



## Writing and Submitting an Obituary: A Guide

An obituary serves as a tribute to the deceased, providing an account of their life, announcing their death, and sharing details about the planned funeral or memorial service. Below are helpful tips and resources, including obituary templates, to guide you in drafting a meaningful obituary for publication in local newspapers and online.

If you need additional help, our **Cooperative Memorial Society (CMS)** funeral service providers offer assistance with creating and submitting obituaries. This service is available for an extra fee and can help ensure the obituary meets newspaper and/or website guidelines while capturing the essence of your loved one's life. Be sure to inquire with your funeral provider about this option if you prefer professional support.

### **Step 1: Review Your Local Newspaper's Style**

Most newspapers require obituaries to follow specific formatting guidelines. Start by reviewing your local paper or asking your funeral home if they provide templates. If you plan to submit to multiple newspapers, be sure to check each publication's requirements, as styles can vary. Not following these guidelines may result in editors rewriting the obituary, potentially introducing errors. Many newspapers also offer their formats online for reference.

### **Step 2: Create Two Versions**

Consider creating two versions of the obituary to meet different needs:

#### **A Shorter Version for Newspapers**

Newspapers often charge based on word count or column inches. A concise version helps control costs while still sharing essential information, such as:

- Full name of the deceased

- Age, date of death, and city of residence

- Names of close family members

- Time, date, and location of the funeral or memorial service

You can also include a sentence directing readers to the funeral home's website for a more detailed obituary, such as:

*"For a complete obituary and details about [Name]'s life, please visit [Funeral Home Website]."*

#### **A Comprehensive Version for the Funeral Home Website**

A longer version can include additional personal details, anecdotes, and a fuller account

of the deceased's life. This version is ideal for sharing on the funeral home's website or other online platforms, where there are no word count limitations.

### **Step 3: Set a Budget**

Obituaries are often charged by the column inch, and longer entries can become expensive. Funeral service providers may offer obituary assistance for an additional fee. Request cost estimates and adjust the newspaper version's length accordingly. To avoid unexpected charges, ask your funeral home or newspaper for specific word-count guidelines and confirm if there are any length restrictions.

### **Step 4: Be Aware of Deadlines**

Daily newspapers typically have afternoon submission deadlines, often between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. To ensure the obituary is published on time and free of errors, submit it as early as possible. Late submissions are sometimes accepted but can increase the risk of inaccuracies due to rushed editing.

### **Step 5: Gather Essential Information**

Before writing, collect all relevant details about the deceased. Missing information can be obtained through phone calls to family and friends. Below is a checklist of common details included in obituaries:

Basic Information:

- Full name of the deceased

- Age, date of birth, and city/province of residence at the time of passing

- Significant other's name (alive or deceased)

- Time, date, and location of viewing, burial, wake, or memorial service. If plans are incomplete, note, *"Funeral arrangements are being handled by [Funeral Home] and will be announced later."*

Optional Details:

- Birthplace (city/province)

- Significant previous residences

- Names of parents (alive or deceased)

- Names or count of children, grandchildren, and other family members

- Special friends or pets

- Hobbies, clubs, and volunteer work

- Career, education, and military service

- Marriage date and other life milestones

- Personality traits or anecdotes

- Cause of death (optional)

- Memorial donation instructions (e.g., *"Please consider donating to [Charity] in memory of [Name]."*)

### **Step 6: Write the Obituary**

Using the gathered details, write the obituary. Begin with the shorter version for the newspaper to ensure it meets space requirements and includes a link or reference to the longer version. Then expand the content for the funeral home's website, including additional personal touches and a more detailed narrative.

### **Step 7: Proofread for Accuracy**

Before submission, have a trusted family member or friend review the obituary for spelling, grammar, and factual accuracy. They may also help ensure no important details or loved ones are overlooked.

### **Step 8: Submit Electronically**

Whenever possible, submit the obituary electronically. This reduces the chance of errors compared to handwritten or faxed submissions. If the funeral home is handling the submission, confirm they will send it electronically. If not, email it to the newspaper yourself.

### **Step 9: Request a Proof**

Ask the newspaper for a proof before printing. This may require a visit to their office or receiving a copy via email or fax. Reviewing a proof allows you to catch and correct errors before publication.

### **Step 10: Consider Submitting to Other Newspapers**

If the deceased had ties to other towns, consider submitting the obituary to additional newspapers. Be sure to review their guidelines and adjust the obituary's style as needed.

### **Step 11: Check the Published Obituary**

Once the obituary is printed, review it for accuracy. If there are errors, contact the newspaper immediately—they may offer to reprint it at no cost.

By creating two versions of the obituary, you can manage costs while still honouring your loved one with a complete and heartfelt tribute. Scroll down to access free templates and get started.

### **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.) Funeral arrangements will be held [TIME], [DATE] and [PLACE].

Most obituaries adhere to a straightforward noun/verb format, which may feel plain, but it's the standard style for many newspapers. If the newspaper allows for more creativity and you'd like to personalize the tone, feel free to do so. The provided example is just a guideline, as styles

can vary widely between publications. To ensure your submission is accepted without significant edits, try to match the style of obituaries already published in your chosen newspaper. Focus on getting the structure and key details right—don't worry too much about minor details like abbreviations, specific date formats, or courtesy titles, as editors will adjust these to fit the publication's style.

### **Standard Obituary Template**

[FULL NAME], [AGE], of [CITY], passed away on [DAY/DATE]. [FIRST NAME] was born to the late [PARENTS' NAMES] on [BIRTH DATE], in [BIRTHPLACE]. [First Name] graduated from [HIGH SCHOOL NAME] in [YEAR] and received a [DEGREE] in [FIELD OF STUDY] from [COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY] in [YEAR]. [He/She/They] married [SPOUSE'S NAME] in [YEAR], and together they lived in [CITY/CITIES] before settling in [CITY]. [First Name] was a [PROFESSION] for [NUMBER] years and was passionate about [BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WORK OR IMPACT]. [He/She/They] was also active in [COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, CHURCHES, CLUBS, ETC.] and loved [HOBBIES OR INTERESTS]. [First Name] is survived by [LIST OF SURVIVING FAMILY MEMBERS, INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS AND LOCATIONS]. [Optional: Include predeceased family members or mention pets.] A [VIEWING/SERVICE] will be held at [TIME/DAY/DATE] at [LOCATION]. Burial will follow at [LOCATION]. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to [CHARITY OR ORGANIZATION NAME].

### **Example Filled Template**

Mary Jane Smith, 88, of Calgary, passed away on Wednesday. Mary was born to the late John and Jane Green on Nov. 11, 1919, in Calgary, AB. Mary graduated from Highland Park High School in 1938 and earned a BA in English from the University of Calgary in 1942. She married the late John Smith in 1943, and they lived in Edmonton before relocating to Calgary in 1960. Mary was a high school English teacher until her retirement in 1984 and was dedicated to making a difference in the lives of her students. She founded the Calgary Reads program for underprivileged children in 1968 and received the CBE Teacher of the Year award in 1966 and 1970. Mary was an active member of Highland Park Presbyterian Church, Calgary Rotary Club, and the Bridgeland Book Club. She loved traveling and enjoyed 20 cruise trips with her husband during her lifetime. Mary is survived by four children: Jane Doe and Samantha Andrews, of Medicine Hat; Jennifer Brown, of Lethbridge; and Mike Smith, of Taber. She also leaves behind eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

A viewing will be held at 7 p.m. on Friday at [Name of Funeral Home]. Burial will follow at 1 p.m. on Saturday at Queen's Park Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to Highland Park Presbyterian Church.