



## Writing and Submitting an Obituary A Practical Guide for CMS Members

An obituary lets friends and family know about your loved one—and it can become an important historical record for your family.

An obituary is a tribute to the person who has died. It usually shares a short account of their life, announces their death, and provides details about any funeral or memorial service.

If you would like help, our CMS funeral service providers can assist with creating and submitting obituaries (typically for an additional fee). Ask your funeral provider about this option if you prefer professional support.

### Quick start (10 minutes)

- 1) Gather the key facts using the checklist on page 2.
- 2) Draft a short newspaper version first (to control costs).
- 3) Expand a longer version for the funeral home website or online sharing.
- 4) Proofread carefully, then submit electronically and request a proof if available.

### Optional help: Using AI to draft an obituary

AI (artificial intelligence) tools can help you turn notes into a first draft. Think of AI as a writing assistant—not an expert. You are always in control, and you should review and edit the draft for accuracy and tone.

#### How to use AI safely and effectively

- Start with your own notes: names, dates, relationships, service details, and 3–6 personal memories or qualities.
- Protect privacy: avoid sharing sensitive details (for example: exact home address, banking information, or details that could increase fraud risk).
- Check every fact: AI can make mistakes. Verify spelling of names, dates, locations, and relationships.
- Keep it family-centred: adjust wording so it sounds like you and reflects your loved one’s voice and values.
- Make two drafts: ask AI for a short newspaper version and a longer website version.

If you're new to AI, here's a simple approach:

- 1) Write a few bullet points about your loved one (use the worksheet in this guide).
- 2) Copy those bullets into an AI tool and ask for a draft obituary.
- 3) Edit the draft, then have another family member proofread it.

#### **Copy/paste prompts you can use in AI**

Prompt A (short newspaper version): "Using the notes below, write a newspaper obituary under 120 words. Keep it simple and factual. Include service details."

Prompt B (longer website version): "Using the notes below, write a warm 350–500 word obituary for a funeral home website. Include a short story or personality details."

Prompt C (tone options): "Rewrite this obituary draft in a more [traditional / plain language / faith-based / celebratory] tone while keeping all facts the same."

Prompt D (proofread): "Check this draft for clarity and grammar. Do not change names, dates, or service details."

Important: If you use an online tool provided by a funeral home (such as an obituary writing assistant), follow their on-screen steps carefully to ensure your draft is saved or shared with them.

### **Optional tool: McInnis & Holloway Obituary Writing Assistant**

If your funeral provider is McInnis & Holloway, you may choose to use their online Obituary Writing Assistant to help you draft a more personalized obituary. The draft should be reviewed carefully for accuracy before you share it or submit it for publication.

#### **How it works (important tips)**

- The more information you enter, the more complete the draft will be.
- It's okay to leave fields blank. Some tools allow you to type "not applicable" to remove prompts.
- After you click "Submit," the draft may take a short time to generate and you may not see a loading indicator—click only once and wait.
- Your draft is not published online or sent to newspapers until you approve it.
- Follow the on-screen steps to ensure your draft is saved/shared with the funeral home (for example: paste the obituary, then click "Continue" and "Finish" if prompted).
- Always proofread and edit the draft before sharing.

McInnis & Holloway Obituary Writing Assistant: <https://www.mhfh.com/writing-assistant-tools/obituary-writing-assistant>

#### **CMS note**

Not all funeral homes use the same tools or submission steps. If you're working with a different provider, ask them what options they offer for drafting and submitting obituaries.

## Step-by-step process

### Step 1: Check the newspaper style

Newspapers often have formatting rules and may charge by length. Review the obituary section of your local paper or ask your funeral home if they have a template.

### Step 2: Create two versions

A short version for newspapers (to manage cost) and a longer version for the funeral home website or online platforms.

### Step 3: Set a budget

Ask for pricing or word-count guidance. Adjust the newspaper version to fit your budget before you submit.

### Step 4: Watch deadlines

Daily newspapers may have afternoon deadlines. Submit as early as possible to reduce the risk of errors.

### Step 5: Gather information

Use the checklist on page 2. Missing details can often be confirmed by calling family and friends.

### Step 6: Write the obituary

Use the templates at the end of this guide. Start with the short version, then expand for the long version.

### Step 7: Proofread

Have at least one other person review spelling, names, dates, and locations.

### Step 8: Submit electronically

Email or use the newspaper's online form. Electronic submission reduces the chance of transcription errors.

### Step 9: Request a proof (if available)

A proof lets you catch mistakes before printing. Ask the newspaper how proofs are provided.

### Step 10: Consider other newspapers

If your loved one had ties to other communities, you may choose to publish in additional places.

### Step 11: Check the published obituary

If there is an error, contact the newspaper right away. Some papers will correct or reprint at no cost.

#### Helpful privacy tip

Consider avoiding personal details that could increase risk of fraud (for example: exact home address, unoccupied-home dates, or overly specific travel plans).

If you include donation instructions, list the charity name and (optionally) a general website name, but avoid posting banking details.

## Two-version approach

**Short newspaper version:** Focus on the essentials and service details. Newspapers often charge by length.

**Long website version:** Add stories, personality, and the fuller life narrative. Online platforms usually have no length limits.

### Optional linking sentence (newspaper version)

“For a complete obituary and more about [Name]’s life, please visit [Funeral Home Website].”

## Information checklist and worksheet

Use this page as a worksheet. Fill in what you know and leave blanks to confirm later.

Item	Notes (fill in)
Full legal name	
Preferred name / nickname (if used)	
Age	
Date of death	
City / province of residence	
Date of birth	
Birthplace	
Parents (include “late” if deceased)	
Spouse / partner (include “late” if deceased)	
Children (names and locations if desired)	
Grandchildren / great-grandchildren (names or count)	
Siblings (optional)	
Close friends, pets, or special mentions (optional)	
Education (schools, degrees, years)	
Career / service / achievements	
Clubs, volunteer work, community involvement	
Hobbies, interests, personality notes	
Cause of death (optional)	
Service details (date, time, location)	
Reception details (optional)	
Burial / interment details (optional)	
If plans are not final: funeral home name to reference	
Donation or “in lieu of flowers” instructions (optional)	
Photo to publish (optional)	
Newspaper(s) and deadline(s)	
Budget / estimated cost	
Who will proofread	

## Templates (copy, paste, and customize)

Tip: Write the short newspaper version first, then reuse and expand it for the longer version.

### Template 1 - Short newspaper obituary

[FULL NAME], [AGE], of [CITY], passed away on [DAY/DATE].

[Optional: brief line about family role or legacy, e.g., “A beloved [mother/father/partner/friend]...”]

Survived by: [list names and relationships; separate with semicolons].

[Optional: Predeceased by: ...]

[SERVICE] will be held at [TIME] on [DATE] at [LOCATION].

[Optional: In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to [CHARITY].]

For a complete obituary, please visit [FUNERAL HOME WEBSITE].

### **Template 2 - Longer obituary for funeral home website**

[FULL NAME], [AGE], of [CITY], passed away on [DAY/DATE].

[First name] was born to [PARENTS' NAMES] on [BIRTH DATE] in [BIRTHPLACE].

[He/She/They] [grew up in... / moved to... / built a life in...].

[Education and career: schools, training, profession, years, achievements.]

[Community: clubs, volunteering, faith community, service, passions.]

[Personal: hobbies, favourite things, personality, a short story or memory.]

[First name] is survived by [family list]. [Optional: predeceased by...].

A [SERVICE/CELEBRATION OF LIFE] will be held at [TIME] on [DATE] at [LOCATION].

[Optional: reception details.]

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to [CHARITY/CAUSE].

### **Template 3 - Notice when service details are not finalized**

[FULL NAME], [AGE], of [CITY], passed away on [DAY/DATE].

Funeral arrangements are being handled by [FUNERAL HOME NAME].

Service details will be announced when confirmed.

### **Useful wording options**

- Passed away / died / peacefully passed away (choose what feels right for your family).
- Predeceased by (for close family who died earlier).
- Survived by (for living family members).
- In lieu of flowers / Donations in memory of [Name] may be made to...
- A private service will be held (if not open to the public).
- A celebration of life will be held (often used for less formal gatherings).

### **Final proofreading checklist**

- Correct spelling of every name (especially last names).
- Correct dates (birth, death, service).
- Correct locations and addresses (funeral home, church, cemetery).
- Relationships are accurate and no one important is missed.
- Donation details are correct.
- One person is identified as the main contact for changes.

If you have questions, contact your CMS funeral provider or the CMS office for guidance on next steps.