

How to write a eulogy under pressure

Regardless of the individual circumstances, when it comes to writing a eulogy you are likely to be going through a difficult, sensitive and busy time in your life. Unlike most speeches, this is often an unexpected one. You may have little time to prepare for the funeral, let alone the eulogy. You'll have a million and one thoughts going through your head and a range of contrasting emotions. Amongst all that there is the instant requirement to write something perfect.

If you're worried about the eulogy or just need a guiding hand then here's some advice to help get you started:

1. Start by working backwards. Think about how you will feel once you have given the eulogy. What do you want people to remember? What key memories, emotions and reflections do you want to convey? Taking this information, think about what balance between 'fun' and 'sentiment' within the speech is required. Use this as a brief for diluting thoughts from this point on.
2. Don't just rely on your own material. Contact friends and family who have known the person at different stages of their lives to gather comprehensive insights and anecdotes.
3. When putting pen to paper, don't start with stories or memories. Start instead with a structure. 'Chronology' is the most obvious structure, but not the most effective. It is much more powerful to work your stories and memories around a theme that was central to how he or she lived their life and would want to be remembered.
4. Try, if possible, to begin your speech by putting a smile on people's faces. The funeral will be emotional enough as it is, so start light. It will also help you to relax if you receive an early chuckle from the congregation.
5. Keep yourself separate. It's tempting to focus your speech on your own relationship with the person you are speaking about. But if you labour the point too heavily, you are doing a disservice to them and everyone else in the room.
6. There is no 'perfect' shape or style for a eulogy. But the key is brevity. Stay away from long paragraphs in favour of short, punchy, deliverable sentences. And using your theme, try to link all the separate parts together seamlessly.
7. Because of the pressure of the situation and the added emotion involved, you want to keep everything else around you as simple and straightforward as possible. This includes what your speech is on. Big pieces of paper with lots of print can lead you to getting lost. So, instead of laying all of your speech out on one or two bits of paper, put it on cards. And keep the words on each card to a minimum.
8. Although they may be hard to avoid, try to save the tear jerking elements of the speech until the end. This way, if emotion gets the better of you, you won't have to gather yourself together again.
9. With rare exceptions, a eulogy should be a celebration of life and there to create happy memories and a lifting of the mood. No matter how sad the occasion, try to write your speech from this perspective.

10. As a rule we would suggest a speaking length of 8-10 minutes. However, with eulogies the length should be lead by the content. But remember, as with all speeches, less is more, particularly if there is more than one eulogy being delivered.

If you are still feeling anxious, remember that never, ever in your life will you speak to a more sympathetic audience. They won't be waiting for you to trip up. You won't get heckles. Everyone will be aware of the difficulties you're facing and there is likely to be unanimous support for you and the speech.

This guide was written by Lawrence Bernstein of [Great Speech Writing](#), who has lots of experience in writing eulogies and is always happy to give further advice.