

# HOW TO WRITE YOUR OWN OBITUARY

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## Savvy Living



*Can you provide any tips on how to write your own obituary? At age 80, I am in the process of preplanning my funeral and would also like to take a crack at writing my own newspaper obit too.*

For many people, writing their own obituary can be a nice way to sum up their life, not to mention avoid mistakes that sometimes occur when obituaries are hurriedly written at the time of death. Here's what you should know, along with some tips and tools to help you write one.

### OBIT TIPS

Before you start writing your obit, your first step is to check with the newspaper you want it to run in. Some newspapers have specific style guidelines or restrictions on length, some only accept obituaries directly from funeral homes, and some only publish obituaries written by newspaper staff members.

If your newspaper accepts self-written obits, find out if they have a template to guide you, or check with your funeral provider. Most funeral homes provide forms for basic information, and will write the full obituary for you as part of the services they provide.

Also, most newspapers charge by the word, line or column inch, so the cost to publish your obituary will depend on your newspaper's rate and the length of your obit. Most obituaries range between 200 and 500 words.

### WHAT TO INCLUDE

The most basic information in an obituary usually includes your full name (and nickname if desired),

age, date of birth, date of death, where you were living when you died, the name of a significant other (and whether he or she is alive or dead) and details of the funeral service (including whether the service will be open to the public or private). If you will have a funeral service open to the public, include the date, time, and location of service.

Other relevant information you may also want to include is: the cause of your death; your place of birth and parents' names; your other survivors including your children, other relatives, friends and pets and where they live; family members who preceded your death; high school and colleges you attended and degrees earned; your work history and military service; your hobbies, accomplishments and any awards you received; your church or religious affiliations; any clubs, civic and fraternal organizations you were members of; and any charities you feel strongly about that you would like people to donate to either in addition to or in lieu of flowers or other gifts.

Also, include a photograph of yourself. Finally, make sure to leave copies of your obit with your funeral director and immediate family members.

## NEED HELP?

If you need some help writing your obituary there are free online resources you can turn to like *legacy.com*, *obituaryguide.com* or *caring.com/obituary* that offer tips, templates and sample obits.

If you want your obit to be more memorable, purchase the ObitKit (*obitkit.com*). This is a \$20 workbook that helps you gather the details of your life so you can write an obituary that will reflect your personality and story.

## LEGACY LETTER OR ETHICAL WILL

If you're interested in writing your own obituary, you may also be interested in writing a legacy letter or ethical will.

A legacy letter is a heartfelt letter that you write to your loved ones sharing with them your feelings, wishes, regrets, gratitude and advice. An ethical will is not a legal document, but an extension of a legacy letter that many people use to express their feelings as well as explain the elements in their legal will, give information about the money and possessions they're passing on and anything else they want to communicate.

For help in creating these, there are lots of resources available like *celebrationsoflife.net* and *personallegacyadvisors.com* that offer practical information, examples and materials you can purchase to help you put them together.

**Savvy Living is written by Jim Miller, a regular contributor to the *NBC Today Show* and author of "The Savvy Living" book. Any links in this article are offered as a service and there is no endorsement of any product. These articles are offered as a helpful and informative service to our friends and may not always reflect this organization's official position on some topics. Jim invites you to send your senior questions to: Savvy Living, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070.**

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