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Your guide to writing a eulogy...
How to pay tribute to the person you cared about

GUIDE TO WRITING A EULOGY

A eulogy is a brief account of the milestones and achievements of someone's life and is usually presented by a celebrant or family member at their funeral or memorial.

When a family member accepts this onerous responsibility, he or she does so in the belief that it's preferable to have the eulogy presented by someone who knew the person rather than someone who didn't.

While there is a certain logic in this belief, the reality is that in some cases family members are either too emotionally connected to take on such a role, or they lack the writing and/or public speaking experience to do the job justice. But for those who decide to accept the challenge, here are some helpful guidelines we hope can assist you in this difficult time, so that you may honour and pay tribute to the person you cared so much about in a way that captures who they were and what they meant to you.

Summing up a person's life in just a few words can feel like a tremendous responsibility. Amid the grief of losing a loved one, it can be difficult to articulate the impact that person had on your life and the lives of others.

Whilst a degree of chronology or a timeline will help put the deceased's life in some historical context, you do not need to be too precise about dates and places. The eulogy could touch on areas such as the deceased's childhood, family background, education, adolescence, and adulthood.

What is more important though, is that the words you use are a fitting and accurate description of the person whose life you are celebrating and the memories and the anecdotal stories you have to share that can help others to connect to the person and see them in the light that you did.

A strong eulogy not only shares the person's life milestones and influence, it also illuminates their personality through storytelling. Incorporating a thoughtfully selected personal anecdote into your eulogy can be a heartfelt reminder of your loved one's characteristics that attendees can fondly reflect on.

If you've been called upon to deliver a eulogy, a few key elements can help make it memorable.

Set the tone

In the beginning, you can mention your relationship to the deceased, a reading of a quote or scripture they enjoyed, and their major milestones, like a romantic partnership, becoming a parent, their career, etc.

Paint a picture

Next is the heart of the eulogy. This is where you'll share the deceased's life achievements, personal stories, and the impact they had on the people around them.

The final farewell

The closing of the eulogy can include the reading of a poem, song lyrics or verse, or an expression of gratitude for your loved one. It can also highlight the main sentiment that you'd like attendees to remember about the person and hold close to their heart as they remember and grieve the person they too cared about.

Some helpful tips:

No two eulogies are exactly alike since each person's story is distinct. However there are a few things to keep in mind when you've been given the honour of celebrating someone's life:

Be aware of time : There is no set time limit but as a guide, a well-paced eulogy speech takes about five to ten minutes and is around 700 to 3,000 words.

Be prepared : Even if you're generally confident about giving speeches and talking in public, the day of the service can surface a lot of intense emotions that might make it difficult to articulate a meaningful tribute. Prepare your speech in advance, practice aloud and have notes to support you on the day.

Be respectful : While sharing a lighthearted story during a eulogy can be appropriate and lend levity to a somber and difficult experience, keep in mind that everyone who knew the person could be in the room; from grandparents and immediate family, to the sports team and lifelong friends. If including humor in the eulogy, avoid embarrassing stories or anecdotes that might offend or surprise attendees in a negative way. Remember this is your chance to leave a lasting impression on people and to honour the life of the person you are celebrating. Such stories may be best shared privately or not at all.

Some helpful prompts to assist your writing:

- Were they named after anyone in particular and if so why?
- Did they have any nicknames throughout life and if so why were they given?
- Are there any particular stories revolving around their name?
- If you could paint a picture of them in words what would you write?
- If you could describe them in 5 words what would they be, and why?
- What quirky traits about them that you really love?
- What made them 'them'?
- Can you think of a memorable story or experience you had with them?
- How did they impact your life?
- Describe their family, their family history, their siblings and their place within it.
- Can you recall their childhood or stories they told you about their childhood and growing up?
- Where did they go to school, what suburb did they grow up in?
- Where have they lived in their lifetime?
- Think about your last happy memory together or the last big laugh you had and describe it
- What was their employment history, jobs they loved or didn't like?
- What parts of history have they witnessed in their lifetime and did they serve in any wars?
- Marriage/Children/Grandchildren/Great grandchildren

- What were their favourite holiday destinations?
- What were their hobbies and outside interests?
- Were they a part of any clubs or group memberships?
- What were their sports teams and sporting interests?
- What were their favourite music, books, films and television programs?
- Was there a tune they loved to play loudly or whistle or hum?
- What were their talents or hidden talents?
- What were some notable achievements in their lifetime?
- What topics did they love to chat about?
- Did you enjoy or participate in any of these hobbies with them, are there any stories you can tell?
- Were they known for favourite expressions or homespun philosophies/nick names?
- What were the happiest times in their life?
- Did they have any religious beliefs or rituals they loved?
- Do you have any favourite memories around birthdays or family celebrations?
- Did you ever receive any memorable gifts or surprises?
- Did they share any childhood dreams or life aspirations with you?
- What lessons did they teach you and how?
- Did they have a favourite quote?
- Were they social? did they have a lot of friends or did they prefer their own company?

- Did they like to travel?
- Did they have a favourite place? where did they love to spend their time?
- Did you holiday with them or spend time in their home? What memories do you have?
- What is something your loved one did or said that always made you smile?
- How did they show up as a parent/grandparent/friend/aunty/uncle...
- What parting words would they like to give to attendees at their funeral?
- Did they have a personal phrase or saying they would often repeat?
- What words of wisdom would they share in this moment if they could?

Piecing it all together:

Please know that the task of summarising the entirety of someone's life or personality into a short speech is near impossible. When writing a eulogy, it is easy to fall into the trap of composing a chronological list of events or dot points to recount their life; you do not have to include every single detail. Instead, use these prompts as starting points to help jog your memory and provide some inspiration to tell the stories that celebrate the life of your loved one in a way that honours the person they were to you and to others.

The best thing you can ever do is speak openly and from the heart so that everyone in attendance can share in the memories of them that you all hold so dearly and perhaps relate and reminisce themselves. Focus on a few key parts of their story and highlight the unique aspects of them as a person, and their life.

Remember, delivering a eulogy can be a hugely emotional task and although in practice you may feel comfortable, give yourself grace on the day that no one else is there to judge your public speaking efforts. You can have notes to read, you can pause and compose yourself when you need to, and you can take your time in remembering your loved one to honour their life as best as you can.



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