

Interview and Personal Story Release-FAQ

1. When do I need a signed release?

A release is always needed when publishing a formal interview where the interviewee is quoted verbatim. A release is also needed anytime you share someone's words or reveal part of their story that is not widely known and is potentially embarrassing or controversial. For example:

No release needed

1. "My mom always told me to tell the truth." Most mothers say something along those lines, so this is fine.
2. "My pastor, John Doe, had a huge influence on me. His compassion for others and solid leadership..." Pastors are expected to be compassionate, solid leaders, so there's nothing controversial here.
3. "My former pastor, Nadia Bolz Weber, is a recovering alcoholic." In most cases, this would be problematic. But Nadia is a public figure and her alcoholism is part of the personal story she shares frequently. In this case, the use is fine.

Release needed

1. "My Sunday school teacher, Jane Doe, told me that marriage is only between one man and one woman." This is acceptable in some circles but highly controversial in others. Are her views widely known? Does she stand by that statement or have her views changed? Might she now be embarrassed by her previous stance? Get a release or protect her identity.
2. "My pastor John Doe had a huge influence on me. Though he pastored a church for many years, he struggled with unresolved questions about the church's mission." Did he reveal those doubts publicly? If not, get a release or protect his identity.

Bear in mind that even if the material doesn't seem personal or controversial to you, the person named may feel differently. And though the facts revealed may not be libelous, courtesy and the right to privacy are also concerns. *When in doubt, ask yourself if revealing someone's identity strengthens your book. If not, rewrite to protect them.*

2. Isn't it legal to quote someone or share their story as long as the use is for journalistic or nonfiction, editorial purposes?

Book publishing and newspaper and magazine publishing are related, but separate, industries with different processes and editorial expectations. The standards of one do not necessarily apply to the other.

3. The person knew they were being quoted/interviewed. Doesn't that imply consent?

The person named might not object during the interview or conversation, but that can change once a book is published. Perhaps they feel their words were misconstrued or the book reveals facts they thought would remain private. The only way to protect against such possibilities is through a signed release.

4. What if it simply isn't possible to obtain a written release?

If a written release cannot be obtained, take steps to protect the identity of the person named by changing 1) their name and 2) biographical and narrative details that will reveal the person's identity.

5. What if I have permission in an e-mail exchange?

E-mails are often quickly read or written and just as quickly forgotten. When a formal release is signed, all parties are much more likely to gain a complete understanding of what's being agreed to. The formal document also gives everyone involved an easily referenced record of consent.

6. Why is your policy so strict? Does everyone require this?

Release forms are standard in book publishing and protect you and the publisher. For more, see [Things Every Writer Should Know before Signing a Contract](#) from the author advocacy group, The Authors Guild. Bear in mind that the article is an overview and each publisher has their own guidelines. For example, WJK encourages authors to share manuscript pages with those named.

7. What are the risks of not obtaining written releases?

We live in a litigious society and not having the proper releases exposes you to the possibility of a lawsuit. You may be able to successfully defend against claims, but any lawsuit, even if decided in your favor, is expensive and time-consuming. Be proactive and obtain written consent, which is the best insurance policy against frivolous and not-so-frivolous lawsuits.

For your convenience, a fillable release form is available for download [here](#). If the above stipulations apply to your manuscript, please collect a signed release from each interview or personal story subject in your book.