



## Six-Word Memoirs

In 2006, *SMITH* online magazine had a contest: write your autobiography in just six words. The contest's success led to the publication of the book *Not Quite What I was Planning: Six-Word Memoirs by Writers Famous and Obscure*, edited by Larry Smith. Best-seller status and fame followed. Other media took the format and tried their own versions, from children's *Highlights* to AARP's magazine. Even a TED talk!

And in an intense few minutes of radio, Anne from Hell's Kitchen shared her six-word memoir, "I found my mother's suicide note." She talked about how important it was for her to come to terms with her mother's death, and the role of the note in that process. The note, she explained, was just six words: "No flowers, no funeral, no nothing."

Here are some collected from various editions:

- I still make coffee for two.
- Doubted Parents Teachers Bosses Politicians Myself.
- Never second guessed my own instincts.
- You're fifty, not twenty. No tattoos.
- Blue man in a red state.
- Asked to be quiet. Spoke louder.
- Lazy Renaissance man settles for dilettantism.
- FaceBook ruined my whole life.
- I type to empty chat rooms.
- Brunette with many, MANY blonde moments.

### **Six Tips for Six-Word Memoirs from Rachel Fershleiser:**

1. Be specific.
2. Be honest.
3. Forget the thesaurus.
4. Use your own speaking voice.
5. Experiment with structure. Two three-word sentences. Three two-word sentences. One statement or six separate ones. Repetition can be powerful and punctuation is our friend.
6. Stop trying so hard. Write carelessly; edit carefully. Throw a million ideas down and then decide. These aren't epic novels or Supreme Court decisions. Just start scribbling and see what catches your eye. In our experience, peoples' first instincts are usually the best.

**Your Turn:** Write several of your own Six-Word memoirs – at least three. After consulting friends, family, and your inner editor, pick the best and find the perfect illustration for *your* words. Use one of the blank slide templates online at GoogleDocs. Post your finished slide online at Google Docs, following directions given in class.

- Proofread and run spell checker.
- Do not change font type or size.
- Use *your* illustration. You may re-size it only slightly.
- Use *your* name.