

## Writing an Obituary – Lastingpost.com

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### Introduction

The obituary provides an opportunity to remember and celebrate a person's life and times. A well written obituary will not only be a summation of the public facts but will accurately reflect the personality of the subject by drawing out traits of character and glimpses of uniqueness. It is the story of a life. Honesty and humour should play a large part.

Most importantly the obituary should be personal. The aim is to give people a feel for who the person really was. When done successfully, the reader should feel that they knew, or would have like to have known, the deceased.

### Types of obituary

There are two main types of format for an obituary. Firstly, the shorter personal version that families draft and that usually appears in the local and regional newspapers. This format will often make the announcement of death, give the details of the funeral arrangements and provide a short summation of the person's life. The length of the obituary will often depend on how much the family are able to spend.

The second format is the longer version that appears in the national newspapers and some magazines. These professional obituaries are usually written by journalists but sometimes by people who personally knew the deceased person.

With the advent of the internet the opportunity is now available for a family to publish online a full length personal appreciation along the lines of the professional obituaries in the national newspapers. An online personal obituary can stand as a proper celebration and appraisal of the person's life. The great advantage is that it will also remain available for posterity. The other advantage of the internet is that photos can be included in the obituary.

### Structure of an obituary

There are no hard and fast rules as to how the obituary should be structured. This is your personal tribute to your loved one and you should write it accordingly.

### Suggested layout

There are some generally accepted thoughts on layout that you are set out below. You might find these helpful if only to ensure that you give appropriate coverage to all the various aspects of the person's life. However, these thoughts are simply a starting point. The obituary that you write should reflect your own personal taste.

## **1. The Introduction**

This should give notice of the death and provide basic details about the person (their name, where they lived and their age).

## **2. Details of the funeral arrangements**

If the obituary is also an announcement of death then it should give details of when and where the funeral will take place.

## **3. A brief summary of the person**

This should be a short section and give a broad overview of what they accomplished during their life.

## **4. A chronological account of the person's life.**

Details should be included in the obituary of the important milestones in the person's life. These will include the date and place of birth, marriage, university graduation etc. However, care must be taken to avoid simply giving a monotonous list of specific events.

## **5. A record of the person's family**

This should include details of the person's spouse, children, grandchildren, their parents as well as other close relatives. Details of their close friends are often given as well.

## **6. A family history**

The section on the person's family is often expanded to include a short family history.

## **7. A more detailed narrative**

The purpose of this section is to concentrate on the person's interests, hobbies, favourite pastimes as well as defining or amusing moments. Mention can be made of any quirks and foibles.

This part is the heart of the obituary as it draws out the deceased's personality; their fascinations and their interests. In essence, it is the assessment of what made them tick. It is surprising how many people's lives that at first glance are not unusual become interesting and often extraordinary with closer examination.

One respected national newspaper editor noted that that every obituary should include the words 'on one occasion.'

## **8. A description of the person's personality**

This section should assess as objectively as possible the person's character; whether they were gentle, loving, humorous, amusing or loud and garrulous. There is a line to be drawn here as a personal obituary should accentuate the good and avoid dwelling on the less impressive aspects of a person's character.

The journalists who write the professional obituaries in the national newspapers have developed a code to describe less flattering traits of character. Someone described as a 'tireless raconteur' was often a crashing bore, someone who 'lived life to the full'

was usually drunk and someone described as 'larger than life' was clinically obese. The most famous example and one that has been used for generations in obituary writing is the description that someone 'didn't suffer fools gladly' that intimates the person was easily irritated and cantankerous.

## **9. The conclusion**

A personal obituary should end on an upbeat note. There is no better way to end than with a simple appreciation of the person, who they were and what they meant to their family and the people they knew.

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## **END**

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