

Writing an Obituary

A Step-By-Step Guide to Writing an Obituary

1. Obtain 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*. If you plan on submitting to other newspapers, try to get a copy, or check to see if they print obits 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 you hundreds of dollars. The Cremation Center of Kansas City includes a free, basic obituary, posted on its web page, as part of our cremation services. Your funeral director will be able to assist in helping estimate the obituary price for the Kansas City Star.

3. Deadline time. Most daily papers have a deadline of 4 or 5 p.m., so you'll want to submit your obit as soon as possible to ensure accuracy, especially if you want it to run the next day. If the obituary is to include the publication of a photograph, the deadline is earlier in the day.

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 No. 5.**

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.

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--*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*

--*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.

5. Write the obit. Now that you have all of the information you need, it's time to sit down and write the obit. Here's a basic template that you can use to get started. We also included a sample obituary below to help you out.

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, activities, etc.

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

A service will be held TIME, DATE and PLACE.

Here's a sample obituary:

Mary Jane Doe, 88, of Overland Park, died Wednesday.

She was born to the late Donald and Rita Green, Nov. 11, 1919, in Savannah, Ga. Mary graduated from Memorial High School in 1938 and received a BA in English from the University of Georgia in 1942. She married the late John Smith in 1943, and they lived together in Athens, Ga., before relocating to Miami 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 Miami Reads program for underprivileged children in 1968 and was honored with the Dade County Teacher of the Year award in 1966 and 1970.

Mary was an active member of First Baptist Miami Church, Miami Rotary Club and the Dade County

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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.

In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting that donations be made out to (Insert Here).

A memorial service will be held, Friday, (Insert date) at 7 p.m. at (insert location name and address).

Most obits 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 your 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 obits 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 to 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 obit 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. Submission of the obituary to the Cremation Center of Kansas City. Please submit your obituary to the Cremation Center of Kansas City via email. You may incorporate the obituary within the body of the email or by attachment of a Microsoft Word® file. If you are submitting a photo for publication, be sure to attach the photo to your email as a jpeg file and **not a pdf file**. We will crop or make necessary image adjustments to accommodate the requirements of the newspaper(s) and will electronically submit the obituary to the newspaper(s).

10. Check the obit when it prints in the paper. If there are errors, and the Cremation Center of Kansas City submitted the obituary, please notify us immediately. If the family submitted the obituary, call your newspaper to let them know.