**Do you have a eulogy to write?**

**- funeral speeches step-by-step**



Having a eulogy or funeral speech to write is a gift and a privilege and while the task may appear difficult, it doesn't need to be. If you follow the step by step guidelines below *you can and will* give a memorable and fitting funeral speech or tribute.

When we're caught in the maelstrom of feelings triggered by the death of a loved person finding the clarity to make decisions about what to write in a eulogy can feel overwhelming. *There is so much we want to say*. Trying to compress a whole life into a few minutes seems impossible, almost an insult. But there is a way through.

**Why write a eulogy?**

**Why can't I simply stand up and talk letting inspiration carry me through?**

The answer is that for many people giving any type of speech *without conscious preparation i*s a challenge. We tend to drift off topic or lose the thread connecting our ideas.

Preparation will give your eulogy form - a definite pattern. It will help you contain and convey your emotions without being overwhelmed by them.

Without the safety of form your funeral speech may become a ramble with no obvious purpose or direction. That is distressing for everybody: the speaker and the hearers.

Taking the time to fully prepare your eulogy is the safest way to express all you want to, the way you want to.

**Writing a eulogy is a gift**

Your eulogy is a gift to the living and its words will help everyone, (yourself included), through the grief of loss.

**How?**

A eulogy is like a mirror or reflection. We listen to the stories told to hear and see in our imagination what the life of our loved one was all about. We want to understand, to have it make sense to us.

A eulogy may not provide answers to difficult questions but it allows us to focus more clearly.

A memorable funeral speech prepared with loving care celebrates the   
*whole person*: their strengths, their joys, challenges and achievements. At a time when many are emotionally fragile your courage to stand in front of friends and family will be deeply appreciated.

Take a deep breath and follow the steps.

**How to write a eulogy**

**Before you begin; who are you writing for?**

* Are you writing on behalf of the immediate family?
* Have you been asked to be the principal spokesperson or will others be talking too?
* Or are you writing about your own relationship?
* Are you writing as work colleague, a friend...?

The answers to those questions put you, the eulogy giver, in context which is important to those listening. If they don't know, they'll want to know how you fitted into the life of the person you are celebrating.

**How long is a eulogy expected to be?**

The general rule is approximately 3 to 4 minutes. If you're unsure ask for guidance from the person conducting or organizing the service.

**What to include in a eulogy:**

1. A brief introduction of yourself and where you fitted in the person's life
2. Personal stories: anecdotes, songs, poetry ...   
   Anything at all that speaks true.

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**Subjects to bypass**

Be honest without dwelling on or re-living negativity.

The eulogy is not an occasion to *'get even'* or expose family secrets.  
If the person was bowed down with challenges, talk about them compassionately, *if you must.*

Remember a funeral speech is an opportunity to honor and even the most difficult personality or life will have aspects worthy of celebration.

(And while we're discussing what subject matter it's best or diplomatic to avoid; political opinions or religious differences don't belong in a eulogy either.)

If you're speaking on behalf of others ask friends, family or work colleagues for their recollections and stories to add to your own. There is no need for you to carry the responsibility of putting together the eulogy alone. Let others share in the privilege of shaping the speech to honor your loved one's life.

**Would you like some help finding a special poem or quotation?**

Here are **five** possible sources to explore:

**1.** Browse through my collection of [**funeral poems**](http://www.write-out-loud.com/free-funeral-poems.html) and a large selection of widely diverse [**inspirational quotations**](http://www.write-out-loud.com/inspirational-quotations.html).

**2.** If you're pressured by time and want an instantly available comprehensive collection of sympathy poems, funeral readings and quotations, Lucie Storr's downloadable PDF could be the answer.

**3.** In your quest for a quotation don't overlook the person whose life you're celebrating. Perhaps there are memorable phrases that were uniquely their own. May be it was a line from a song or a poem.

For example, my mother had a signature saying.  "*Let there be peace and let it begin with me"*inspired her throughout many years of a sometimes very difficult life.

**4. What about writing your own poem?**  
It's not as difficult as you may think and you'll have something very special and original to offer.  
You can find out here [how to write a poem](http://www.write-out-loud.com/how-to-write-a-poem.html)in free verse.

**5.** Alternatively if none of those suggestions help feel free to ask for others. Use the contact form on my "[About Me](http://www.write-out-loud.com/aboutme.html)" page. I'll be happy to assist.

**Writing the eulogy: tone**

**What tone do you want to use?**  
Do you want it to be solemn? Do you want it to be lighter, perhaps even humorous? Or do you want a balance of both?

To help decide ask yourself; what would your loved one have wanted? Be guided by your answer. There are no "right" or "wrong" ways. This a decision for yourself, the family and friends.  A life contains joy as well as sorrow and laughing through tears can be a real reflection of that.

**Writing a eulogy: order of content**

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| Go through your collection of material selecting what gives an accurate portrayal. You won't be able to include everything but what you do choose, you'll want to resonate with the 'truth' of the person.  Put your choices of material in the order you want them come when you write the eulogy. |  |

It might look this:

**Introduction:**

Statement of who I am and relationship to loved one

**Body:**

1. Story one or poem or song or reading
2. Story two or poem or song or reading
3. Story three or poem or song or reading

**Conclusion:**

Restatement of main message or theme from body of eulogy

Do resist the urge to list in chronological order achievements or milestones. These can be dry, dull facts.

Instead tell the stories! They may have been heard many times but in their telling the essence or life force of your loved one lives on. This is the real person who people want to hear about and remember. Lists don't give   
that.

**Writing a eulogy: how to start**

**Begin with the body of the funeral speech**

This is where you will be sharing the stories making this person unique, special and loved.

If you can't get straight into writing, putting your stories on tape or telling them to another person may help kick start the process.

Remember to go straight to the core of each story. Long preambles are not needed. Include enough to make sense and no more.

**For example:**

(This is a true story. I didn't use it for my Mother's eulogy but telling it here is a little like giving her another small one years later.)

"I'm going to tell you the story of the yellow blouse.

I was 18 and leaving home. We had very little money and certainly none for luxuries and that's what new clothes were. Ours came in boxes, hand-me-downs from cousins.

What money Mum got each week was carefully placed in a series of jars in a cupboard in the kitchen. Each had a label. This was for 'Food', that for 'Electricity' etc. The jars were often empty but miraculously, our stomachs never were.

The day came for going. I had made 'new clothes' from old ones. They were folded, ready for packing. As I closed the lid on my suitcase, my mother gave me a parcel.   
  
Inside was a new store-bought yellow blouse, beautifully sewn and made of fine cloth. 'A girl must have at least one quality garment.' she said. It was extraordinary. I knew the path to that blouse had been 5 cents by 5 cents by 5 cents over months. I also knew this was love."

Link your stories/poems/songs/readings/quotes together so one leads into another. Think of them as beads you are threading to form a necklace. Each is part of the whole.

**Write the conclusion**

What enduring message do you want your listeners to carry away with them?

It may be a simple thank-you for the life you've shared with your loved one or it could be a special quote expressing an idea or feeling you know is appropriate. As this is the last opportunity to pay tribute think carefully. You'll want to get it as "right" as you can.

**Write the opening**

Now you have the rest of your eulogy it will be easier to write the opening.

Unless you're being introduced by someone else be sure to include who you are at the very beginning.

Once that is done think about the major events, relationships  and general characteristics making up this life special.

**For example:**

"Sophie was my Mother but she was also Mother to four more: Fred, Isobel, Warren and Gwen. Many of you know her as Aunt, cousin, friend and colleague but whatever the relationship, we all know her as the woman who played many roles.

She was the bright and beautiful young women who married my father after a war-time whirl wind romance. She was the determined young bride who taught herself to cook and sew.' (And so on ...)

'We all have memories of Sophie. I want to share some of my most precious with you now ...":

This leads into the body of the speech comprised of the specific stories you plan to tell.

**Writing a eulogy: practice & rehearsal**

Go through your first draft reading it aloud as if you were delivering it. This helps you make sure that what you've written makes sense.

It also helps if you have someone listen to you to give you feedback. A pair of independent ears will pick up things you might otherwise miss.

**Check the following:**

1. Does it flow from one idea to the next?
2. Are the opening and closing remarks fitting?
3. Have you varied your language and sentence length to keep it interesting to listen to?
4. If you hear yourself repeating the same phrases over and over again, either cut them out or find other language to express the idea.
5. Listen to hear if you are rambling without real point or direction *or* you've repeated the same or a similar story without realizing it.
6. Time yourself and make sure your speech fits the time allowance.  
   (If you've not been given a time allowance, approximately 3-4 minutes is about average. Although this may seem very brief, it does have advantages. Firstly, it gives other people who may be speaking time to do so. Secondly, it focuses your speech and helps you to decide what is important to say.)
7. Make any adjustments and *write your second draft*.
8. Go through the *same process* again and once more get someone to listen and give you feedback. Check for timing.  
   When you're satisfied you have it right prepare your final copy.

**Suggestions for delivering your eulogy**

If you've written it in a word document on your computer, BEFORE YOU PRINT IT OUT:

1. Make sure the font is large enough to be easily read
2. Double space each line for easy reading
3. Number your pages clearly
4. Select single-side printing
5. If you're using a poem or reading include the text in the body of your notes.  
   This is less stressful than trying to read from a book or books. It's simpler to deal with one item (your notes) rather than try to manage several under pressure.   
   But if you must use the original text make sure you bookmark your place clearly so you do not have the added hassle of trying to find the right page while everybody waits.
6. If it's available use a lectern or stand for your notes rather than hold them.   
   You can either stand to one side or behind it. When you hand-hold notes the temptation to rattle, or mask your face with them, might be too much to withstand.
7. Practice breathing deeply before you stand to talk to calm yourself.  
   You'll find more information on [how to breathe to release tension](http://www.write-out-loud.com/overcoming-public-speaking-anxiety-breathing-exercises.html)here.
8. Have a glass of water available.
9. Do not worry if you "wobble" or falter. Tears and being unable to speak for a moment or two are natural. Do not fight them. Have a tissue handy. Blow your nose, wipe your eyes, have a sip of water and carry on. People will not judge you. Tears are not a loss of dignity. Your listener's will admire your courage.
10. If you do have to stop, do not apologize. Nobody is expecting a flawless performance.   
    The British have a saying: "*stiff upper lip"*. It means concealing or   
    keeping feelings under control. In the midst of great emotional or physical pain a "*stiff upper lip"* hides the inner turmoil. This is not being asked of you and is expected less and less of the British too! Being able to acknowledge and show feeling openly is healthy and honest. The ideal is to *ride the wave* and continue.
11. Take a support person to stand beside you.  
    This is a wonderful way of sharing the eulogy and their presence will give you the strength to carry on.
12. If you have time, practice in the venue.  
    There are fuller guidelines on [how to rehearse a speech](http://www.write-out-loud.com/howtorehearse.html) here.
13. When you have finished do some more deep breathing to center yourself. To give a eulogy is to give of yourself at a time when you are most vulnerable. It is good to give but it is *equally good* to take care of yourself.

**In conclusion:**

Remember having a eulogy to write is both a gift and a privilege.  
It's a gift because you are giving your energy, time and love to honor the life of your loved one. But primarily it is a gift to your listeners and yourself as it will aid the healing process.

It's a privilege because it signifies your value or importance in the life of the loved one and in the lives of their family and friends. Additionally, being asked to speak shows trust and respect. You are being trusted to encapsulate a life fittingly and deliver the unique essence of the loved one publicly.

I hope these notes are of service to you. If you have questions,[ask them through my ***contact form*** here.](http://www.write-out-loud.com/aboutme.html) I would be happy and honored to assist.

Go well.

**"Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."**

**\*** The quote above is widely attributed to Goethe. Despite disagreement over its origin, the sentiment expressed is fitting for your task. Have courage, and begin.

http://www.write-out-loud.com/eulogy-write.html