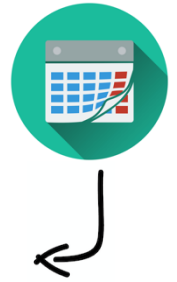


Quick-Start Guide to Writing an Online Obituary

by Melissa Jayne Kinsey, author of
How to Write an Online Obituary: Virtual Memorials Made Simple

Mark your calendar

Unlike a newspaper obituary, an online tribute can be posted weeks or months after your loved one's death. Figure out how much time you have to write. Working backward, set deadlines for finishing each task outlined below. In the meantime, funeral arrangements can be published in the newspaper and posted on the funeral home's website, or use a notification app to update mourners.



Get started by brainstorming

List eight or ten things that remind you of your loved one: pets, places, sounds, scents, objects, foods, hobbies, habits, skills, distinctive physical features, personality traits, typical gestures, song lyrics, quotations, formative events or experiences, hopes and dreams. Consider using a mindmap or brainstorming app to help you sort through this ragbag of memories.

Write a barf draft

Journalists sometimes sit down and bang out a story all in one go. The result is what they call a "barf draft." It may be dreadful, but it's a starting point. You can create your own barf draft, of sorts, by turning each item on your brainstorming list into a sentence or anecdote. Think of it as a mental throwdown of memories and stories. Don't worry if your thoughts aren't in order and you end up with a random string of factoids. The point is to produce some raw material you can massage into shape.



Rearrange your content

Now organize your draft into paragraphs by categorizing similar themes and ideas. For example, descriptions of your loved one's appearance and gestures could form a paragraph. Memories of his or her favorite places, people, and things could form another. Begin with a great quote or story, and end with something people will wake up thinking about tomorrow. There's no need to cover your loved one's life from cradle to grave. Just hit the highlights—and remember that it's okay to be funny!



Polish your draft

This is the fun part. Go over your revised draft carefully, re-examining every sentence. Replace the generic with the specific: why use *walk* when there are delightful words like *amble*, *stroll*, and *sashay*? Why settle for *car* when there are hotrods, cruisers, sedans, wagons, and hatchbacks? Scour your tribute for timeworn clichés. Show no mercy toward phrases like "adored by everyone," "larger than life," and "never knew a stranger." Scrap any sentence or anecdote that's not working. Aim for a length of 800-1,200 words.



Add photos, videos, and music

Haul out that shoebox from under the bed and start reminiscing. Then help everyone else recall the good ol' days by uploading black-and-white snapshots, Polaroids, home movies, music, and audio, such as voicemail messages. Upload photos of documents and objects associated with your loved one, such as a wedding invitation, passport, draft card, postcard, bingo card, love letter, lottery ticket, plane ticket, work uniform, class ring, bowling ball, or a favorite anything: chair, socks, dog, grandkid.



For more advice, ideas, and examples, please visit HowToWriteAnOnlineObit.com.