



Writing a Great Eulogy

When you leave a memorial or funeral with your heart and head full of the person being memorialised, you know the speakers got it right.

If you've been asked to prepare a eulogy the first thing to keep in mind is it's about them, not you!

A great eulogy serves two purposes; it calls up memories - which is a way to honour the person. And it creates an atmosphere of community and connection.

On the following pages you'll find our tips for writing and presenting a great eulogy. But if all else fails, story telling is always a winner.

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The Nuts and Bolts

A eulogy isn't the opportunity to read off every event from birth to death.

Great eulogies focus on stories not a CV.

Keep your eulogy to about 1,000 words or six to seven minutes' speaking time.

Brain storm a list of important events, people, memories or stories you want to share (they don't have to be in order). As you write your eulogy, cross them off your list - this makes it easy to sandwich or combine stories or ideas rather than writing an entire paragraph around single events.

If there's more than one speaker get together and work out which parts of your person you want your eulogy to talk about. You can do this by focusing on specific relationships (ie family, work, professional, hobbies etc). or by dividing their life into "chapters" (childhood, young adult, parent, retirement).

Always write down what you're going to say, even if you plan to abandon your notes.

Print your eulogy in large print so you can easily read it (or hand it to someone else to read if it gets too much).

Practice. Practice. Practice. Read your speech out loud at least 10 times. It will help you recognise where you need to pause for effect and which parts of your speech might trip you up or make you emotional.

Share what you know about your person

Be honest and authentic. A eulogy isn't time to dish all the dirt but it also doesn't have to be a shiny made up version of the person who has died.

Write down key points in your persons life and then narrow it down to three or four key 'chapters' or events that you know well.

You don't have to know everything about your person's life. You can either ask other people to speak to that time of their life, or ask for anecdotes to help you fill in the gaps.

It's OK to make people laugh

The best eulogies are respectful and solemn, but they also break the tension and are made interesting with some comic relief.

Keep your audience in mind. A eulogy that is full of inside jokes or constant roastings is cringey and awkward - stick to finding the funny moments not a stand up routine.

Writing your eulogy

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Capture attention (and find your voice) with a story.

If you haven't been introduced by an emcee or other speaker start your speech with a story that makes your relationship to the person obvious.

"When I was a kid all my friends wanted my mum to be their mum too..."

"From the first day we worked together, Jo and I knew we were going to be best of friends..."

"For those who don't know me, I'm Ray's youngest (and without a doubt his favourite) daughter Holly."

PART 2: SHARE VALUES, CONNECTIONS & THEIR PERSONALITY WITH STORIES

Rather than listing off abstract statements or achievements like "she was kind" or "she was funny" or "he was a policeman", illustrate who your person was.

Stories about important moments or memories capture the values, personality and experiences of the person you're memorialising better than anything.

Deliver and surprise - great eulogies include a story or description of your person that everyone will recognise or appreciate, as well as a surprise story or deeply personal piece of information that people don't know.

"Vicki always said 'one long chat once a month' was better than a quick hello every day. What Andrew didn't realise one long chat a month lasted nearly an entire day..."

"By the time I was 23 Nanna was making a LOT of noise about not living long enough to attend my wedding. So I put my foot on the gas and married the first guy that came my way. Turns out grandma did live to see my wedding, and my divorce. And my second wedding. And my second divorce. She famously said if she'd know she'd be around for so many weddings she'd have bought a less fashionable dress the first time so she didn't have to buy so many outfits!"

"Always one to save money where she could my mum would brazenly take the sugar from cafes and stash it in her handbag, defensively declaring it was "for later". Cleaning up her house last year, my sister and I found, and I'm not kidding, 1,187 straws of sugar in a tupperware container. I'm not sure how "later" she was thinking."

PART 3: INCLUDE OTHER IMPORTANT PEOPLE

Great eulogies focus on the whole life of the person you're talking about - not just your relationship.

You may not know everything about everyone in your person's life but you can still make reference to the people and things they loved.

One area that can be tricky to navigate is previous relationships (ex husbands or wives) or estranged family members. It's entirely up to you but

"His airforce mates were like his second family."

"Matt's teenage years were spent almost entirely in the back of a panel van with Pete, Simon and Gary. He would get home from Uni, strip off as he made his way through the house, get into his wetsuit and grab his board. 10 seconds later a horn would sound in the street and he was gone. As an 11 year old I could only dream of the allure the beach, a slab of beer and a family size bag of Smiths S&Vs held."

"In 2012 after nearly 25 years together, mum and dad separated. Nobody wants to think of their big strong dad being heartbroken, but as I get older the more I realise mum was the love of dad's life. I'll be forever grateful they could put their differences aside to make life easy for Emma and me as we navigated our late teens and early 20's."

PART 4: THANK OTHERS OR CAREGIVERS

Use your eulogy as a way to speak on behalf of your person and thank family or caregivers for their support.

You can also thank people who have supported you during your time of grief or in working through the realities of death.

Try to avoid specifically naming people, incase you miss anyone out.

"Nobody warns you that the conversations with a dying person are filled with the profound, the emotional, the tragic. But also the numbingly mundane. What day to put the bins out. Where to find the hidden cash. Which Birthdays you should remember. Mum left me with a list of people to thank for their love, support and generosity of spirit as she navigated the past few months. I don't know if this list belongs in the profound, the emotional or the mundane but here goes...."

PART 5: THE END

End with a quote or a poem that reminds you of your person.

Song lyrics are another good way to reflect or draw inspiration.

Close your eulogy by directly addressing the person who died, something like "Joe, thank you for teaching me how to be a good father".



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