

# How to Write a Eulogy

## by Hazel Edwards

**Question:** How do I write a Eulogy?

**Answer:** Basically a 'eulogy' means saying nice things about the person who has died, and to celebrate their life. 'Eu' means good.

Speaking in public is the greatest fear for many people. But this is where notes from existing family history research are often useful.

There are two parts to a eulogy; writing and then delivering it, usually at the funeral.

To write a eulogy, you need the facts of the person's life quickly: dates of birth, years when people worked where and the correct names of colleagues. Others may help, but the eulogy writer has to craft it.

And it's a more personal tribute, if you 'profile' the life of the person you knew well, rather than a stranger just reading it. Even if you do get upset.

Often a funeral celebrant will advise on compiling the short talk or will even talk at the ceremony around the notes you have provided. However, these hints may help in the writing.

- Check if any family members are compiling a history. Copy the facts.
- Display dated and captioned family photos at the ceremony. Put on Powerpoint to show electronically. Gives people something to talk about.
- Anecdotes are mini stories, often humorous. Jot down 5-6 anecdotes or memories which typify that person for you because they symbolise attributes e.g. good organiser/ sense of humour/ persistent. Tell the best first, to set the tone.
- Keep the sentences short and number the points.
- Print it off in really large, dark font so you can read through tears or glasses.
- Focus on the person, not only your relationship to them.
- Find a theme or linking idea e.g. A practical man who finished projects.
- Consider your audience, some may not know all aspects of that life, so you need to tell stories in context and explain who Aunt Mary was.
  
- The age of the person who died determines the type of audience. If they have out-lived their contemporaries, had little family and not belonged to organisations, the numbers may be small. But if well known and died young, there may be many contributing eulogies for various aspects of a life: family, work, sport, membership of organisations, community work.
- Often some facts of a life are news at a funeral for some audience members. Be diplomatic.
- Allude to weaknesses, but with acceptance e.g. had a short fuse.
- A spoken funeral eulogy is often used as the basis of a published obituary later.
- Sometimes there's a mismatch and the eulogist does not really make

appropriate tribute to the person's life. Or the eulogist may be brilliant in the writing and delivery and make a hero out of someone who wasn't.

- The tone needs to be genuine and even if you break down, the audience will feel with you.
  - Practise reading and keep to time limit.
  - Send a copy afterwards to the family, for their family history.
- Write with your heart, but you also need to craft it.

### **YOUR TURN:**

Imagine you've been asked to write your own eulogy. Which five aspects of your life would you like covered?

### **MORE**

1. [www.hazeledwards.com](http://www.hazeledwards.com) has useful links to writing sites and publishers.
2. **Australian Society of Authors** ([www.asauthors.org](http://www.asauthors.org))  
National organisation which has self publishing and writing family histories & pamphlets.