

Virtual War Memorial Australia

Writing a Biography

WRITING A BIOGRAPHY

When adding a biography, try to tell a story of a life and not repeat data that is already known. Avoid a string of dot points or date related information that is already on the record. A narrative is always easier to read. Readers will want you to 'tell the story'.

What did the person like, and dislike? What did others think of them? What was important to them? Why did they sign up for service? Who did they leave behind?

Letters, diary notes and oral histories / interviews all add a personal dimension and, if you can locate them, they should be included. First-hand accounts are a lot more compelling than retrospective speculation. Personal impressions of the situation they were in add to the depth and substance of the narrative.

**The aim of this site is to be more than a presentation of data.
We want to tell a story and give life to the name...**

Process

- Assemble your sources and collate the information. [In Word files on your computer or on paper in a folder or book.]
- Prepare an outline of your biography and use headings if it helps to organise your ideas and information.
- Write your biography in Word. Check the spelling and grammar before uploading it to the site.
- Try and tell a story - use prose rather than dot points but keep your paragraphs short.

What information should I include?

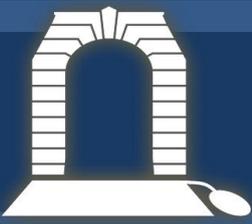
A timeline based narrative is probably the best. There is usually a typed chronology of the soldier's service in their service record – it is a basis to work from.

It is always useful to start from the beginning! **Birth, parents, siblings and residence.** Relationships to others who served Australia are also good to include. A clue is to search the [National Archive](#) service record by entering the name of next of kin.

The [Red Cross files](#) connect with other names - witnesses, colleagues etc. If you can identify them we can extend the link or connect the records.

Growing up - school records are terrific if you can find them – check out [Arthur Harris](#)' school cadets photo!

Date of Birth was not collected for WWI personnel; rather their age in years and month was declared. So record the age at enlistment. The declaration was often 'not truthful' - nor indeed were names in many cases! Date of birth and death can be investigated through [Genealogy SA](#).



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Pre enlistment employment and /or service in the cadets or militia etc adds context to life before conflict.

Enlistment, embarkation, re-assignment (where and when it took place). Many soldiers embarked with one unit and ended up in another. Working out whether they were involved in particular campaigns is a bit more difficult.

Absences such as **illness, courses / training and detachment** to other units are generally recorded in the service record. So before assuming they were 'in' a battle or involved in an event, it is best to see if they were absent or 'out'.

Decorations are often best treated as "stories" – what they were awarded for – action place date, are more important than when they were gazetted or actually presented. Check on the AWM Honours and Awards site.

As far as **post service life**, that is where family records or perhaps "Trove" kicks in.

Writing Tips

More detail can be added as a **Resource** in your individual's profile, eg. a standalone document such as memoir or diary; a photo of an object.

1. Keep it **concise** – if it's too long, people won't stick with it.
2. If there is a lot of information, look for **key or quirky events** - they serve as the 'hook' to keep people reading.
3. An appropriate point of focus might be a particular **incident** or some **distinguishing characteristic** of his/her service.

Added Extras

1. **Photos with multiple people** - those people who are pictured help us to build biographies and stories of other men and women who served - and yours might be the only photo that exists of them!
2. **Quotations** are great evidence of your individual's life and service – but one or two are generally enough, so pick the best ones.



AWM A00714 – Australian 10th Battalion Headquarters at ANZAC

Additional quotes can be added as stories. We found a letter from Private Max Allan's Platoon Commander Sergeant John Ponton, addressed to none other than Miss Vera Deakin - the founder of the Australian Wounded and Missing Inquiry Bureau in WW1.

Don't Forget

1. Captions and attributions are necessary for any images - respect Copyright and acknowledge the source.
2. Tell us if photos are from a personal collection, a library, a museum or an archive.