



Appendix G: Traditional Obituary

Some funeral homes offer the service of having an obituary published, sometimes charging a fee. If you are working with a funeral home, this can simplify things for you. Obituaries can be published in newspapers (in print and online) as well as through solely online platforms. Expect that newspapers will charge—by word or line; some online sites charge as well. Online obituaries are generally more affordable and are accessible for a longer period of time. Paid sites are more likely to allow you unlimited length for an obituary and often offer other services, like a guestbook where visitors can leave messages and remembrances.

Components*

Announcement of Death

Begin with the full name, age, and place of residence of the deceased, along with the time and place of death. Common phrases include “died,” “passed away,” “passed on,” “after a long struggle with cancer,” “surrounded by her family.”

Ultimately, the cause of death is the business of the most immediate loved ones. Please keep in mind, however, that if the circumstances of death are sudden, announcing the cause of death, either in the obituary or in some other manner, may keep loved ones from having to explain what happened over and over to every friend and neighbor.

Unfortunately, some causes of death carrying more cultural baggage—suicide, drug overdose, AIDS, etc. Naming these can help lessen the taboo, as well as decrease the chances for complicated grief for survivors who might feel pressured to keep a secret.

Biographical Sketch

“Sketch” is the key word here, with the following traditional information included:

- Date and place of birth
- Parents’ names
- Date and place of marriage (if any)

* Adapted from “[How to Write an Obituary—A Step-by-Step Guide](#),” The Remembrance Process, accessed July 15, 2021.

- Birth name of spouse (if any)
- Education, work, and/or military service

Do mention one or two significant contributions and recognitions; there may be many, but a published obituary may not be the place to be able to name them. If there is a memorial service or funeral, the biography in the program often includes more details than the obituary allows.

Provide a meaningful example to illustrate and bring life to the obituary, whether it is a quirky habit, a favorite recipe, or a touching expression of love.

One of the most important elements: the impact of the deceased on loved ones and/or their community. This can be a challenge emotionally, or can cause concern about being immodest, if you attempt writing this as part of writing your own obituary. That said, it can be a juicy prompt for writing your *spiritual* obituary.

Family

It is said that the funeral/memorial service is for the living. The obituary is for the living too, and another important part is listing survivors and those who preceded you in death. Depending on how long the obituary can be, you may have to choose who is mentioned by name and who is mentioned in a more general way (such as “seven grandchildren” rather than naming each one).

Many family constellations have gotten more complex over the past several decades. Think about all who are considered close family—chosen family, step-parents, step-children, ex-spouses, and half-siblings are more likely to be included (or excluded) if you do so when you write your own obituary.

Service Times

This section cannot be written ahead of time. However, it is a component of a traditional obituary and as such, is included here as a guide for those who will finalize the publication of your obituary. Consult your local papers for the specific order of service times, or better yet, leave this part up to your funeral director if you choose to use one. The essentials:

- Full date, time, and place of the service
- Time, full date, and place of burial or interment, if applicable
- Time, full date, and place of visitation(s), if applicable

Note: Choosing the date and time of the service before consulting your chosen officiant may be more convenient for the funeral staff, but it is most definitely not convenient for the officiant and may foreclose their participation if they are not available. If you hope to have a specific person officiate, bring them into the scheduling process early on.

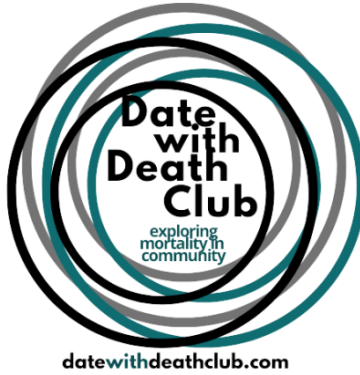
Special Messages

At the end, a special message is sometimes found, such as “in lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to...” or “special thanks to the staff at _____ for...” or “we will always carry your memory in our hearts.” These messages are optional but can be a way of including something that did not fit elsewhere.

Photos

Photos are a welcome reminder and a way for readers to recognize the deceased among other obituaries. Identification can be more challenging if a forty-year-old photo is used. Two photos are sometimes used—a favorite from long ago and a more recent one. Typically, the inclusion of photos adds to the cost of the obituary.

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Basic Obituary Worksheet

Full name as I want it to appear: _____

Other important names (last names, previous names, nicknames, etc.) and information that is meaningful to me about them:

Date of birth: _____ Birthplace: _____

Parents' names: _____

Date and place of marriage: _____

Education highlights: _____

Work/profession highlights: _____

Military service: _____

Accomplishments: _____

Meaningful illustration: _____

Predeceased family members and loved ones: _____

Be sure to name these family members: _____

Destination of memorial donations: _____

in lieu of flowers?

Include in expressing gratitude: _____

Description of photos to use: _____

Anything else? _____

