

How to write an obituary, step by step

Follow this simple obituary format to celebrate and honor someone who has passed away

By Sara Slinker

Obituaries serve as a way to communicate the death of a loved one and to announce important information about funeral or visitation services. Obituaries tell the story of the deceased and allow loved ones to celebrate and honor his or her life.

Writing an obituary for a loved one can seem like an overwhelming task during an already difficult time. Many people struggle with knowing how to write an obituary and follow the correct obituary format for names, dates, and order of content.

This step-by-step guide on how to write an obituary includes helpful information, tips, and obituary examples, so you can write an obituary that is respectful and meaningful.

Getting started writing an obituary

Before you begin crafting an obituary for your loved one, the following information should be gathered:

- Deceased's full name as you would like it to be published
- Date of birth
- Place of birth
- Date of death
- Photo of deceased
- Funeral/memorial service information

Announcement of death

A standard obituary format begins with the following information about the deceased:

- Full name, including first, middle, maiden, and last names, and suffixes, such as Jr. or Sr.
- Age at the time of death
- City and state of most current residence
- Time and place of death

- Cause of death (optional)

The announcement of death can be communicated in different ways. “Passed away,” “died,” and “left this world” are common phrases to announce the death of a loved one.

You are under no obligation to include the cause of death in the obituary; although, it may keep you from repeatedly explaining what happened.

Obituary example

Jane (Smith) Doe, age 80, of Capital City, passed away June 1, 2019, in her home from natural causes.

Biographical sketch

In addition to announcing the death, an obituary tells the story of a person’s life. The obituary shouldn’t be a full biography; instead, it should highlight important events, milestones, and achievements in the deceased’s life.

Important events, milestones, and achievements you may want to highlight include:

- Dates of birth, graduation, marriage, and retirement
- Hometown and former places of residence
- Education and degrees earned
- Employment and positions held
- Military service, ranks, or awards
- Community involvement
- Hobbies or passions

Obituary example

Jane Doe was born in April 1939 in Capital City. She attended Capital City Public Schools and earned a bachelor’s degree in business from Business University. She was married to her husband, John Doe, for more than 50 years. Jane was actively involved with her church and regularly volunteered with United Way. She loved traveling and gardening and was an avid reader.

Family members

Obituaries typically list survivors of the deceased and those who preceded your loved one in death. Full names, as well as location, are included in listing the family.

Choosing which family members to name in an obituary can cause some controversy. The

typical obituary format for listing family includes immediate family members: spouse, children, parents, grandchildren, and siblings. Grandchildren; great-grandchildren; and extended family members, such as cousins, nieces, or nephews, are typically not named but instead listed numerically. Other people, such as extended family members or close friends, can also be listed in an obituary if you think your loved one would have wanted to include them.

Obituary example

Jane Doe is survived by her husband, John Doe, of Capital City, two children, their spouses, eight grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her parents and sister.

Funeral information

Obituaries are typically published before a funeral service and usually have a section that announces the funeral or memorial service information. Include the key details, so others know how they can pay their respects:

- Date
- Time
- Location of the visitation
- Funeral, burial, or memorial service

Be sure to indicate in the obituary if the services are private to close family and friends.

Obituary example

The visitation will be held at Smith's Funeral Home on July 15, 2019, at 10 a.m. Following the visitation, a private burial service for family and close friends will take place at Capital City Cemetery.

Final steps

Proofreading is the final step in writing an obituary. Look for any factual, spelling, or grammar issues. Since obituaries are written during an emotional time, you may want to have someone else review it from another perspective.

After you're sure the obituary is just as you'd like it, submit it by email to clinehansondahlke@gmail.com for publication.