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A Guide to Writing a Eulogy



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How to write a eulogy

Being asked to give a eulogy at a loved one's funeral can be a great honour but preparing and delivering one can be nerve-wracking, even for those accustomed to writing and public speaking.

This guide will help you to write and deliver a meaningful piece that best commemorates a loved one's life.

What is a eulogy?

A eulogy, or funeral speech, is an opportunity to pay tribute to someone who has passed away by giving a short speech about their life and what they meant to you. It is usually delivered at a funeral service, but they can also be read during the wake.

A good eulogy is heartfelt, honest and personal. It does not have to be religious or serious - they can even be full of humour. The key thing with writing a eulogy is creating a farewell that both commemorates and praises the best things in the person's life, giving everyone who is listening a moment to both remember and cherish.

Who gives a eulogy at a funeral?

To be asked to give a eulogy at a funeral is a sign that you played an important part in the person's life.

There are no rules about who can give a eulogy at a funeral. However, it is usually someone who was close to the person who has died, such as a spouse, a child or a close friend. It is perfectly understandable that reading the eulogy to a congregation might be too overwhelming for some. In these instances, it is possible that after writing the eulogy another friend or family member is asked to deliver it in their place.

The eulogy can also be given by a religious leader or a celebrant; they will talk to the family and friends of the deceased to find out what to say. If you are writing the eulogy but have concerns about reading it on the day and do not want to ask another family member or friend to read it, a religious leader or celebrant might be a good option.

How long should a funeral eulogy be?

A eulogy will normally be around three to five minutes long. As a rough guide, a speech of between 500 and 1000 written words will take from around three and a half to seven and a half minutes to read aloud. Giving a eulogy can be very emotional, so you should also consider how hard it may be to hold it together for a very long speech.

Although there is no official limit for how long a eulogy should be, a lot of funerals will have an allocated time slot for the service. For this reason, we'd recommend the eulogy takes no longer than ten minutes to deliver.

If you are not responsible for arranging the funeral, but have been asked to prepare the eulogy, you could talk to the funeral organiser to agree a suitable length that will fit in with the rest of the order of service.



Tips for writing a eulogy

Many people choose to write a eulogy in chronological order with a small personal note at the end, whereas others prefer to divide the eulogy into different sections, beginning with their loved one's childhood and working through memorable moments of their life or even writing it as a letter to them. Every person is unique, so every eulogy will be too.

Here are some other tips on how to write a eulogy:

1. Keep it brief

Including every detail of the person's life isn't necessary and may result in a eulogy that is drawn out and loses meaning. The purpose of a eulogy is to summarise the person's life and achievements.

You may want to pick one or two qualities that you'd like to talk about, perhaps a story or an experience that you shared with the deceased, or maybe speak about a good deed or cause that they cared about.

2. Make it personal

Remember that eulogies are about the person who has passed away. When writing a eulogy keep it relevant with anecdotes and messages that only involve them. Keeping the eulogy personal to the person who has died will also help your eulogy to stay on track from a time perspective.

Things you may want to include in a eulogy:

- Their date of birth and where they were born
- Details of their early life such as the schools, college or university they attended
- Names of close family
- Nicknames
- Where they worked and when
- How they met their spouse or partner, where and when they got married (if applicable)
- Your relationship with them
- Their favourite activities and pastimes
- Their favourite TV shows, films or music
- Charitable or volunteering work
- Any other key achievements or memories of their life



3. Don't be afraid to ask for help

You shouldn't be afraid to ask for help and advice when writing a eulogy; this isn't something you should have to prepare alone if you do not feel comfortable doing so.

Religious figures are a good starting point to ask for advice if they are conducting the service, as they will likely have experienced many eulogies in services they have delivered, but you may want to speak to others who have recently delivered eulogies too. First-hand experience always wins.

You could also get help writing the eulogy from other family and close friends of the person who has died. There is no need to put pressure on yourself to write the eulogy, others will be happy to help.

4. Plan it out

For many people, the hardest part is structuring the speech. Instead of trying to get everything down all in one go, write down a few notes about your loved one's life to help you compartmentalise each section of the eulogy. Maybe look at some photos of the person who has passed away to help you remember the most important parts of their life or even any letters they wrote.

Planning the eulogy ahead of time will help you to realise which parts of the person's life were most memorable, or which parts you feel need to be shared with fellow mourners.

5. Keep it light if you feel like it

Despite funerals being solemn occasions, many people would prefer their funeral to be a happy occasion and more of a celebration of their life.

When writing a eulogy, don't focus too much on the sadness of their passing, and think instead of happy or funny moments that could raise a laugh or smile in the room. That humorous quip or downright hilarious moment from their life could help to lighten spirits even for a short amount of time and will help the audience to connect with the person through laughter or even just a knowing smile.



Tips for delivering a eulogy

Our tips for delivering a eulogy might be familiar to those who are used to speaking in public, but at such an emotional time, speaking aloud can become overwhelming to even the most experienced of speakers.

Here are some tips for delivering a eulogy:

Read from a script, from notes or speak freely, whichever is best for you

Some people prefer to deliver a eulogy that is conversational and sometimes even improvised. If you don't feel comfortable with this, jot down some notes and practice on other family members to judge reactions and get their feedback.

Most people will find reading from notes that can be glanced at rather than a script easier, but the most important thing is that you do whatever you feel comfortable doing.

Don't worry about getting upset

It is completely normal to get upset whilst delivering a eulogy. Funerals can be deeply distressing and will naturally affect the way you deliver a speech, especially if you have lost someone who you were particularly close to. Don't worry about taking a moment to gather your thoughts, and don't worry if you're unable to finish the speech.

You may find it helpful to practice reading the eulogy in advance and to take a bottle of water with you when you give your speech. We guarantee that there won't be a single person in the room who will judge you for stopping, pausing or feeling unable to continue.



Stand still

Public speaking doesn't always come naturally to many, and it's easy to start fidgeting with notes or try to move around. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, fold your hands loosely in front of you (if you are not holding notes) and try moving your head around the room – this will help you to take your attention away from your feet.

Speak slowly, clearly and loudly

You've thought long and hard about what you want to include in the eulogy, so make sure those at the back can hear you clearly. If you have trouble speaking loudly, then ask the venue if they have a microphone you can use.

Pause for thought

Although it may be tempting to get through your speech as quickly as possible, taking your time when delivering a eulogy will help it to become more meaningful. Even a pause of a few seconds between sections will help mourners to process what you have said and spend even a very small amount of time remembering key moments they may also have been involved in.

Hopefully these tips will help you to prepare a eulogy that will both honour the person who has passed away and help mourners to remember the best parts of their life.

If you are struggling to cope with the loss of a loved one and don't feel that you have anyone to talk to about it, take a look at our [Grief & Loss support page](#). Our specially trained bereavement councillors are available from 9am to 9pm and can be reached via our [GriefChat service](#).

