

Syracuse University
College of Law
Legal Writer's Toolkit

The Art of Memoir

The next book in the 2020 alternative reading list is “The Art of Memoir” by Mary Karr. The book, published by Harper Perennial, an imprint of Harper Collins, is in its first edition.

Mary Karr is an award-winning writer and teaches writing in the graduate writing program at Syracuse University. In this book, she shows us some techniques for writing memoir, as the title suggests, but she shows us much more than that. She writes about writing, and about herself, in a compelling way and she helps all writers - not just memoirists - to think about the way words are put down onto a page and the effect they can have once they are placed there. In a dazzling display of writing skill, the author doesn't just tell us how to write, she shows us how to write at the same time. And while her book might seem to have little relevance to legal writers on the surface, one just has to dip a little below that surface to realize how profoundly important the advice she gives is for all writers.

This book was selected by Professor Aliza Milner. Professor Milner's bio on the College of Law's website tells us that “Professor Milner teaches legal writing and civil procedure. Her teaching reflects the study of legal process, writing, and wellness in legal practice. She also assists students seeking judicial clerkships as a Faculty Judicial Clerkship Advisor. Before joining the faculty, Professor Milner clerked for three Maryland appellate judges: the Honorable Alan M. Wilner, the Honorable Andrew L. Sonner, and the Honorable Patrick L. Woodward. She also served as Assistant Legal Counsel to the Governor of Maryland, Parris N. Glendening.” Professor Milner is also the director of the Legal Communication and Research program at the Syracuse University College of Law.

A list of focus questions designed to help you get the most out of “The Art of Memoir” is available as a separate document.