

Preparing a Eulogy Tribute

Think of the person

A good Eulogy doesn't just tell the audience about the person - in a sense it brings the person to life in their imagination and gives them something by which to remember them. You can do this by telling stories about the person; the happy things, the funny things, the sad things, the unusual things that happened, which sum up their life. Talking about these and the enduring qualities which describe what they were really like as a person, will help you build a picture for the audience with your words. Some suggestions:

Think big: What are the major moments in youth, middle or old age, at work or play, at home or away, alone or with others? What are the highlights of their life story? Were they committed to something? What were their talents?

Think small: What are the little characteristics - what he or she did or said, habits and foibles, pastimes and passions, likes and dislikes? One small detail can be worth a thousand words.

Think sad: What were the challenges, the difficult times? How did they cope and what does this say about them? Should reference be made to the manner of their death if it was particularly shocking or untimely?

Think happy: When were they at their best and happiest? What gave them pleasure?

Think inside: How do you feel about them? What were they to you? What sort of things did you do with them?

Think outside: Who else was close to them? How do they feel about the person? The hardest task in preparing any talk is often not so much deciding what you're going to say as deciding how to organise it into a structure

with a beginning, middle and end. There are no hard and fast rules, but here are some suggestions about preparation.

Do I write it word for word? Yes, if it helps. But if you do, speak it out to yourself as you're writing otherwise your words may sound stilted when you actually come to deliver it. When we speak normally we don't speak in perfect sentences. What's important isn't the grammar but the points you are making and the stories you are telling. So if you can, don't write word for word, but put key points on a card to have with you. An exception to this is where you are using a piece of poetry or song, in which case you may want the exact words to hand.

Where do I start? If you don't know how to start, don't waste time worrying about it. Write the middle first - the main part - and think about how to begin afterwards.

How do I structure it? Decide the best order for what you're going to say:

Chronological? This would suit the life-story approach, beginning with their childhood and working through the highlights of their life.

Reverse chronological? Beginning with the present or recent past, then working backwards.

Three-point plan? Decide three key things to say and the order for saying them.

Theme? Choose one big thing and give examples, anecdotes, stories to explain and illustrate it.

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How will I begin? Avoid clichés like ‘We are gathered here today’ and begin as you mean to go on, with something special to that person. In fact, you don’t really need an introduction, people know who you are talking about and why everyone’s there. It may be easiest and best to get straight to your point.

For example:

There are many things for which she will be remembered, but what we will never forget is her sense of humour.

How will I end? If you intend to play a piece of music or give a reading after your Eulogy, you can end by explaining why you’ve chosen it. If not, then a good way could be to end with a short sentence of farewell, maybe the very last thing you said to them - or wanted to say to them - before they died.

Who can help me check my facts? Getting places, names and dates wrong can distract your audience so make sure you check any factual information about the person.

Here are some prompts to help you get started:

Who am I speaking to?

How would the person like to be remembered?

What made them special? Favourite pastimes and interests, likes and dislikes?

When were they happiest?

Who was really close to them?

What did I really like about them? What did other people really like about them?

What are the highlights of their life story?

If I could say only three things about them, what would they be?

Who can help me check my facts?

Do I want someone else to give the Eulogy on my behalf on the day?

Is anyone else planning to speak about the person at the funeral? Do we need to avoid saying the same thing twice?