

Writing your own obituary/eulogy

Why not get started on writing your own obituary? This is your chance to say what you want others to know about you. Do it for yourself: for peace of mind knowing that you have had your say. And do it for your family and friends: that you have helped them cope with a difficult time.

Your best chance of having your wishes honored is to write them down. Writing your own obituary can be part of your life and end-of-life planning. The way you would like to be remembered is part of a careful arranging for yourself should you not be in the best of health or life.

Here is a list to consider: health care directive ("living will"), naming of a power of attorney, life and disability insurance, up-to-date will, appointing of an executor, ethical will, completed organ donation forms, listing of bank and other financial information, listing of usernames and passwords for Internet accounts, wishes for a funeral (or not) or other service, requests for charitable donations, and wishes for interment. (See *Be Prepared: Will, Living Will, Obituary, and More.*)

The concept of an "ethical will" may be unfamiliar. An ethical will is a document that outline a person's values, life's lessons learned, and hopes for the next generation. Rather than money or possessions, the ethical will aims to pass down values, beliefs, and ideals from one generation to the next. (Read more.)

Also keep in mind that making these arrangements does not cause disability or hasten death. Completing these arrangements just makes it easier for others you care about.

Note that laws vary from place to place. My home province of Manitoba, for example, on the government website, provides an excellent guide to wills, estates, powers of attorney, and health care directives. Although addressed to seniors, the information would be useful to adults of any age. Also note that one should seek the advice of a lawyer.

The most important thing is to get started. A natural inclination (especially for us procrastinators) is to put off big projects. But to make a start is important. Don't put off writing your own obituary because it seems too big to finish. Here's the good news: you don't have to worry about finishing it! But you can get started. Perhaps knowing that you do not need to complete it will make it easier to begin.

The second most important thing is to leave your information where it can be found quickly. It's fine to have a back-up copy at your lawyer's or in your safety deposit box, for example, but have a copy close at hand for those entrusted with your affairs when they need them. The website Obit Now maintains a free service for anyone to record their wishes for an obituary, funeral, and other arrangements. If you do sign up, make sure that you leave the username and password available for access after you die.

Make your obituary interesting. "The secret of fascinating obits," says journalist and writing coach Don Fry, "is pushing the resumé into the background." List the facts of your life, but concentrate on anecdotes and recollections. Fry recommends making the core of your work "a few rich paragraphs in the third person, answering this question: 'What do I want people to remember about me?'" (See the article "Want to Live Forever? Write Your Own Obit.")

If you are looking for inspiration, especially for a longer work, then check out the questions on The Remembering Site. This non-profit initiative has a couple of hundred questions for you to answer in order to compose your life history. They range from "Do you have a favorite coffee mug?" to "What was the hardest thing that you ever had to do?" The questions are free for the looking. You may then want to pay the fee of \$25 to register so that you can use their website to actually write your biography.

Writing your own obituary could grow out of – or in to – a personal memoir or family history. For more suggestions, see [Memoir Writing: Ten Tips](#) and [A Family History Writing Workshop](#).

Tips to Writing Your Own Obituary

- **Just get started.** No matter how incomplete it is, it will be of benefit to others.
- **Read other obits for ideas.** See [Ordinary Lives, Extraordinary Stories](#).
- **Say what your life means to you.** This part may be hardest for others to describe if you don't.
- **Find Three Words.** Think of the right three words that would aptly sum up your life and conclude your obituary. (Or, think of six words; see the review [Six Words To Describe A Life?](#))
- **Use this project as an opportunity.** You can, for example, expand your work into a longer [memoir](#) or [family history](#) that you can leave to your descendants. You can also use this as an opportunity to make those other arrangements such as a "living will" and funeral wishes. See [Be Prepared](#).

- **Inspire yourself.** Write an inspiring obituary, then live up to it!
- **Include a recent photo.** As well as one of a younger you, if you wish, with the other information.
- **Leave your composition** in a place where it can be readily accessed when it is needed. Inform your next of kin where this information, as well as your funeral wishes, is stored so it is available when needed.
- **Update as required.**
- **Plan for an exceptional obituary.** Create as interesting and meaningful a life as possible, while you can.