

How to write a eulogy, step by step

Key facts

- NFDA recommends 2 to 5 minutes with 1 to 3 stories if you're not the only speaker, or 7 to 10 minutes as sole speaker (NFDA, Remembering A Life, checked 2026-09-21).
- Toastmasters International's core rule: "a eulogy should not be the chronology of a life but a tribute to it," and should be limited to "two or three main points" (Toastmasters International, Delivering Eulogies, checked 2026-09-21).
- AARP's writer Garry Schaeffer says the most common mistake is describing someone's qualities in the abstract instead of with a specific story that shows them (AARP, checked 2026-09-21).
- Family, friends, clergy and funeral conductors all commonly deliver eulogies, and in many faiths clergy deliver it themselves (Everplans, checked 2026-09-21).
- No law regulates what a eulogy must contain, and delivering your own costs nothing.
- If officiating clergy deliver the eulogy as part of the service, the FTC's Funeral Rule treats their honorarium as a "cash advance item" the funeral home may bill back to you, and it must disclose in writing if it adds its own fee (Federal Trade Commission, checked 2026-09-21).
- At VA national cemeteries, federal regulation says VA will "respect and defer to the expressed wishes of the personal representative for the content and conduct of a committal or memorial service" (38 CFR § 38.619(c), checked 2026-09-21).

What should go in your eulogy checklist?

Print this list or save it with your notes.

- ☐ Confirmed whether you're the only speaker or one of several
- ☐ Asked the funeral director, celebrant or officiant how much time you have
- ☐ Brainstormed the person's qualities and a specific memory tied to each
- ☐ Called 2 to 3 people who knew them well for their own stories
- ☐ Chosen a theme and 2 to 3 stories rather than a full biography
- ☐ Drafted an opening that states your relationship to the person
- ☐ Drafted the stories, in the order they'll be told
- ☐ Drafted a short, consoling closing line
- ☐ Read the draft aloud and timed it against your target length
- ☐ Had someone else review the draft for tone and balance
- ☐ Practiced out loud more than once, including the hardest lines
- ☐ Printed a backup copy or brought notes
- ☐ Saved the final text for the family's records