



Preparing a eulogy

What is a eulogy?

A eulogy is a speech written to give high praise or commendation to a person, most commonly in honour a deceased person. Eulogies delivered at a funeral or memorial service can be prepared by the family or friends. Some eulogies are written by an individual family member or friend, but can be a collaborative effort with a number of people involved in putting the speech together.

As a funeral celebrant, I sometimes deliver the eulogy on behalf of the family. On rare occasions I will write the eulogy after 'interviewing' the family to gather information about the deceased. This can be very challenging, because, even while I can write an interesting story, I cannot bring out the personal feeling that the family and friends would bring. Therefore, I recommend that the eulogy be delivered by a family member or close friend – and it doesn't have to be an experienced speaker!

It's okay to cry

Often, when preparing the funeral service with the family, there is a tendency among the family to shy away from delivering the eulogy, because they feel they will cry or breakdown. Of course, this is a genuine feeling and fear. But, it's perfectly okay to cry! In fact, my experience, from attending hundreds of funerals, is that tears add a deeper dimension to the service and can make the service more significant for mourners. By contrast, I attended a funeral where there were no family and no friends at the funeral. Counting the funeral staff and a few acquaintances, there were seven people in attendance. When the funeral conductor asked if anyone wanted to say a few words about the man, no one spoke. That was the saddest funeral I ever attended – sad because there was no emotion. While a funeral where there are many tears is sad, the love that causes those tears makes the service more meaningful. So don't be afraid to cry.

Remember, too, that you can have someone stand with you as you deliver the eulogy. In fact, it is common for children to stand together while the eulogy read – and even to share the delivery with each reading portions of the eulogy.

How long should a eulogy be?

The length of eulogy will depend on many things: how long the person lived, what they achieved in their life, their marriage or marriages, children, career path, significant events and so on. If the eulogy is more than 1,200 words, consider having two people deliver the eulogy: one might talk about the general history – where they were born, where they lived, who they married, and so on; the other might talk about their achievements, career or significant events, and character.

If the service is to be held in a cemetery chapel, the time is limited and strictly controlled. The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board (MCB) does not permit a funeral service to run beyond its scheduled time. If the service is scheduled for 1 hour, limit the eulogy to no more than 1,500 words. If there is to be multiple eulogies, limit the total to around 1,400 words. It is important that if you want to deliver a long eulogy or multiple eulogies to consider booking a 90 minute or two-hour service at the cemetery chapel. It is very important that you insist on whoever is writing the eulogy to adhere to this as, despite the stress and grief a family and friend might be feeling, there is no leniency shown, by MCB staff – none!

Make it personal

If you are writing a eulogy for a family member or close friend, make it personal – talk about how you loved them, and even talk about how they might have annoyed or frustrated you! This does not mean you have to 'air the dirty laundry', rather, talk about these emotions in a loving way.



What they loved	
What they hated! Or what annoyed them!	
What they achieved	
Sport Favourite teams What they played	
Entertainment Favourite TV shows Favourite movies Music preferences	
Faith and religion if applicable	
Family Their parents & siblings Spouse & children Grandchildren	
Where they lived Starting with the early years if known	
Friendships People they were close to	
Career The type of work they did, first job, and other jobs	



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Funny things they did	
Personality & character	
Cars First car, favourite car Dream car	
Major events Marriage/s Children Graduation Etc.	
Education & Qualifications Tertiary Trade Other	
Animals and pets	
Holidays and vacations Favourite places Furthest places travelled	
Adventures As a child Growing up Adult years	
Claim to fame Can be serious or funny	
Famous people they met	