

M1 / CHOOSE, ARRANGE, BEGIN

Memoir Book Blueprint

Turn a pile of material into a provisional book you can actually draft.

For Write Your First Memoir by Adrian Reston. Use this after Chapters 1–2 and return during Chapters 5–6. The book teaches the craft; this companion helps you make and revise the decisions for your own project.

Leave with three connected outputs

A boundary you can explain; a reading order in which each chapter changes something; and a next writing session tied to actual material. A longer map is not automatically a better one.

How to use the files

Read the fictional example first. Open M1_Your_Copy.docx, replace the bracketed fields and save a new dated copy. The PDF is for printing, not an interactive form. The writing areas in Word expand with your text. Duplicate the chapter-card page as needed. Do not force your book into the six movements used here.

WHAT THIS ADDS

The book’s provisional brief becomes a connected system: alternatives, source-linked material, chapter function, dependencies and a testable first session. Keep chronology separate from the order in which a reader learns the story.

A scope decision, not a life summary

Possible project	Why Mara does or does not choose it
Everything my father taught me	Too broad for the material available. It invites a summary of a life rather than a sustained inquiry.
Six weekends clearing his workshop	Chosen: a bounded task exposes a changing conflict about what it means to keep something.
The day we emptied the last drawer	Potential short essay. Strong scene, but too narrow for the book Mara currently wants to explore.

All Mara/Eli material in this companion is invented for instruction. It is not a real reader’s work, family history or account of results.

WORKED EXAMPLE / BOUNDARY

A question that can meet resistance

Decision	Mara’s provisional choice
Reader	Someone who recognizes that sorting belongings can become a way to postpone another decision; no knowledge of tools is assumed.
Time and place	Six weekends in one workshop after the father’s death. Earlier memories enter only when they change the present action.
Live question	What was I trying to keep when I kept saying an object might be useful?
Earlier self wants	To save anything that might be needed later and to avoid an irreversible choice.
Counterevidence	Mara kept tools she did not know how to use. Eli’s decision to keep less did not mean he remembered less.
Not this book	A full biography of the father, a repair manual, a verdict on the sibling relationship or a promise that sorting resolves grief.

A boundary earns its place by helping you choose

Mara can now park the school-award story: it explains family history but does not change the workshop decisions. She keeps the memory of a failed repair because it challenges her claim that every saved tool will be used.

WHEN THE MAP STARTS TO GO WRONG

If every memory proves the father was generous, the question has become a conclusion in disguise. Add material that complicates the claim; do not invent a hostile memory to create balance.

WORKED EXAMPLE / MATERIAL

Separate what happened from how you know

ID / material	Basis and uncertainty	Possible narrative job
N01 · the drawer	Fictional recollection: six brass handles; one screw missing; Mara puts them in the save box. Exact words of the exchange are not retained.	Open with an action, not an explanation of the entire family.
P01 · photograph	Fictional phone photo after the first weekend: three labelled boxes. It confirms labels, not the order in which objects were handled.	Locate the task; do not treat a photo as proof of unpictured motives.
N02 · failed repair	Fictional recollection of keeping a plane but never learning to adjust it. Date is approximate.	Complicate the equation between ownership and skill.
V01 · Eli's version	Fictional later account: he remembers offering to keep the handles himself. Mara remembers only his question. Neither version is settled.	Retain difference as a source question; avoid assigning his motive as fact.

A useful research stop

Mara needs to know whether her notes support the quoted sentence she drafted. They do not. She uses indirect speech for now. She does not need the purchase year of every handle before writing the scene.

Chronology is a support file, not the table of contents

Chronology: first sort → failed repair → donation visit → disagreement → last drawer → return. Reading order can begin at the last drawer, then return to the first sort, provided the reader receives the context needed at each step.

YOUR FIRST PASS

Make a few material records, not a complete archive. A record is useful when you can say what it contributes, what is uncertain and which next decision it supports.

WORKED EXAMPLE / SHAPE

Give each movement a different job

Reading movement	What changes for the reader	Dependency / draft action
1. The last drawer	A small choice is unresolved; the reader sees what Mara does.	No family prologue needed. Draft from N01 and flag dialogue.
2. The first sort	“Useful” begins as a sensible rule.	Explain the boxes and the job without repeating the opening.
3. The tool she kept	Keeping is no longer the same as using.	Place the failed repair before another debate about possessions.
4. Eli’s smaller box	The brother’s choices resist Mara’s interpretation.	Show an action; preserve disputed words as disputed.
5. What leaves	A practical consequence replaces another abstract argument.	Decide what the donation visit changes; cut it if it does no new work.
6. The one object	A limited choice becomes possible, not a cure or final verdict.	Return to the drawer without retelling it. End on the choice the draft earns.

Test the order instead of defending it

Remove movement 3 temporarily. If Eli’s smaller box then reads only as insensitivity, the failed repair was doing important work: it changed the reader’s interpretation before the disagreement. If two movements produce the same change, combine them or give one a different job.

The next real session

In the next 30-minute session, Mara drafts only the drawer action from N01. Success is a usable scene with unsupported dialogue marked—not a polished first chapter. Her re-entry note: “Continue from placing the handles in the box; do not explain the whole workshop yet.”

DONE FOR NOW

You can name a focus, point to material for your first scene and explain why the next movement is different. Save the map, then draft. Reopen it when the pages reveal a better question.