

## Preparing a Eulogy

The family should decide if there will be a eulogy and who they would like it to be delivered by. The family should also be consulted when deciding where in the service or ceremony the eulogy will fit best. If a eulogy is decided upon, the Family Liaison Officer should make the appropriate contacts and advise the Funeral Officer so the proper arrangements can be made.

Writing a eulogy can be an emotional process. A eulogy should pay tribute to the deceased and offer comfort to surviving family and friends.

When writing a eulogy it is important to:

- ✓ Do your research. Talk to family members and friends of the deceased to get a better understanding of their accomplishments, honors and awards, and significant achievements.
- ✓ Include personal stories and anecdotes. If you do not have personal stories or memories, include ones gathered from family and friends.
- ✓ Stick to a theme. Your remarks should have structure and be organized.
- ✓ Prepare a draft. Be sure to offer condolences and acknowledge family members and close friends of the deceased.
- ✓ Celebrate the person's life; don't dwell on their death or the events that lead up to it.
- ✓ Be sure to practice giving your remarks and receive feedback in necessary.
- ✓ Identify someone who would be willing to finish your remarks if you are overcome with emotion.
- ✓ Express the fire department's support for the family.

Writing and delivering a eulogy or remembrance speech can seem daunting. In addition to the grief and sorrow you're already feeling as you cope with the loss of a loved one, you must find the time to organize your thoughts, put them down on paper and deliver your speech—all within the fairly compressed timeframe between the death and the funeral or memorial service. While only you can determine the unique tone of your eulogy, the following five tips will help you write and deliver a touching, meaningful eulogy in nearly any funeral or memorial setting.

### Keep Your Eulogy brief

This is not the time to write the great American novel, so keep telling yourself that "less is more." The truth is that the longer you speak, the more likely you will ramble and make listeners feel awkward, bored, or uncomfortable. Instead, you should create a eulogy that you can deliver in around five minutes. If possible, ask the funeral director, clergy member, celebrant, or other officiants beforehand how much time you will have during the service, but five minutes is a good rule of thumb.

To help keep your remembrance speech brief, you should focus your eulogy on a specific quality or two about the deceased that you admire, or share a story about the deceased that expresses a significant personality trait or formative moment in his or her life. Ideally, try to relate something that you witnessed firsthand or that personally involved you, but if you're having trouble thinking of something, then its okay to ask a close loved one for some ideas.

By limiting the scope of your remarks in this way, you should find it easier to write your eulogy. A eulogy outline can also help. In addition, you will more likely give your listeners some meaningful insight into the deceased that they will cherish, rather than fill them with the desire to glance at their watches or stifle their yawns.

### **Keep Your Eulogy Personal**

Listeners will not find your eulogy moving if you merely recite a list of dry facts, such as those found in most obituaries. And avoid simply rattling off a long list of character traits, such as "Uncle Ben loved hunting, motorcycles, the Green Bay Packers, woodworking, etc." This approach will prove about as interesting as listening to someone read a grocery list out loud.

Instead, share a story that illustrates something your loved one enjoyed—especially if you were also part of that story. For example, imagine that you and "Uncle Ben" once took a road trip on his motorcycle to see the Packers play football. Not only would this convey a deeper sense of his love of motorcycles and the Green Bay Packers, but you would also find it much easier to share other insights that listeners will find meaningful. Again, if you can't think of a firsthand story to share, then talk to a close family member or friend and borrow one from them.

### **Keep Your Eulogy Positive**

Many movies and T.V. comedies have focused on the main character struggling to write/deliver a eulogy about a person he or she despised, such as an overbearing boss or unfaithful ex-spouse. Assuming you're not tasked with eulogizing somebody like Ebenezer Scrooge, you shouldn't have a problem finding enough words to focus on the positive things.

But if you do struggle, then just remember that listeners will not be there to judge you on the thoroughness of your remarks. If the deceased was a difficult person or led a troubled life, then just trust that those in the audience already know that and it's not your job to break the news to them.

In some cases, you might feel it's impossible not to reference something negative or unflattering about the deceased, even though you're trying to focus on the positive. If you find yourself in this situation, then you should resort to a euphemism to help get you past the awkward point in your eulogy and to avoid adding greater pain to those mourning.

### **Write Your Eulogy Down and Use Your Notes to Deliver it**

Even people who earn a living making speeches use a written copy of their remarks. Often, these are projected on teleprompter's for easy and inconspicuous reference. Sometimes, a speaker will simply have a printed copy on a podium or even just an outline on index cards in a pocket.

The point is that if the professionals use a written copy of their speeches, then you should too. While you definitely need to practice your eulogy several times to make sure it's long enough and that you become familiar with it, there is no reason to feel you must deliver your remarks from memory.

Moreover, if you write your eulogy or remembrance speech on a computer, print it out using a font size that you find easy to read, and double-space the printout so it's easier to keep your place. In addition to your written/printed eulogy, it's also a good idea to have a handkerchief or tissues with you in case you grow a little emotional, and a bottle of water should your throat feel dry.

It can be a nice touch to give a copy of your eulogy to the grieving family. You may want to bring extra copies along or have it available in an email to give to people who will request a copy.

### **Keep Your Eulogy Conversational**

Public speaking traditionally ranks among the greatest fears that people hold. Despite this, most of us have no problem talking to our family members, friends, coworkers or even strangers if the situation calls for it. The difference, of course, is that nobody is "watching us" in those latter situations. To help you deliver your eulogy effectively, and to make it more interesting for listeners, speak in a conversational tone—as if you were simply talking to a family member or friend. This should be easier if you've followed the advice above and you're sharing a story or other firsthand insights.

In addition, remember to look up at your listeners from time to time and make eye contact. Doing so will help your delivery feel more like a conversation, and you will be less likely to rush through the eulogy and/or deliver it in a monotone voice.

If you don't feel you can look at your audience without growing emotional, however, then keep your focus on your written remarks and don't feel self-conscious if you need to pause for a moment to compose yourself.