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How to Write a Eulogy

Writing and giving a eulogy at your loved one's funeral

If you have been asked to give a eulogy at someone's funeral and have accepted, you may be wondering where to start. In this guide you'll find advice and suggestions on how to write a eulogy and where to begin.

What is a eulogy?

A eulogy is a speech given at funerals. This may sound daunting, but is really an opportunity to pay tribute to the person who has died. It's regarded as an honour to be asked to give a eulogy for a loved one or friend.

Every eulogy is meant to be unique. Although there are guidelines you can follow, writing a eulogy is also about things that come from the heart.

Writing a eulogy – getting started

One of the best ways to begin writing a eulogy is to talk to family members and close friends about the person who has died. Is there anything that they would like you to include or mention, or a favourite anecdote or story they'd like you to share?

Your own and other people's memories could not only provide things to talk about, but inspire a way of summing up at the beginning and end of the eulogy who they were and what they meant.

"John was a dedicated family man, who was always there when you needed him."

"Seeing so many people here to say goodbye to Helen today, shows just how loved she was and how much she will be missed."

Reflecting on how well you knew the person who has died and the times you spent with them, think about life-moments that reflect their personality and set the scene. It might be how you met, the time you realised you were both in love (or had found a friend for life), or an occasion when they helped you.

Looking through photos could provide inspiration for thoughts about them and things that happened in their life.

Putting your ideas for a eulogy together

Once you have gathered enough information, you may want to make notes about where each bit will fit in your eulogy, so you have a rough beginning, a middle and an end to work to. Try these ways of mapping out ideas as you write a eulogy.

Timeline – There are no rules for writing a eulogy, so you don't have to get everything in order or precisely dated. But constructing a timeline of the person's most significant life moments may help you to better decide what to include in your speech.

Key words – make a list of words to describe the person. Think of as many words as you can and then highlight which words you think are most fitting. This list can act as a helpful prompt if you become stuck while writing a eulogy.

Expressing what you have to say in a eulogy

A bereaved family usually asks to someone to give a eulogy, because that person is important to them and to the person who has died. This can matter more than words, but there are a few different ways of writing a eulogy.

You may want to keep it mostly fact-based, written in chronological order with a small personal note of remembrance at the end.

Alternatively, you could base it on personal anecdotes and stories that capture the personality of your loved one. These might even be more lighthearted anecdotes, which often helps the assembly feel more at ease.

If they were close to the person who has died and bereaved family, some people even choose to include jokes in their eulogies, though you should use your judgement as to whether this would be appropriate.

In the end, writing a good eulogy depends on writing from the heart. If you aim to describe what made the person special and important to you, this will show through in your writing.

How long should a eulogy be?

Some funeral venues allocate a specific period of time for a funeral. The funeral director may be able to advise you, if you ask how long should a eulogy last, as part of the order of service.

Generally, a eulogy should be around three to five minutes long and take no longer than ten minutes. As to how many words a eulogy should be, that may depend on how fast you deliver them. A funeral eulogy of between 500 and 1000 written words will take from around three and a half to seven and a half minutes to speak.

Some details to include when you are writing a eulogy

The final decision of what to include will always come down to you. However, you may wish to include some, if not all, of the following:

- When and where they were born
- Nicknames
- Any military service
- Favourite poems, songs or quotes
- Sporting achievements
- Clubs and society memberships
- The names of their close family
- How they met their spouse or partner
- Education
- Acknowledgement of the guests
- Anything they have contributed to the community

Practise giving a eulogy

Once you have determined what you want to say, it's a good idea to practise giving your eulogy. Many people struggle with public speaking, so you are not alone. Read it through out loud, either on your own or in front of a trusted friend or family member. It's a good idea to time yourself so you have an idea of how long your eulogy will last and add or omit anything that will help keep it to a comfortable time.

When you're giving a eulogy remember to:

- Speak slowly. Everyone wants to hear the words you have prepared.
- Pause for thought. There may be certain points in the eulogy that deserve a moment of silence for contemplation, or if a particular story makes the audience laugh.
- Give people eye contact. This may be difficult, but if you mention a close family member by name you may want to scan the first row to make them feel included.