

GUIDE TO WRITING ON OBITUARY

We are deeply sorry for your loss and pray that this information helps you write an obituary that will celebrate the life of your loved one.

If you're in a hurry, skip ahead to the obituary template and example by going straight to item number five. But we recommend at least scanning the numbered obituary writing tips below before you get started.

Step-By-Step Guide to Writing an Obituary

- 1.** Grab a copy of your local paper. Most newspapers require obituaries to be written in a specific style, so take a look at your paper when looking for a guideline on how to write an obituary. You also should ask your funeral home if they have templates. If you plan on submitting to other newspapers, try to get a copy, or check to see if they print obituaries online. If you don't follow the newspaper's style, they will likely rewrite your obituary, which could introduce errors into the write-up.
- 2.** Set a price limit if you're on a budget. Most newspapers charge by the column inch, and lengthy tributes can cost hundreds of dollars. Many funeral homes will include a basic obituary as part of the funeral package. If your funeral home will be submitting the obit, ask them what the word limit is, and how much it will cost you for each additional inch. Because the word count per inch varies depending on the column width and font size used in the newspaper, call your funeral home or local newspaper and ask them roughly how many words are in a column inch for obituaries. Also ask them if there are any length restrictions. This will give you a rough idea of how much you should write.
- 3.** Ask for the deadline time. Most daily morning papers have a deadline of 2 or 3 p.m., so you'll want to submit your obituary as soon as possible to ensure accuracy, especially if you want it to run the next day. Newspapers often make exceptions and take obituaries after deadline, but just remember that doing this increases the chances that an error will appear because editors might not have enough time to proofread it.
- 4.** Decide what you want to include. If you don't have all of the information you need, you'll want to make phone calls and gather these facts as soon as possible, preferably before you start writing. Again, if you're in a hurry and want to skip ahead to the templates, go straight to item number five.

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The basic obituary usually includes:

- Full name of the deceased
- Age
- Date of Birth
- City and state of residence where they were living when they passed away
- Name of significant other (alive or deceased)
- Time, date and place of viewing, burial, wake and memorial service arrangements–If you don't have this information yet, you can always write something like, "funeral arrangements are being made by ABC Funeral Home and will be announced at a later date." That way those who are interested can contact the funeral home for more information. If you plan on repeating the obituary, you can include the details in a future issue.

Other things you might want to include:

- City and state of birth
- City and state of other residences–You may want to include this if: most of the person's life was spent living in a different place from where they died, they lived in a town or city that was important to them or if they were well known or did something notable in a previous town.
- Parents' names and residences–Some people only include these if they're still alive, but others give tribute to a deceased parent (ex: "daughter of the late John Smith").
- Children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren's names and residences–If this list gets too long, you can eliminate the names and locations (ex: "five grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren").
- Other family members (nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, etc.) and special friends–Again, this can make your obituary quite long (and can get political if you include some names, but not others), so you may want to leave these people out unless you have a small family or are prepared to pay for a costly obituary.
- Special pets
- Activities–Include churches, clubs, organizations, volunteer groups, hobbies and other things that were important to your loved one.
- Vocation and places of employment
- Notable accomplishments
- Degrees and schools attended
- Military service
- Date of marriage
- Personality traits and anecdotes

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- How they died—Most people don't include this information, but it's up to you. Use good judgment, especially if the death was gruesome, involved illegal activity or was a suicide. However, if someone died while in the war or during a major catastrophe, you may want to include that information.
- Where people should make a memorial contribution. If you'd rather people not send flowers, tell them where they can make a contribution. Again, think about what your loved one, not you, would want. If you prefer no flowers it is helpful to use this wording: *Please, in lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to....*

5. Write the obituary. Now that you have all of the information you need, it's time to sit down and write the obituary. Here's a basic template that you can use to get started. We've also included several sample obituaries on the last page of this document to help guide you.

Basic Obituary Template

NAME, AGE, of RESIDENCE, died (passed away, went to heaven, etc.), DATE (cause of death optional).

HE/SHE was born (PLACE, DATE OF BIRTH, PARENTS). NAME graduated from SCHOOL and received DEGREE from SCHOOL. HE/SHE was married to SPOUSE'S NAME (date of wedding optional).

INSERT OPTIONAL BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION HERE: Employment history, accomplishments, organizations, award, activities, etc.

HE/SHE was survived by CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN, ETC. (Make sure to separate each entry with a semicolon. See the example below.)

Funeral arrangements will be held TIME, DATE and PLACE.

Most obituaries follow a very basic noun/verb format. This may seem dry and boring, but this is the style at most newspapers. However, if it looks like the newspaper offers more flexibility and you feel like being creative, by all means go for it. The example above is just an example, and styles differ from paper to paper. Try to mimic the style of other obituaries in your newspaper so it will not be rewritten. Just focus on getting the format right and don't sweat the small stuff such as abbreviations, days vs. dates, courtesy titles, etc. Editors will fix these things to conform with the newspaper's style rules.

- 6.** Have someone else, preferably a close family member or friend, proof the obituary. It is always a good idea to have someone else read the obituary before you submit it to the newspaper. This person should not only check for spelling and grammatical errors, but they also should make sure you didn't leave out important family members or anything else that was inadvertently excluded. As you're writing and reading the obituary, think about how your loved one would want others to remember him/her. If fishing was his life, you should include that. But if he was in the chess club just to pass the time, you might want to leave that out. If she was close to her extended family, you might want to make an effort to get those names in and leave something else out.
- 7.** Submit an electronic copy. Ninety-percent of all obituary errors start with people (or funeral homes) who submit a typed or handwritten copy. Even if you type it on your computer and fax it in, someone at the newspaper will have to scan it in or retype it, increasing the chance that errors will be introduced into the obituary. If the funeral home is submitting the obituary on your behalf, make sure that they plan to e-mail the announcement to the paper. If not, you should submit it to the newspaper yourself.
- 8.** Request to receive a proof from the newspaper before your obituary is printed if you're worried about mistakes. You probably don't have the time or energy to worry about it at this point, but if you're concerned about errors, ask if you can see a proof before it goes to press. You may have to come into the newspaper office or have a copy faxed to you.
- 9.** Submit the obituary to other newspapers. If there are other towns where your loved one lived and had a number of family or friends, you may want to submit the obituary to those newspapers. Just check those newspapers' guidelines and modify the style of the obituary as necessary.
- 10.** Check the obituary when it prints in the paper. If there are errors, call your newspaper to let them know, they possibly will reprint it the next day for free.

Please see the following page for detailed examples of three different types of obituaries.

Your HPPC Congregational Care staff hopes that the Peace that passes all understanding fills the void in your heart and lives as you process your loss.

SAMPLE OBITUARIES

STANDARD

MARY JANE SMITH, 88, of Dallas, died Wednesday. She was born to the late John and Jane Green, Nov. 11, 1919, in Dallas, TX. Mary graduated from Highland Park High School in 1938 and received a BA in English from the University of Texas in 1942. She married the late John Smith in 1943, and they lived together in Athens, TX, before relocating back to Dallas in 1960. Mary was a high school English teacher until she retired in 1984 and was passionate about making a difference in the lives of her students. She founded the Dallas Reads program for underprivileged children in 1968 and was honored with the Dallas County Teacher of the Year award in 1966 and 1970. Mary was an active member of Highland Park Presbyterian Church, Dallas Rotary Club and the Dallas County Book Club. She loved to travel, and took 20 cruise trips with her husband in her lifetime. Mary is survived by four children: Jane Doe and Samantha Andrews, of Ft. Lauderdale; Jennifer Brown, of New York City; and Mike Smith, of Miami. She also is survived by eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Please, in lieu of flowers, the family is requesting that donations be made to Highland Park Presbyterian Church. A viewing will be held at 7 p.m. Friday at Green Family Funeral Home. Burial will be held at 1 p.m. Saturday at Oakland Cemetery.

OLDER PERSON

JOHN IRVING MACREADY, 92, of Shreveport LA, died April 30th, 2013. “Johnny” MacReady, son of Irving and Dorothy MacReady, loving husband of Irene Smith MacReady, passed away on April 30th at his home in Shreveport, LA after a long battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife Irene, and two sons Abraham and Joshua. He is also survived by six grandchildren and three great grandchildren, all living in the Shreveport area. MacReady worked as an auto mechanic until his retirement in 1983, bringing his love of cars home with him to his own garage on many occasions. He also loved fishing, deer hunting, and playing with his grandchildren. He will be greatly missed by his family and friends. Services will be held this Tuesday at Jones and Sons funeral home at 6 pm.

YOUNGER PERSON

MARGARET ELIZABETH GREEN, 32, of Chicago, IL, passed away Sunday, April 28th, after a fatal car accident. She was born in Chicago, IL on October 21st 1980 to Michael and Susan Jones. Margaret graduated from Lincoln Way High School and went on to receive a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Art Institute of Chicago. She was married to Jason Green on May 15th, 2009. Margaret took pride in working as an administrative coordinator at The Art Institute of Chicago, and in her spare time painted and doted on her dog Pickles. She loved to jog along the lakefront in the mornings and was training for her first marathon. Margaret is survived by her brother Nathan Jones, her nieces Claire and Marissa Jones, her parents Susan and Michael, and her loving husband Jason. Her wonderful spirit, joy, and talents will be celebrated at an 11 am funeral service at All Saints Presbyterian Church on N. Halsted St. The burial will be at 3 pm at Graceland Cemetery.