small, by providing examples of his father’s writing and his own writing.

One central idea that Zinsser develops throughout “How to Write a Memoir” is that memoir writers should not try to write with the goal of becoming a published author. He says that being yourself is more important than trying to be a writer. Zinsser develops this idea by providing an example of his father who wrote two family histories. He writes, “What my father did strikes me as a model for a family history that doesn’t aspire to be anything more; the idea of having it published wouldn’t have occurred to him” (2). Zinsser uses this example to advise the readers that they should write their family history in their own voice and as honestly as they remember it. Throughout the essay Zinsser provides examples about what his father wrote about their family history and how his father wrote effectively without trying to follow a certain form or rule. For example, “He wrote the way he talked, and now, when I read his sentences, I hear his personality and his humor, his idioms and usages, many of them an echo of his college years in the early 1900s. I also hear honesty” (2). Zinsser even says that there are many good reasons to write a memoir other than to publish a book.

In addition to encouraging writers to “be themselves,” Zinsser also develops the idea of writing about a “universal truth.” He develops the idea “think small” and writing about a vivid memory by providing examples from his own life. Zinsser shares his experience on the boxcar in Africa during WWII. He says, “But in my memoir I don’t write anything about the war itself. I just tell one story about one trip I took across North Africa after our troopship landed at Casablanca” (7). Zinsser describes how he focused on one memory that changed his life, which made the memory important to readers. He says that thinking small will help a writer focus on a universal truth that “readers will recognize from their own life” (7). Zinsser means that if the memory is strong enough to be clear in the writer’s description, then it must have had an effect on his or her life. That effect will appeal to readers who may have had a similar experience that impacted their lives. Zinsser develops his second central idea with an example from his own writing experience and shows how thinking small and telling important memories appeals to readers.

In “How to Write a Memoir” William Zinsser encourages people to be themselves and think small. He does this by providing examples and lessons he learned from his father’s and his own memoir writing experiences.