

Guide to Writing an Obituary

If your loved one just passed away, you may be asking yourself, "How do I write an obituary?" Some people feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of writing an obituary. They worry that they'll forget important facts and information, or that the obit won't fully capture their loved one's life.

To assist, Legacy.com has prepared this guide to writing an obituary. Here are the most important things to keep in mind:



1. Always check with the newspaper and/or funeral home first. Many funeral homes provide forms for basic information. Some newspapers have specific style guidelines or restrictions on length, some only accept obituaries directly from funeral homes, and some only publish obituaries written by newspaper staff members.

2. Include biographical information, as much as you have available and feel comfortable sharing (the more information you include, the easier it is for acquaintances to identify the deceased as someone they knew). Some items you may wish to include:

- Full name of the deceased (including maiden name, nickname, or any other name by which your loved one might be identified)
- Dates and locations of birth, marriage, and death
- Cause of death
- Predeceased and surviving loved ones' names
- Schools attended
- Military service
- Place of employment and position held
- Membership in organizations (for example, civic, fraternal, place of worship)
- Hobbies or special interests

3. Consider listing one or more charities to which you'd like donations made. If you do, be sure to include the address or URL for the charity to make it easier for people to make donations.

4. If services are public, include full funeral service information: location, day, and time of visitation, memorial or funeral service, and burial. If services are private, indicate so (for example, "Burial will be private" or "Private services will be held").

5. If the family prefers monetary contributions rather than flowers, include a phrase such as: "In lieu of flowers, please consider the needs of the family" or "contributions suggested to the family," or "the family is requesting financial assistance for the services."

6. Plan to publish the obituary at least 1-2 days prior to services so that friends and family can make arrangements to attend. For information on how to submit an obituary to one of our 1500+ newspaper affiliates, visit Legacy.com.

Want your loved one's obituary to be more memorable?

Consider these tips from Legacy.com experts:

According to obituary writing expert Susan Soper, the founder and author of *ObitKit®*, *A Guide to Celebrating Your Life*, the interesting and memorable obit is in the details.

“If you are in a position of writing an obit, try to dig for the intimate details that will keep the person alive in memory: quirks, hobbies, favorite passions, oft-heard quotes, travels, food or unusual pursuits. It doesn't matter if the person was a company president, an electrician, a cook or ballerina, everyone has a story to tell. But that story doesn't come together by itself. Ask friends, children, parents, co-workers and spouses for details they recall and favor. How did the person look or dress? What was his daily routine? Where did she find most happiness? Be creative, look outside the box to find the personality traits and characteristics to recall.”

Condolence and eulogy expert Florence Isaacs, author of *My Deepest Sympathies: Meaningful Sentiments for Condolence Notes and Conversations, Plus a Guide to Eulogies*, encourages obituary, eulogy and condolence note writers to reflect on what made your loved one unique.

“Try to remember specific instances where she made a difference in the lives of others, in her profession or field and/or in the community. Instead of just listing her achievements, tell a little story about some of them. Keep an eye out for moments that speak eloquently of her humanity, kindness, zest for life or even her cranky disposition—whatever fits. Did she take tango lessons or play poker in her eighties? Say so. Such information inspires people and helps them connect with the deceased. Before you sit down to write, take a day or so to think about what you want to say, and take notes as ideas come to you. Then get started.”

-Obituary General Guidelines-

The following is a general guideline for writing an obituary to create a memorable tribute for your loved one. Since you know him or her the best, you can refer to this guideline and determine what applies. Ideally, the obituary you create will accurately reflect on your loved one's statistical and biographical information and will paint a picture of who he or she was.

Header: Name; Date of birth; and Date of death

Relevant statistical information: Birthplace; Parents' names; Educational accomplishments; Military service; Marriage(s); Children; Geographical locations of residence

Career information: Work history, affiliations and accomplishments

Other affiliations, accomplishments, interests: Religious memberships and organizations; Civic, fraternal and/or club memberships (with any positions or offices held); Hobbies; Other interests

Survivors (generally in this order): Spouse; Children; Grandchildren; Parents; Grandparents; Siblings; Nephews; Nieces; Cousins; Friends, as appropriate. List family that preceded him/her in death such as Spouse; Parents; Children; Grandchildren; Great-grandchildren; Brothers; and Sisters.

Service details: Day, date, time and place of service(s); Name of officiant and their title; Place of burial, entombment, or final resting place, if appropriate.

Memorial contributions/donations (in lieu of flowers): Name any organization(s) for memorial contributions. Their mailing and/or website address can be helpful.

Arrangements by: List your funeral service provider's business name for reference.