

Memorial Resources for Family and Friends

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Guidelines for Sharing a Eulogy or Story at a Memorial

Thank you for being willing to share at this service. Speaking about someone you love in the midst of grief is one of the most generous things you can do for the people gathered. These guidelines are here to help you prepare something meaningful, and to help us shape the service as a whole.

Please send us a written copy of what you plan to say at least three days before the service. This isn't about approval. It helps me see how all the pieces of the service fit together, adjust the overall arc, and make sure we aren't accidentally doubling up on things in ways that don't serve the occasion. If something you planned to share was already covered earlier in the service, that's completely fine. People don't mind hearing meaningful things more than once.

What Is a Eulogy?

A eulogy is a brief speech given during a memorial service that reflects on the life of the person who has died. It is a chance to share personal memories, to show something of who they were, and to offer gratitude for the time you shared with them.

Your role is not to summarize their entire life. Think of it instead as offering a window into who they were and the impact they had. A eulogy is a heartfelt gift to the people in the room, a way of reminding everyone of the love and legacy this person leaves behind.

Practical Guidelines

Time Limit

Please keep your eulogy to about 5 minutes, which is roughly 600 to 750 words when read aloud at a natural pace. When emotions are involved, things tend to run longer than expected, so a little shorter on paper is usually just right in person.

Preparation

Write out your eulogy in advance and practice reading it aloud. This helps you stay within the time limit, speak more confidently, and feel grounded when emotions rise. Even seasoned public speakers benefit from having a written version to fall back on.

Focus on Stories, Not Narration

Jump straight into your stories and memories. Let go of any preamble about how you arrived at what you were going to say. Phrases like "when I was thinking about what to say" or "I wasn't sure what to share" take up precious time and pull focus from the person you're honoring. Start with the story itself.

Choose Impact Over Summary

Resist the urge to tell their whole life story. Instead, focus on impact. Share one or two moments that reveal something true about who they were. Some of the best eulogies show a side of the person that not everyone in the room may have known. A single vivid story will say more than a list of accomplishments.

Trust Your Impulses

If something keeps coming to mind when you think about what to share, follow that instinct. A eulogy doesn't have to be a traditional speech. If what you want to write is a letter to the person who died, do that. If you spent time with them in the kitchen, you might share a recipe and talk about what it meant to cook together. If a poem keeps surfacing, read it. The form should serve the feeling, not the other way around.

A Note on Honesty and Complicated Relationships

Being honest and telling the truth is a gift, especially when offered in the context of respect and love. Avoiding the elephant in the room doesn't help anyone grieve. But honesty is not the same as plunging into an open wound. If the relationship or the circumstances were complicated, you can speak to that with care. You don't have to pretend, and you don't have to punish. If you're unsure about the balance, reach out to me and we can talk it through.

How to Write a Eulogy

A well-crafted eulogy typically includes the following:

1. An Opening Tribute

Begin by introducing yourself and your relationship to the person. For example: "*My name is Sarah, and I had the honor of being [Name]'s sister.*" Briefly acknowledge the occasion and express gratitude for the life you are honoring.

2. Personal Memories

Share one or two specific memories that highlight their character, values, or personality. Choose moments that illustrate their kindness, humor, faith, or love for others. Be personal, but avoid overly private details or stories that may be difficult for the family to hear in a public setting.

3. Reflection on Their Legacy

Speak about how their life impacted others. Share how they will be remembered and what lessons they left behind.

Delivery Tips

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Make eye contact with the people gathered when you can.
- If emotions overwhelm you, that is completely okay. Pause, take a deep breath, and continue when you're ready. No one is judging you. Everyone in that room knows how hard this is.

Questions and Prompts for Preparing Your Eulogy

When writing a eulogy, it can be hard to know where to start. The following questions are designed to help you think about the life of your loved one and find meaningful stories, qualities, and experiences to share. You don't need to answer all of them. Just use whatever sparks something real.

Reflecting on Their Life

- How would you describe your loved one in a few words or phrases?
- What was their most defining quality or characteristic?
- What did they love most in life? Family, hobbies, career, faith, nature?
- How did they spend their time? What brought them joy?

Memories to Share

- What is a specific memory you have of them that makes you smile or laugh?
- What is a moment that shows their kindness, generosity, or love for others?
- Did they have any quirky habits, sayings, or traditions that made them unique?

- Was there an experience or event you shared that captures the essence of who they were?

Their Relationships and Impact

- How did they make others feel?
- What role did they play in your life or in the lives of others?
- How did they show their love for family, friends, or their community?
- What lessons or values did they teach you through their words or actions?

Legacy and Closing Thoughts

- What will you remember most about them?
- What lessons from their life will you carry forward?
- How did their faith, beliefs, or values shape their life and those around them?
- What do you think they would want to say to those gathered today?
- If you could describe their life in one sentence, what would it be?
- How would they want to be remembered?
- What message of hope, gratitude, or love would you like to leave with those listening?

A Simple Outline

If you're unsure how to organize your thoughts, here's a simple structure to follow:

1. Start with an introduction: who you are and your relationship to the person.
2. Share a story or memory: pick one or two meaningful moments that highlight their character.
3. Reflect on their legacy: how their life impacted you and others.
4. End with gratitude or hope: express thanks for their life and share a message of encouragement.

Thank you again for being willing to share. If you have questions or want to talk through what you're working on, please don't hesitate to reach out.