

### *Qualities of a Memoir that Work<sup>1</sup>:*

- The title invites and fits.
- The lead brings readers right into the actions of the story.
- Background information that a reader needs is woven in.
- There's lots of I (thoughts, feelings, and observations of the memoirist).
- The pace is slowed down: readers can make a movie in their minds.
- A reader can see, hear, and feel the experience because the writer provides concrete, sensory details and descriptions of people in action.
- The small details show what matters to the people in the memoir.
- There is dialogue; the writer uses it to show what people are like and how they're feeling.
- The language is interesting: (verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and the way they are used).
- The ending is purposeful: it leaves a reader thinking.
- There's a "So what?": a meaning or significance that was discovered by the memoirist during the act of writing the memoir.
- There's a setting: time and places.
- The action flashes back and forward in time and creates questions in the reader's mind about what will happen next.
- The memoirist invented details that fit with the spirit, intention, and truth of the story.

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<sup>1</sup>p. 100 Atwell, Nancy, *Lessons that change writers*, 2002