

Write a Clear, Personal Obituary

**Gather the Facts, Choose One Telling
Detail, and Prepare the Notice**

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Start with the work you need to finish

A checked notice draft with accurate names and dates, a personal detail if wanted, and usable service information.

This book is for adults asked to prepare an obituary or death notice for a newspaper, funeral home or online memorial.

Bring: Verified facts, the family's decisions about inclusion and privacy, and the publishing destination's actual requirements.

The working method: Build a factual core first, add one specific detail from the life, then check names, permissions and service information against the destination's requirements.

Start with the four working sheets immediately after this introduction. They are part of the book, not an external download you must obtain. You can write on paper or copy the field labels into a document. The fictional worked example shows what a completed piece can look like; the reference sections explain choices and difficult cases. You do not have to finish the reference before making your first notes.

A useful first result is a filled brief: the real task, the available facts and the missing information. A blank field tells you what to find out. It is not permission to invent a detail. Completion takes your own checking and revision; this book does not promise a fixed time or control over someone else's response.

A writing guide for adult readers, with fictional examples. It does not provide grief therapy, funeral planning or legal advice, and cannot resolve family disagreements.

The named people and dialogue in the examples are fictional illustrations, not customer results. Their circumstances are not instructions to copy into your own situation. Treat strong rules of thumb as drafting defaults; the actual brief, recipient, privacy needs and applicable requirements take precedence.

Find the part you need

- Working sheet 1 — Facts with a source
- Working sheet 2 — Names, detail and privacy
- Working sheet 3 — The notice frame
- Working sheet 4 — Proof for the publishing destination
- A short notice with a person inside it
- Guide 1 — The funeral-home form
- Guide 2 — Facts first
- Guide 3 — The list of names
- Guide 4 — Cause of death
- Guide 5 — What you leave out
- Guide 6 — Partner, not friend
- Guide 7 — Newspaper versus online
- Guide 8 — The first sentence
- Guide 9 — The name they were known by
- Guide 10 — One detail from a life
- Guide 11 — Private service
- Guide 12 — Flowers, or not
- Guide 13 — The photograph
- Guide 14 — They already wrote it
- Guide 15 — Two obituaries
- Guide 16 — The machine wrote it

- Guide 17 — Send
- Guide 18 — After it is live

Working sheet 1 — Facts with a source

1. Name and any name the person was known by

Your notes: _____

2. Date of death and age only if verified

Your notes: _____

3. City or community; no unnecessary private address

Your notes: _____

4. Source or person who verified each fact

Your notes: _____

5. Facts still unconfirmed; keep them out of the draft for now

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 2 — Names, detail and privacy

1. Names to include, with spelling checked

Your notes: _____

2. Relationships described accurately and respectfully

Your notes: _____

3. One true work, service or everyday detail to include, if wanted

Your notes: _____

4. Information to omit or confirm before publication

Your notes: _____

5. Who reviews the draft and what remains disputed

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 3 — The notice frame

1. Opening: verified name, place if relevant, and date

Your notes: _____

2. Personal detail: one specific thing from the life

Your notes: _____

3. Family or survivor line according to the agreed scope

Your notes: _____

4. Service: verified public details, or a clear private-service statement

Your notes: _____

5. Flowers or donations only with verified instructions

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 4 — Proof for the publishing destination

1. Required format, length, fee, deadline and submission channel checked

Your notes: _____

2. Names, dates and service time read back to a second person

Your notes: _____

3. Photo rights and identifying details checked

Your notes: _____

4. Links and donation recipient independently verified

Your notes: _____

5. Final approved version saved; published notice checked for errors

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

A short notice with a person inside it

This notice is entirely fictional. The names, dates, relationships and details exist only to demonstrate the writing choices.

Worked draft — fictional:

Mara Ellis of Brookfield died on 12 September 2026, aged 78. She taught at the local primary school for many years and sent home surplus tomatoes from her garden in paper bags with the variety written on them.

She is survived by her partner, Robin, and her daughter, Claire. Her family will hold a private service.

The first sentence does the public-notice job. The tomatoes give the reader one ordinary, specific detail. “A wonderful person who touched countless lives” would add praise while telling the reader less about Mara.

This example uses a private-service statement because the fictional family chose one. A real public notice needs the actual place, date, time and any attendance instructions confirmed with the organiser. “Details to follow” should not be used to conceal the fact that nobody has agreed who will provide them.

You can omit the personal detail if you have none you can honestly use. You can omit cause of death. Do not fill either space because a form or a familiar example seems to expect it. Follow the destination’s requirements and the decisions of the people responsible for the notice.

For your own draft, highlight every name, date, relationship and logistical detail. Check those before asking whether the prose is beautiful. Then read the personal sentence alone: could it be moved unchanged to hundreds of other notices? If so, replace the general praise with a true detail, or leave the sentence out.

Guide 1 — The funeral-home form

The worksheet is the object

They gave you paper because paper does not time out.
They gave you a portal because the paper does not send. Use both. The paper is for the kitchen. The portal is for the desk.

You: The boxes are ugly. Me: Ugly is a field. A hymn is pretty and late. Fill the ugly boxes.

*You: There are two worksheets. They do not match.
Me: Then the portal wins for send, and the paper wins for thinking. Copy from paper to portal. Do not keep two live drafts. Two live drafts is how a nickname survives on one and dies on the other.*

Write on the paper first if the portal makes you small.
Legal name. Dates. City. Survivors you can stand.
Service if you have it. Charity if you have a place to send. Photo later. Cause later or never. Address never.
Family phone never. Email never.

Then sit up. Type those lines into the portal. One box at a time. Save if there is a save. Portals lie about save.
Copy the text into a file on your machine named notice-draft.txt. Keep a copy is craft. A copy is not a second send.

A cousin of that night: there is no portal. There is a director who says *email me the text*. Then the email is the form. Put the facts in the order the paper will want: name, dates, city, list, service, charity. Do not attach a

speech. Do not attach a will. Do not attach a photo at a resolution that buries the words. Words first. Photo as a second object if they asked.

Another cousin: the form is a phone call. The director will type while you talk. Talking is how beloved gets into the first line without you seeing it. Ask them to read back. Ask them to send a proof. If they cannot send a proof, you cannot hear your mouth. Delay the send until you can hear it, or accept the thin file. Do not accept a hymn you never saw.

You: I hate forms. Me: The form is how a desk files. Hatred is not a method. Fill or freeze. Freeze still files.

Service is a field, not a day

The form will ask for the service. Time. Place. Public or private. Visitation. Burial. A later memorial.

This book will not teach you how to run a funeral. How to plan a funeral is a neighbour, and a thin one. You are not seating uncles. You are not timing cars. You are not picking a casket in this spine. You are putting details in a notice.

If the service is private, say private. Do not print a time you do not want strangers to use. If a later public memorial exists, say the date you actually have. Do not invent a public hour because the box looked lonely.

You: They want me to describe the flowers and the music. Me: Flowers, or not, is a later night as a line in the notice. Music is the day. The day is not your job in this book. Put the hour and the place. Stop.

You: *The director asked me to confirm the pallbearers.*

Me: *Confirm with the director, off the form.*

Pallbearers are the day. If the paper in your town prints them, that is a local custom, not a law I will nationalize. Do not turn the form into a seating chart.

You fill: *Private service. A public memorial will be announced.* Or you fill a Friday hour you have. You do not fill a novel of the procession.

A cousin of that night: you do not have the hour yet. Leave the service box with *arrangements pending* only if the director uses that line. Otherwise file name, dates, city, and send a correction when you have the hour. Guessing an hour is how a church lobby fills at the wrong time.

Another cousin: two services, two towns. Put both if you have both. Do not merge them into one poetic hour. Hours are facts. Poetry waits.

Guide 2 — Facts first

Legal name

Write the name they had in law, then the name they answered to.

Full name including maiden and nickname is a field the guides repeat because desks need it. I will not cite a guide at you. I will tell you to look at a document you already have: a licence, a certificate, a mail label, a hospital band photograph someone sent. Copy the spelling. Do not copy from memory if memory is a fight.

You: *Everyone called her Nona.* Me: *Then Nona can live in quotes after the legal name. Nona cannot replace the legal name unless the legal name is a secret you have a reason to keep, and even then the desk still wants a name they can file. Maria Elena Ruiz (“Nona”) is a notice. Nona is a kitchen.*

You: *He hated his legal first name.* Me: *Then lead with the name he used, and put the legal name where a desk can find it. James “Chip” Arthur Boone or Chip Boone (James Arthur Boone). Both are facts. A poem that never says James is a poem. The paper still has to index someone.*

You: *There are two spellings in the family.* Me: *Pick the document, not the loudest uncle. If the certificate says Ann and the mailbox says Anne, you are in a night about names they were known by, later. Tonight, pick one and be able to say why. Do not print both with a slash because a slash feels fair. A slash is*

how a desk files neither.

A cousin of that night: a professional name. A byline. A stage name. Put it in quotes if that was their mouth in public. Do not list six aliases and no date. Guide 9 is that night. Tonight, one legal name, one known-as if you have it, dates, city.

Another cousin: you are not sure of the middle name. Leave the middle name out before you invent one. Invented middle names are how a lobby starts with a correction. Blank middle is allowed. Guessed middle dies.

A third cousin: the name on the arrangement sheet is already wrong. Call before you write poetry around it. A hymn with a wrong name is a hymn that will be quoted. Fix the name. Then, if you still want a verse, you may still not want a verse.

Write the name. Read it aloud. Spell it backward if you have to. Check the capital letters on a Mc- or a hyphen. Hyphens are facts. They are not decorations.

Dates

Date of death is not a mood. It is a day.

You get it from the director, from a certificate, from a hospital line you have confirmed. You do not get it from a cousin who said *it was Tuesday-ish*. You do not get it from a post that said *this morning* in another time zone.

You: *We do not have the certificate yet.* Me: *Then use the date the director is using, and ask them to say it twice. Write it in digits and in words on the*

worksheet. 3 March 2026 and March 3, 2026. If those two disagree, you are not done.

You: The time of death was after midnight. The family says yesterday. Me: The family can say yesterday in the kitchen. The notice uses the date on the record. If you print yesterday, a paper in another city will disagree with a paper in yours. Pick the record.

Date of birth if you have it. Age if you have a birth date you trust. Do not calculate age in your head at 1:40. Do not write 72 if you have not done the arithmetic on paper. Wrong age is a small stone that starts a large lobby.

You: She lied about her age. Do we print the lie? Me: You print the date of birth you have from a document, or you omit the birth date and the age. You do not print a performance. You do not print a gotcha. Facts first is not a courtroom. If the document and the kitchen disagree, omit rather than punish.

A cousin of that night: two dates of death in two messages. Hospital. Home. You call the director. One date. You do not average. You do not write *passed over the weekend*. Weekend is a fog. Fog is not a fact.

Another cousin: you want *entered into rest* instead of a date. Entered-into-rest is a choice, not a default. It can open a sentence that then names the date. As a replacement for the date, it dies. Guide 8 is the first sentence. Tonight the date stays a date.

A third cousin: you have the year and not the day. Write the year. Ask. If the desk needs a day and you do not have one, say so. Do not pick the 1st because the box wanted two digits.

Write the dates. Put a box around them. If the rest of the notice burns, the dates should still be readable.

City

Of which city.

Lived. Died. Buried. Three places, sometimes. Do not merge them into a feeling about home.

Anita Louise Ward, 81, of Toledo, Ohio, died on Monday, March 2. That *of Toledo* is the city a stranger uses. If she died in a Cleveland hospital and lived in Toledo, Toledo can still be the *of*. If you need the hospital city, that is extra, and extra waits until the three facts are true.

You: *He moved last year. Which city is his?* Me: *The city he lived in, as the family will say it in a lobby without starting a fight. If that fight is already on, pick one and be able to say it. Do not print of the world or of heaven. Those are hymns. Hymns wait.*

You: *She would have wanted the village, not the suburb the mail uses.* Me: *Then write the village if that was their mouth, and make sure a stranger can still find the service. A village with no state is a puzzle. City, state. Dull. True.*

A cousin of that night: two countries. Write both if both are true and useful. *of Lisbon, later of Providence, Rhode Island.* That is a fact line. *Her soul travelled between two shores* is instant poetry. Kill it.

Another cousin: you want the neighbourhood. Neighbourhoods can live if they help a local paper. They die if they print a street. City is the floor. Street is

a scrape. Do not climb from city to street because specific felt like love.

A third cousin: you do not know the city. Ask. If nobody knows, omit *of* rather than invent. A name and a date with no city is still a notice. A name and a date with the wrong city is a person sent to the wrong train.

Write the city. Write the state. Do not write a weather. Weather is poetry pretending to be place.

Guide 3 — The list of names

Order

You write the line you can stand.

She is survived by her husband, Cal Reed; daughters Nora Reed and Tess Reed; four grandchildren; a brother, Vic Hall; and her parents, Irene Hall and Peter Hall, of Canton.

Spouse or partner first. Then children. Then grandchildren. Then siblings. Then parents, if they are living. That is the conventional order. It is not a moral ranking. It is a map a stranger already knows how to walk. Newspapers have been walking it longer than your family has been fighting. If you invent a new order because someone is louder, the loud person will still be loud, and the page will look like a committee.

You try the other line, the one a sample offered.

She is survived by her loving family and many friends who will miss her dearly.

You read it aloud to the empty kitchen. You cannot see a spouse. You cannot see a child. You cannot see who was left out. You can see a person who did not want to start a fight. Fights are not the danger. Fog is the danger. Fog is how a cousin learns, on Thursday morning with coffee, that you were willing to spend money on a hymn and not on a name. Names file. Hymns wait. Friends who will miss her dearly are not a survivor line. They are a feeling. Feelings do not belong

in the block the paper charges by the line.

You: *It looks cold with the titles.* Me: *Cold is a feeling you are having. The paragraph is a list. Lists have names and an order. Names and an order are not cold. They are true.*

If they had a wife, you say wife. If they had a husband, you say husband. If they had a partner, you say partner, and you do not demote the word because an uncle in a doorway prefers *friend*. That demotion is a later chapter with its own object. Tonight you only owe the map: closest surviving family, in the order the page already uses, spelled the way they spelled it on a licence and a Christmas card.

A reader who did not know them will use the survivor list as a filter. Not a moral filter. A practical one. Who do I send the dish to. Who is the person at the door. Who is the child who should not find out from a neighbour. If the list cannot answer, the rest of the notice can still be kind. Kindness is not the same as a name. Names live in an order. Tonight you only owe the order.

Missing a name

You leave a name off because the week was loud and the person was not in the room when the clipboard came out.

The name will find the page. It will find it in a church lobby, or on a phone, or in a clipping someone tapes to a fridge in another state. Missing a name hurts. It hurts in a way a hymn does not repair. You cannot unsay an absence in print the way you unsay a sentence at a

table. Print sits. The person who was left off will read the sitting.

You: *They haven't spoken in years. They don't belong on this page.* Me: *Belong is a family word. The page is a public notice. If they are a surviving child, they are a surviving child. If they are a sibling and you are using the sibling line, they are on it or you are writing a different family. Estrangement is a fact you may hold in your mouth. It is not a scissors.*

A child left off is the loudest miss. The public will not know your reasons. The public will know a list. Lists that skip a generation look like a fight even when the fight was old and, in your view, earned. Your view is not typeset. The name is.

A sibling left off is the other loud miss. June will sit with that in a minute. You sit with it first as craft: if you name two brothers and not the third, you have not written a quieter page. You have written a page that points at the hole.

Grandchildren can be numbered if the paper is charging by the line and the names will blow the budget. *Four grandchildren* is a true sentence. *Four grandchildren, including the one we like* is not a sentence you type. If you name some grandchildren and not others, you have made a second list inside the first, and the unnamed will hear it. Name all, or number them, or do not start.

Parents, if living, go on the page even when the death was a grown child's death and the parents are not the ones filing. They are surviving. That is the job of the line.

You put the missing name back. You do not put a speech next to it explaining the years. The years are not the notice. The name is.

Who is a survivor

Not every person who loved them is a survivor in the block.

A best friend can be in a sentence later, in the one detail from a life, if the detail is a fact a stranger can hear. The survivor block is closest family as the page uses family: spouse or partner, children, grandchildren, siblings, parents. Some desks will let you add a devoted friend at the end if you pay for the line. Some will not. The desk is not moved by your feeling that the friend was more of a son than the son. The son is the son. If the son is living, he is on the list. If you cannot bear to type the son, you are in a different night, the one where the notice is facts only and still has to name the living children, or you are in the night where someone else files a second notice. You are not in a night where you get to unson a person in the paper.

Stepchildren: if they were the household, they are children on this page. You do not hide them behind *his own* and *hers*. Blood is a kitchen word. The page can say *his children, Nora and Cal, and his stepchildren, Tess and Robin*, if the distinction is how the family actually spoke and you can stand it. If the distinction is a ranking you are introducing tonight, you are writing a courtroom. Courtrooms are the next chapter but one. Tonight, if they were called the kids, they are the kids.

Ex-spouse: usually not in the survivor block. An ex-spouse is not surviving the marriage. If they remained a co-parent in the public fact of the life, you may have a sentence later. You do not put an ex first to punish a current partner. You do not omit a current partner to please an ex. Both of those are kitchen tools. The page is not a kitchen.

A parent who is living belongs even if the parent is in a home and will not read the paper. Other people will read it. Other people will call the parent. The parent should not learn a death from a neighbour who got the list wrong.

A person they had not spoken to: still a child if they are a child. Still a sibling if you are listing siblings. You may write a facts-only notice. You may not write a revenge notice. Revenge is a speech. Speeches belong to a microphone, which you are not holding.

You: If I name them, it looks like we were close. Me: The line does not say close. The line says surviving. Surviving is a fact. Close is a feeling. Do not make the fact carry the feeling, and do not make the feeling edit the fact.

Caregivers who were paid are not survivors. Thank them in a private card if you have a private card. Do not invent a daughter because a daughter would have been cheaper than a wage. The wage already happened. The page does not get to launder it.

Guide 4 — Cause of death

Optional

You write the line you can stand, which may be no line.

Robin Calder died on Tuesday, March 3, at home in Canton.

No cause. A stranger can still use the notice. Date, city, home or hospital if you have that as a place and not as a drama. The public does not have a right to the chart. The paper does not require the chart. An obituary editor will tell you, if you ask, that cause of death is not required. Suicide is the example desks use when they refuse to force a cause. The desk is not a doctor. You are not a doctor. The notice is not a chart.

You try the other line, the one a relative offered in the hallway.

Robin Calder died on Tuesday, March 3, after a courageous battle with a long list of things we are going to name so that people understand how hard this was.

You read it aloud to the empty living room. You can hear the battle. You cannot hear a date the stranger did not already have. You can hear a family that wants the public to take a side against a disease. Sides are for rooms with chairs. This is a form.

You: *If we don't say what it was, people will invent something worse.* Me: *People will invent something worse anyway. Invention is a neighbour sport. Your job is a sentence you can stand, not a rumour-control*

operation. Rumour-control operations become more notice than you meant to file.

If the family already told the room, the room already knows. The notice does not have to catch the room up as if the room were a jury. If the family did not tell the room, the notice is a poor place to start a medical story. Start, if you must start, with the people who need a fact in order to care for their own health. That is a phone call. A phone call is not typeset. Typeset is forever in a way a call is not.

Optional means you may write it. Optional means you may not. Optional does not mean the loudest person in the hallway gets to fill the box because they are loud.

Omit

No clause. Date. City. Sometimes a place: at home, in hospital, in the care of a hospice if that word is one you can stand and not a brochure.

Omit is not a failure of nerve. Omit is a finished choice. You will be asked, in a shop, what happened. You may answer in the shop with a sentence that is not the notice. You may say *we are not talking about that in the paper*. Both are allowed. The paper is not your mouth in a shop. The paper is a clipping.

Hart will sit with omit as a full night in a minute. You sit with it first as craft: if you do not know, you do not guess. If you know and cannot stand the sentence, you do not draft a louder sentence to prove you are not ashamed. Shame is a feeling. The page is optional. Optional includes silence.

Do not omit the death. That sounds obvious. It is not, not when a family wants *entered into rest* and no verb that admits the fact. Entered-into-rest is a later chapter, a choice about the first sentence, not a default. Tonight: the person died. The cause may be absent. The death may not.

Do not omit a public fact that is already on every screen if the omission will make the notice look like a different death. A death that was on the news is a night when the curtain may not hold. You still do not owe a chart. You may write *died Tuesday in Canton* and let the news be the news. You may write a short public clause if the family wants the notice to match the news. Matching the news is a choice. Correcting the news is a different job, and this book is not a press office.

Guide 5 — What you leave out

Secrets stay out

You write the line you can stand, which is smaller than the notebook.

Robin Calder, 67, of Canton, died Tuesday, March 3. He worked thirty years at the plant. He is survived by his wife, Hart Calder, and a son, Cal.

Dates. Work. Survivors. A city. That is already a notice. The affair is not in it. The debt is not in it. The joke is not in it. The relative who did not visit is not in it. Those are secrets, or they are private facts that become secrets the moment you put them in a paper a neighbour can buy.

You try the other line, the one the notebook wants.

Robin Calder died Tuesday after years of making this family pay for his choices, including a woman in Dayton whose name we all know, and a son he did not bother to call.

You read it aloud to the empty table. You can hear a courtroom. You cannot hear a date the stranger could not already have. You can hear a person who has been waiting for a public. The public you get, with a paid notice, is not a jury that will find in your favour. The public is a clipping, a search result, a guest book, a scam script, a child with a phone. Secrets, once typeset, are not yours. They are the town's.

You: If I don't say it, the notice is a lie. Me: A notice is not the whole truth of a life. It is a public record of a death a stranger can use. Whole truth is a different night, and it does not belong to a newspaper meter. If the facts you can stand are few, you file the few. You do not pad the few with a secret to make the page feel like justice.

An affair stays out even if everyone in one room already knows. Everyone in one room is not the paper. A debt stays out even if the debt is why a relative is angry about the charity line. A password stays out. A will stays out; a will is a legal kit on a different shelf, one line, not taught here. A medical chart stays out unless you chose, last night, a single public word you can stand. A child's address stays out. A living person's crime stays out unless you are trying to start a case in a death notice, which is a way to lose twice.

The dead person's crime, if it was public and the notice will look like a different person without a nod: you still do not write a rap sheet. You may file a short notice with dates and survivors and let the public record be the public record. You may omit the hymn. You may not prosecute. Prosecution is a job with a different badge.

No good memories

Friday morning. You are an adult child, or you are filing for an adult child who asked you because they cannot make a sentence that is not a flinch.

There are no good memories you will put on a page. There are years. There is work, maybe. There are survivors, including you, including people you would

rather not list and will list anyway because Guide 3 already sat with missing names. You do not owe a hymn. You do not owe a roast.

You write facts.

Alan Hall, 71, of Mesa, died on January 12. He worked in sales. He is survived by a son, Vic Hall, and a daughter, June Hall of Canton.

That notice is cold if cold means it does not perform love. It is true if true means you can read it in six months without tasting a lie. Estranged adult children have been looking for this stop. The stop is not a speech about estrangement. The stop is dates, work, survivors. Then you send. Then you do not add a paragraph about the years because a cousin said *surely you can think of one nice thing*. One nice thing you cannot stand behind is a hymn written under duress. Duress hymns die in your mouth when a neighbour says, at the shop, *I didn't know you were close*, and you have to unsay the notice with your face.

You: It looks like I didn't care. Me: Care is a feeling. The page is a public notice. You can care in a kitchen and still file facts. You can not-care and still file facts. Facts are what you have when the memory you would need for a hymn is not a memory you will give the town.

Do not write *he was a complicated man* as a wink. Complicated is a suitcase. Everyone in the family will unpack it in a different shop. Do not write *he is at peace now*, if peace is a sentence you do not believe. Do not write *he loved his family* if the love is the argument. Leave the argument off. The argument will

still be there. It does not need a paid line.

Do not write the scorched-earth twin.

Alan Hall died January 12. He was a cruel man and the world is lighter.

That sentence will feel, for one hour, like oxygen. Then it will be a clipping a grandchild can read, a guest book the internet can copy, a thing a stranger can tape to a fight you are still in. You will have given the fight a poster. Posters outlive the hour.

Facts-only is not a failure of feeling. Facts-only is a finished choice when feeling would be a hymn or a fire.

Guide 6 — Partner, not friend

The word they used

You write the line you can stand.

He is survived by his partner, Tomas Ruiz.

That is the whole craft of this night, in one noun. The noun is the one they used when they introduced each other in a shop, on a form, at a table, in a voice message, in the way a hand sat on a chair. You are not inventing a marriage. You are not inventing a romance for a paper. You are refusing to invent a friendship that was not the household.

You try the other line, the one an uncle in a doorway offered.

He is survived by his longtime friend, Tomas Ruiz, who kindly helped in his last years.

Kindly helped is a volunteer. Last years is a shift. Longtime friend is a person who might have a spouse at home. Tomas had the house. Tomas had the cups. Tomas had the hospital's questions. The doorway would like the paper to put Tomas back into a visiting hour. The paper does not owe the doorway a visiting hour. The paper owes the household a noun.

You: *They were never married. Friend is accurate.*

Me: *Friend is accurate for a friend. Partner is accurate for a partner. Marriage is a certificate. A certificate is not the only way a household gets a noun. If they used partner, you use partner. If they*

used husband without a certificate, you sit with that in a minute. You do not let a certificate do erasure for a doorway.

The word they used might be wife, husband, spouse, partner, companion, fiancé, girlfriend, boyfriend, if those were real public words in the life. Your job is not to upgrade a dating month into a marriage because death feels like it should come with a title. Your job is not to downgrade a decade into a friendship because a relative is holding a church. Titles are names the household used. Use those.

If you do not know the word, you ask the person who lived in the house, if they can be asked. You do not ask the relative who is trying to unhouse them. The relative is in a fight. The fight is not a glossary.

Partner

Partner is a public word. It is not code. It is not a wink. It is not a political costume you are putting on a proof to make a point. It is the noun for a household that used it.

Put the partner first in the survivor list, in the same place a spouse goes. Guide 3 already gave you the order. Spouse or partner, then children, then the rest. Do not park the partner at the end after cousins and a dog. Placement is part of the noun. A partner named last, after *also survived by many friends*, has been named as a friend even if you typed partner. Order speaks. Put them first.

Do not write *partner in life* unless that extra prepositional phrase was actually how they talked and

you can stand paying for it by the line. Partner is enough. In life is a costume some desks still use. Costumes are optional. The noun is not.

Do not write *partner and best friend* as a compromise with the doorway. Best friend is how the doorway gets friend back onto the line. One noun. The true one.

You: *My uncle will walk out of the service.* Me: *He may. That is a service, and a service is a room you may or may not run. This is a notice. You do not edit a household out of a notice to keep an uncle in a chair. If the uncle wants a notice that says friend, he can pay for a second one. You already know the second notice exists. It exists for this word as much as it exists for Vic's red pen.*

Children of the dead, if they want the partner demoted: they are in the doorway too. They do not get a scissors because they are blood. Blood is not a glossary. If they file their own notice, they may. Your filing keeps the noun.

Friend as erasure

Friend is a true word for a friend. The miss is not that friend is an insult in the abstract. The miss is that friend, in the survivor line, in the place of a household, is how a paper unhouses a person while sounding kind.

Survived by many friends, including Tomas Ruiz is erasure with a guest list. *Survived by his friend Tomas, and by his sister June, and by his brother Vic* puts Tomas in a visiting hour and June and Vic in a family. Look at the order. Look at the nouns. A stranger will learn, from that line, who counts. Counting is the job of

the line. Do not teach a stranger to uncount a household.

Special friend. Dear friend. Devoted friend. Longtime friend. All of them are friend with jewellery. Jewellery does not restore a house. If you mean partner, write partner. If you mean companion and that was the mouth, write companion. If Tomas was actually a friend who did not live there, and the household was someone else, write the household, and Tomas may appear later in a life-detail if the detail is a fact. Do not promote a friend into a spouse because death feels like a promotion should happen. Do not demote a spouse into a friend because a church is in the doorway.

You: I don't want to out him in the paper. Me: Outing is a different night, and it is not entertainment, and it is not your sport. If the household was public, the noun is public. If the household was private and the living partner asks you not to name the relationship, you sit with the living partner, not with the uncle. The living partner is the person who has to walk into the shop after. The uncle is the person who wants the shop to be easier for him. Easier for him is not the craft.

Outing as entertainment is forbidden on this page. You do not write a reveal. You do not write *the family was surprised to learn*. You do not write a secret with a drumroll. You write the noun the life already used in the places that were theirs: the house, the hospital, the introductions, the mail. If there was no public noun and the living partner says *friend* because they need friend to stay safe, you listen to that person, not to your need for a clean political sentence. Safety is a fact. A clean political sentence is a speech. Speeches are not

this object.

If the living partner says partner, and the family says friend, you take the living partner's noun. That is the household. That is the person who will read the clipping in November. The family's comfort is a kitchen.

Guide 7 — Newspaper versus online

The rate is the desk's

Wednesday morning. You call the number on the sheet.

A person at a desk, not a feeling, tells you the price. Per line, or per inch, or a weekend package, or a photo surcharge, or a transfer fee if the funeral home files for you. You write the number on the rate sheet in your own pen. You do not argue that grief should be free. The paper is a business. The funeral home is a business. You are a person with a card or a check or a funeral-home account that will show up later on a bill you should still read.

If the number is more than the household can stand, you shorten the print. That is the tool. The other tool is online only, if the family can stand not being in the paper. Some families can. Some towns still treat the paper as the public record, and online as a cousin. You choose with the family you have, not with a rule from a how-to. This book will not tell you that print is morally required. This book will tell you that print is paid by the line, and that you should know the number before you write a novel.

You: Can't we just run the long one and see. Me: See is how a bill becomes a fight in a week that already has a fight. Ask for the rate. Ask for a character count. Write to the count. If you want one extra sentence, you know what it costs. You choose the sentence with

the cost in the room.

Do not use a national figure you saw on a blog as your budget. Blogs invent averages because averages feel like knowledge. Your paper is not an average. Your paper is a phone number. Dial it.

A photo in print is a surcharge on many desks. A photo online is often included, or cheap, or part of the funeral-home package. That difference will tempt you to skip the print photo and put a picture only on the site. Fine, if fine means you chose it. A later chapter will sit with which picture. Tonight: do not put a photo in the paper until you have the photo rate, and do not put a photo online with a house number in the background and a child's school shirt in the foreground if you can avoid it. Pictures scrape too.

Some desks only take funeral homes

You try to submit the notice yourself because you want the noun, or you want the blank cause box, or you do not want the funeral home's paste.

The paper's site says: obituaries must come from a funeral home. Or the person at the desk says it when you call. Or the funeral home already told you, on the first night, that they file with the paper and you do not.

This is not a snub. It is a gate some desks use so they are not taking copy from a stranger who may not have the right to file. The gate has a cost. The cost is that the funeral home becomes the pipe, and the pipe will carry their paste if you freeze, and the pipe will sometimes "clean up" partner into friend, or fill a cause box, or add a phone number they keep on file because they

think families want to be reached.

You do not fight the gate by inventing a letterhead. You go through the funeral home, or you find a paper that will take a family filing, or you run online only. Three tools. A fake funeral home is not a tool. A stolen login is not a tool. A night edit of someone else's paid copy is not a tool.

Del will sit with the pipe in a minute. You sit with it first as craft: if the desk only takes funeral homes, your argument about the noun happens with the funeral home, in writing, before they send. You mark the proof. You wait for a second proof. You do not assume the first send is the last send. First sends are where friend appears, and where 14 Walnut Court appears because someone auto-filled an address.

You: I'll email the paper anyway. They'll see I am family. Me: They may still say no. Family is not a login. If they say no, you have the funeral home, or another paper, or the site. You do not have a scene at a receptionist's desk that ends with your copy in the round file and your Tuesday gone.

Some desks take family copy and will still ask for a death certificate, or a funeral-home confirmation, or a card. Bring what they ask. Do not treat the ask as an insult. The ask is how they avoid running a notice for a person who is not dead. That mistake exists. You do not want it.

If two funeral homes are involved because the death was in one city and the burial in another, ask which desk files with which paper. Two pipes. Two chances to drop Tomas. Two chances to add a phone. You name

the filer. You name the paper. You read both proofs.

Two lengths, one mouth

You keep a document with two headings.

Print. Online.

You write print first. You paste it under online. You add, under online, only what you can stand to see copied. You read both out loud. You check the noun. You check the list. You check that the cause box is still the choice from Wednesday, not a paste that grew back. You check that no phone, no email, no house number has crawled in from an auto-fill.

Del does this as a job because Del has already watched a form fill an address. You do it because you are the adult at the table. If you are not the adult who can keep two documents straight, you give the clipboard to someone who can, or you keep the online identical to the print and refuse the extra. Identical is allowed. Extra is optional. Optional extra is how house numbers arrive.

You: The funeral home said they would just put the long one everywhere. Me: Then you give them two files, labelled, or you give them one short file and you say no long one. Just put the long one everywhere is how a meter and a scrape both get fed with the same hymn. You are not required to be efficient. You are required to be the mouth.

If the funeral home's site has a template with fields (phone, email, address, "how to reach the family"), you leave those fields blank. Blank is a choice. The template will look unfinished. Unfinished is safer than finished

with a mobile number.

Guide 8 — The first sentence

Died is a verb a stranger can use

Maria Elena Ruiz, 72, of Toledo, died on Tuesday, March 4.

That line can live. A stranger can hear it. A desk can file it. A cousin can put the phone down and look at a calendar. The verb is *died*. It is not poetry. It is not cruelty. It is the job of the first sentence.

You: *It sounds hard*. Me: *It is hard*. *Hard is not a reason to hide the date inside a hymn*.

A notice that cannot say they died is a notice that hopes the rest of the page will do the work. The rest of the page will not. People skim. The first sentence is what they keep. If the first sentence is a weather report, they keep weather. If the first sentence is a joke, they keep a joke. If the first sentence is *died, of a city, on a date*, they keep a fact they can use.

You do not need a study to know that. You need a cousin who will read this on a phone in a parking lot. Write for that cousin. Write as if the parking lot is real, because it is.

Died does not require a cause. Cause is a different night. Died does not require a last breath described. Last breaths belong to people who were in the room. The page is public. Public gets the verb, the city, the date. The room can keep the rest.

If you cannot type *died* yet, you sit with the cursor until you can, or you choose another verb on purpose, with your eyes open, which is a later heading in this chapter. You do not let the funeral-home paste choose it for you while you make tea.

On a date

The date on the worksheet is a date. Put it in the first sentence.

Died on Tuesday, March 4. Died March 4, 2026. Died on March 4. All three can live if the year is obvious from the paper's issue, or if you include the year because the page will live online into a year that is not this one. Online pages stay. A notice without a year becomes a riddle in a search later. If you have the year, use the year. If the desk's style drops the year in print, the online version can still keep it. Two sizes, same date.

Do not write *died recently*. Recently is how a reader decides it might have been this week or last autumn. Do not write *died this past weekend* if you have Saturday's date. Do not write *passed last evening* because you are writing at dawn and the evening is still in your body. The page will be read on Thursday. Last evening will have moved.

You: *We don't want people to know the exact day.* Me: *Then you are not writing a notice. You are writing a fog. Fog does not tell a cousin whether to drive. If the family needs fog, you may need a private service and a thin notice, and that is a different chapter. The first sentence, if it exists, still needs a date you can stand behind.*

Time of death is not a date. *Died at 3:41 a.m.* is a medical line. Some families want it. Most desks do not need it. A stranger cannot use 3:41. A stranger can use March 4. Put March 4 in the first sentence. If 3:41 matters to the people in the room, they already know it. The page is not the room.

Day of week plus date is a kindness when the service is close. *Died on Tuesday, March 4. Visitation Thursday.* The week sits still. If the notice will run ten days later, the weekday in the death line is less useful and still true. True is allowed to be slightly extra. False is not.

If you do not have the date, you do not guess. You ring the funeral home. You ring the person who was there. You wait. A first sentence with the wrong date is the kind of error a town remembers. Waiting is ugly. Wrong is uglier.

Age is a number you have, or you leave it

Age is common in the first sentence. Age is not required by this spine. Age is a fact. If you have it, and the family can stand it, it helps a stranger know which Maria. 72 does work that a hymn does not.

If you do not have it, do not invent it. Do not subtract years because someone in the doorway wants them younger. Do not add years because a cousin is guessing from a reunion. Guessed age dies as soon as a sibling reads it.

If the family will not print an age, you can still write a first sentence. *Maria Elena Ruiz of Toledo died on Tuesday, March 4.* That line can live. It is thinner.

Thin is not wrong. Wrong is a number you cannot defend.

You: *They were private about their age.* Me: *Then omit it. Privacy is a choice. Fiction is not.*

Do not write *at the age of seventy-two years, four months, and eleven days* unless you are filing a notice that asked for that kind of exactness, which most desks did not. Exactness that becomes a stunt is a stunt. 72 is enough. The months and days can live in a family Bible. The family Bible is not the paper.

Guide 9 — The name they were known by

Legal name first

The notice begins with the name that files. Legal name. The name on the arrangement, the name on the death record the funeral home is using, the name a bank and a paper can match. You do not start with a childhood nickname and hope the legal name appears in paragraph five. Paragraph five is where tired people stop.

If the legal name is long, it can still live. *Margaret Helen Keane*. Three parts. You do not have to use all four names a certificate holds unless the family needs a name that would otherwise be lost, and even then you do not write a genealogy in the lead.

You: Nobody called them that. Me: Then you will say what they were called. After. The file still needs the name that files.

If the legal name is a name they had stopped using, you still need a locating line a desk can attach to a record. You can write the used name in the lead if that is how the town will search, and put the legal name in the next sentence. Some families reverse it: legal first, used name in quotes. Both can live. Six used names cannot.

Do not invent a middle name because a cousin thinks there was one. Do not drop a middle name because you are paying by the line and the middle name was the one they loved. Line rate is a constraint. It is not a licence to erase. If you must cut, you cut a hymn, not a

name they used on a cheque.

Spelling is a fact. Look at the certificate. Look at the identity card. If they disagree, you pick the one the funeral home is filing and you do not invent a third. A notice with two spellings of the surname is a notice that will be quoted both ways, and neither way will feel safe.

Nickname in quotes

Margaret “Meg” Keane.

That is the shape. Legal, then the name the room used, in quotes, then the rest of the first sentence or the next sentence. Quotes tell a stranger that Meg is not a middle name. Quotes are small. Small is good.

Do not write *Margaret Helen “Megs / Mags / M.K. / Tiny / Coach” Keane*. That is six aliases. Six aliases and the date falls off the table. Pick the nickname a stranger would hear at the shop, at the church, on the mailbox if the mailbox had a nickname, which it usually did not. One. Two if they truly lived in two names and both will be searched. Not a catalogue.

You: Different people called them different things. Me: Then you pick the one that locates them. The rest can live in a eulogy, which you are not writing, or in a story a person tells in a kitchen. The page is not a kitchen.

A nickname that was a private cruelty does not belong in quotes on a public page. A nickname they loved belongs. If the family disagrees about which was which, you are in a fight that a second paid notice may have to hold. You do not solve a fight by printing both as if

both were tender.

Punctuation: the quotes sit around the nickname only. Not around the whole name. Not around the date. You would be surprised how often a paste puts quotes around the verb.

If they were only ever known by the nickname, and the legal name will surprise the town, you still put the legal name where a file can find it. *Margaret Helen Keane, known as Meg, 68, of Dayton, died on Thursday, March 6.* Known as is a phrase that can live without quotes. Quotes are tighter. Either works. Neither works if you skip March 6 to make room for three more nicknames.

Guide 10 — One detail from a life

One detail

A stranger will not remember ten true things. A stranger will remember one.

She taught third grade at Lincoln for thirty-one years. He retired from the plant as a machinist in 2014. She kept a garden that fed the block. He made pancakes on Tuesdays for anyone who came through the door. She sang in the alto row at Trinity until her voice gave out, and then she still sat there.

Those lines can live. They are work, or service, or a quirk. They do not require a briefing. They do not require a tear. They sound like a person who occupied space in a town.

You: That isn't enough. Me: Enough for what. Enough to raise them. Enough to settle a family. Enough to be a eulogy. This page is a notice. Enough is a stranger who can hear them.

If you have no good memories, you already had a night about facts only. Dates, work, survivors. Do not invent a garden. Do not invent pancakes. A true thin line is better than a warm fiction. *He worked at the plant.* If that is all you can stand behind, that is all. The notice is not therapy. The notice is not a scorched-earth letter either. You do not use the detail line to punish. You use it to locate a life, or you leave it empty and let the first sentence and the list do the work.

Empty is allowed. Empty is rare in families that are still speaking. Empty is honest in families that are not. Honesty is the craft. Filling the hole with a résumé paste is not honesty. It is panic.

Work

Work is the detail most notices can stand behind even when the rest is a fight.

Name the work the town would name. Shop, plant, school, hospital, farm, office, the bus, the bench, the kitchen if the kitchen was the job. Years if you have them. Title if the title locates. *Machinist* locates.

Dedicated team player and results-oriented professional does not. That second sentence is a cover letter, which is a neighbour. One line is enough: you are not the applicant.

Do not paste the résumé. The résumé has seven jobs, three certificates, a summary at the top that lies in the way summaries lie. The notice gets the work they were known for, not the ladder. *She worked for the county for twenty-two years* can live. *She served as junior clerk, clerk, senior clerk, deputy, acting director, and director, during which time she oversaw* dies.

Oversaw is a hymn of management. Twenty-two years at the county is a fact.

Retired is a fact. *He retired from Wright-Patterson in 2014* can live. A list of every unit, every rank, every ribbon is a different document. If they were known by a rank, the rank can sit in the name line or in this detail, once. Not a service record. You are not filing with a department. You are filing with a desk.

If they had many kinds of work, pick the one a neighbour would say. Neighbours are a useful test. *What did they do.* If the neighbour says *they taught*, you write the teaching. If the neighbour says *they had that garden*, you may be in quirk, not work, and both are allowed, but you still pick one to go first.

Do not write *she was so much more than her job*. That sentence is a speech. If she was more, show one more with a fact. The speech about more is how a notice becomes a eulogy in the second paragraph, and you are not standing up.

A quirk a stranger can hear

A quirk is not a joke lead. A quirk is a small true thing that does not need a briefing.

Pancakes on Tuesdays. A garden that fed the block. A red truck they would not sell. A habit of sending newspaper clippings in the mail. A dog's name if the dog was how the block knew them. A sentence they said that the town already knows.

The test is the stranger. Can a person who never sat in the kitchen hear it. *She kept a garden that fed the block* yes. *She had that thing she'd do with the left eyebrow when Uncle was talking* no. Uncle is a briefing. The eyebrow is a family story. Family stories belong in a eulogy or in a room. The page gets the garden.

You: *The quirk is the only thing I can still stand to say.*
Me: *Then say it, if it is kind enough for print and true enough to live. Do not say it as a joke lead. Say it after the date.*

Do not write a quirk that punishes. *He never returned a phone call* may be true and still be a scorched-earth letter. What you leave out already had a night. This detail is not your courtroom. If the only quirk you have is a cruelty, you are in facts-only. Dates, work, survivors. Stop.

Do not write a quirk that outs someone, or names a debt, or names a disease they did not want named. Cause is optional. Secrets stay out. A quirk is not a loophole.

June's lateness: *She was late to everything except school, where she was twenty minutes early for thirty-one years.* That can live as one detail if June can stand it and if it does not replace the date. It cannot live as the first sentence. June already deleted it from the lead. Here it may earn a chair, or it may still be too much kitchen. June will read it aloud. If it sounds like a roast, it dies. If it sounds like Meg, it can stay, once.

Guide 11 — Private service

Say private

Services are private. A private service will be held.

The family will hold a private graveside service.

Those lines can live. They tell a stranger not to look for a time. They tell a neighbour not to dress for a church on Thursday. They tell a cousin in another state not to buy a ticket on hope. Private is a fact of access. It is not a mood. It is not a punishment you explain. You do not owe the paper a paragraph about why the door is shut.

You: People will think we have something to hide. Me: People will think a great many things. The notice is not a press conference. If the door is shut, say shut. If you explain, you will write a sermon or a medical lecture, and both of those already had doors you were told not to walk through.

Private does not require a cause. Hart may want private because of a cause. June may want private because the list of names is a war. Del may file private because you froze and the funeral home defaults to a family-only graveside. Those are three different nights. The line on the page is the same: private. The line does not have to confess which night you are in.

Do not write *private, family only, no exceptions, we mean it* as if the notice were a bouncer. Private already means that. A bouncer sentence is a fight you are having with a relative in public. Have the fight on a phone. Print is a poor phone.

Do not write *private because of the current situation*. Situation is fog. Fog makes rumours. If you cannot name the reason, you do not owe a reason. *Services are private* is a complete sentence.

If some of the family wanted public and you are filing private, you still file what is true of the service that will actually happen. You do not file a public time for a room that will not open. A public time for a private room is how a town arrives at a locked door with flowers. The locked door becomes the story. The person does not.

A later date only if you have it

A memorial will be announced. A celebration of life will be held at a later date. Public services pending.

Those lines feel kind. They keep a door ajar. They also sit, for years, on a funeral-home site, under a photograph, while nothing is announced. A cousin will ring you in November. You will not remember what you promised a box in March.

If you have a date, write the date. *A public memorial will be held at 2 p.m. on Saturday, May 17, at Trinity, Dayton.* That line can live. It has a time a stranger can use. It has a place that is a public building. It has a day.

If you have a season and no day, be careful. *A memorial will be held in the spring* is almost a date and not one. Spring is wide. Papers will have moved on. Online will still be asking. If you are sure you will announce, you may write *a public memorial will be announced on this site* and then you must actually announce. If you are not sure, omit. Omit is cleaner

than a ghost invitation.

You: *We need time. We cannot decide this week.* Me: *Then the notice can say private, or the notice can be silent about a public later. Silence is not a lie. A later date you do not have is a lie you tell a calendar.*

If the public date arrives after the paid newspaper notice has run, the newspaper may not run a second death notice for free. Some desks will take a memorial announcement as a different object, with a different rate. Del will know that desk, or will not. You do not assume a second print. You can update an online funeral-home page more easily than you can unprint a Thursday edition. Plan the sentence for the pipe it is in. Do not write *see Saturday's paper for details* unless Saturday's paper has agreed to hold those details.

A livestream is a public fact if it is real. If you have a link and the family wants the link public, the link can live on the funeral-home page, which can change. A printed notice is a poor place for a long URL that will die. *The service will be livestreamed; details at the funeral home's page for this notice* can live. A forty-character address with a tracking code dies, and also looks like a scam, which is a later chapter's fear arriving early.

Do not invent a Zoom because a cousin asked. If there is no stream, there is no stream. *Will be available online* without a where is another ghost invitation.

Public means a time a stranger can use

If the service is public, the notice has a job: time, date, place, city.

Visitation will be from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday at Hall Funeral Home, Dayton. The funeral will be at 11 a.m. Friday at Trinity Church, Dayton.

That line can live. A stranger can arrive. A stranger can be late and know they are late. A stranger can stay home if the hours do not fit. Use is the test.

Do not write *friends may call at the convenience of the family*. Convenience is not a time. Do not write *the family will receive friends* without a when and a where. Receive is a verb that needs a door. Do not write *all are welcome* as a substitute for an address of a public building. Welcome is a mood. Hall Funeral Home, Dayton, is a place.

City belongs on the service line even if it was in the first sentence. People skim. The service line is a second locating. Street number of a funeral home or a church is a public business address. That is different from a house. A house is a later no. A funeral home's number on a street is how a driver arrives. Include it if the desk's style includes it, or if the building is easy to miss. Do not include a family phone for RSVP. Family phone dies. The funeral home has a phone that is a business. Use the business if anyone must ring.

If there are two public events, write two. Visitation and funeral. Graveside after church. A lunch in a hall. Each with a time. Do not write a schedule of six events as if

the notice were a wedding program. How to officiate is not this book. Three times a stranger might use is already a lot. If the lunch is private, say the lunch is private, or omit the lunch. A public funeral and a private meal can live in two short sentences. A public funeral and a mapped route to a house for sandwiches dies.

Pallbearers, officiant, music, the order of readings: not required in a notice. Some families want an officiant named. If you name one, name them, stop. Do not write the homily. Do not write *in lieu of a formal service we will tell stories*. Stories are a eulogy. You are not standing up. If there will be an informal gathering, it still needs a time and a public place, or it needs *private*.

Guide 12 — Flowers, or not

In lieu of

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to the Dayton Animal Shelter.

That is the shape. In lieu of. Then a named organisation. Then, in the same breath or the next, a place to send.

In lieu of is not a moral victory. It is a substitution. Some families want both: flowers and a charity. You may write *flowers welcome, and memorial gifts may be made to*. Both. Do not write *in lieu of flowers* if you also want flowers. In lieu means instead. Instead is a word. Use it only if you mean it.

Do not write *in lieu of flowers, please send prayers*. Prayers may be welcome. They are not a place to send. Do not write *in lieu of flowers, be kind to someone today*. That is a sermon. Sermons do not file. Do not write *in lieu of flowers, the family asks for privacy*. Privacy is the service line. Do not steal it into the florist line as a scold.

Do not write *in lieu of flowers, please send food to the house*. Food to a house is a kindness in a neighbourhood that already knows the door. In a newspaper it is an address problem and a scrape problem and a week of casseroles a small kitchen cannot use. If a meal train exists, it exists on a private message, among people who have the door. The public page does not get the door.

You: People will want to do something. Me: Then give them a charity with a place, or give them a funeral home for flowers, or give them the service time. Doing something is not a reason to print a house, or a sermon, or a vague disease word with no organisation attached.

A place to send

A charity named without a place is a search. Searches go wrong.

Donations to cancer dies. Which cancer. Which shop. Which copy of a page that used their name without you.

Memorial gifts may be made to the American Cancer Society is better and still thin if you do not say how. *Memorial gifts may be made to the American Cancer Society, Dayton office, or at the organisation's website* can live. A local chapter with a city is a place. A well-known national name with a city is a place a person can confirm. A P.O. box the organisation actually uses can live. A family member's home address as the place to send cheques dies. You have just printed a living person's mail slot next to a death. Scams scrape notices. Grief is a market. Do not stock it.

If the organisation is small, give more locating. *Dayton Animal Shelter, 200 Main Street, Dayton* is a public business address. That is allowed in a way a house is not. If 200 Main is not a number you have checked this week, check it. Wrong streets are how gifts vanish and how you look careless in a town that already has a date to remember.

A website: if you print one, print the organisation's real one, not a shortened link you have not opened, not a page a cousin built last night with a logo they do not own. Open the link. Read the header. If the header is their name and a donate button you did not authorise, you are in piracy. Take it down. Put the organisation's own page in the notice, or put a street, or omit the charity until you have a place that is theirs.

GoFundMe and its cousins: if the family opened a fund, and you can stand behind it, you may name it as a place. Name it so a person can tell the real one from a copy. The funeral-home page can carry a link you control more easily than a Thursday print edition. Print is a poor place for a URL that will be copied by a stranger with a similar spelling. If you print a fund, you watch it. Watching is a later night. Tonight you do not name a fund you will not look at.

You: *We only know they liked animals.* Me: *Then name a shelter with a door. Liked animals is not a place to send.*

Fake links

After a notice is live, a page you did not build may ask for money in their name. That night belongs later, with piracy and guestbook spam. Tonight, prevent what you can prevent with craft: a real place, no house, no family PayPal, no shortened mystery, no *donate to cancer*. If you name a fund the family opened, you name it as theirs and you watch the spelling.

Do not print *send gifts to the family* and a surname. Surnames plus a town plus a death are enough for a person with a script to ring a widow and claim a

balance is due. AARP has named that night as a scrape. I will not hang a year on it. I will put it on the table. The florist line is one of the holes they walk through when you also print a house, a phone, an email. This chapter can close its own hole: no house as a place to send. Guide 13 will close the others.

If a relative has already posted a wrong fund on a wall, you do not fight them in the notice. You write the right place in the notice. You tell the funeral home. You do not add *beware of scams* as a paragraph. Beware is a sermon and a fear ad. A correct street is better than a beware.

Guide 13 — The photograph

One picture they would recognise

One. Not a carousel. Not a collage of twelve. Not a grid the online form will shrink into a mosaic of ears. One face, or one figure the town already knew.

If they wore glasses, the glasses can live. If they had white hair, the white hair can live. If the only print you love is from 1978 and they died at 84, ask whether the town would recognise 1978. A school friend might. A neighbour from the block might not. The neighbour is a useful reader. The school friend will find the name. The neighbour is using the photograph to be sure.

A professional headshot from a job they left in 1999 can live if they still looked like that, or if that is how a trade will search. If they had not looked like that in twenty years, the headshot is a stranger with their name. You may still choose it if the family cannot stand a later face. Choice. Not default. Default is the studio smile from a packet you found in a drawer, the one they already hated. Hated is a clue. Do not use the picture they hated unless it is the only picture, and then you are in a thin night, and thin is allowed.

You: They look old in the recent ones. Me: They were old, if they were old. Recognition is not a renovation.

You: They look ill in the recent ones. Me: Then you may choose an earlier picture they still look like. You may not choose a face from a different decade if the town will not know it. You may not use a hospital bed.

*The bed is a medical scene. The notice is a public page.
A bed next to a donate button is a scrape with a
feeling attached.*

Group photographs: if you must, crop. A party of twelve with a circle drawn around one head dies. A wedding photograph with eight people nobody will name dies. A couple can live if the couple is how the town saw them, and if the living person agrees to have their face on a death notice, which is a real question you ask. You do not put a living child on the internet next to a death because the only print in the drawer was a picnic. Picnic is a later fight. Crop is a tool.

Full address dies

The form next to the photograph often has fields: name, city, address, phone, email, surviving family contacts. The fields want to be helpful. Helpful is how a house number gets printed under a face.

Do not print the home street. Do not print the apartment number. Do not print the family email. Do not print the mobile. Do not print a surviving spouse's workplace address as a place to send cards. City can live. City was in the first sentence. City is not a street. County can live if the city is small and the paper's style wants it. A street is a map to a living person.

The funeral home's address may live, because it is a business, and because a public service needs a door. A church's address may live, same reason. A charity's address may live, Guide 12. A house may not.

Look at the photograph itself. Mailboxes in the background. Numbers on a porch. A car plate. A school

lanyard with an ID. Crop. If you cannot crop the number off, choose another picture. A perfect garden shot with 1847 on the kerb is not a perfect garden shot. It is a map.

You: How will people send cards. Me: They can send them to the funeral home, if the funeral home will take them. They can send them to a church. They can send them to a work address that is public if that was truly a public work address, which is rare in this night. They cannot need a house from a death notice. People who already know the house already know the house.

A P.O. box the family already used as a public mail drop can live. A P.O. box you opened yesterday to hide a house is still a locating tool you should not print if you do not want mail and callers. Prefer the funeral home. Prefer omit.

No photograph

A notice can live without a face. Some desks will run type only. Some funeral-home sites will show a grey silhouette if you upload nothing. The silhouette is not them. A silhouette next to a donate button is a blank that a copy site will fill with a stock smile. If you can refuse the silhouette, refuse it. If you cannot, you still do not upload a stranger to defeat a grey shape.

If the family has no picture they would recognise, you run none. Shame about that is a feeling. A bad picture is a public error. Choose the feeling.

If a relative has the only album and will not share, you do not steal from a social page you do not control. Steal is a rights mess and a face they may have already

cropped for a different life. Ask. Wait. File without a face if the wait will miss the desk. The first sentence does not require a jawline. The first sentence requires a date.

June has a print. June uses it. Hart has several and chooses 2018. Del has a family who send nothing. Del does not drop a clip-art lily into the square to make the layout pretty. Pretty is not recognition. Del leaves the square empty or uses the shop's type-only layout. You can tell Del to do that. Telling Del is a sentence. *No photo. Type only.* Send that sentence if it is true.

Guide 14 — They already wrote it

what honor means

Honor is not worship. Honor is not a speech. Honor is keeping the decisions they were willing to print.

They chose a legal name and a nickname in quotes, or they chose only the name on a licence. Keep the choice. Guide 9 already sat with names. This night only says: if they wrote the name, you do not swap it for the name the doorway prefers.

They chose an order of survivors. Keep the order unless a fact is wrong (a person listed as living is dead; a person listed as a child is not a child). Wrong facts get corrected. Decisions get kept.

They chose a word for the person they lived with. Partner. Spouse. Wife. Husband. Lifelong companion. The word they used. Guide 6 already sat with that word. This night only says: their mouth on their page beats the doorway's manners.

They chose a cause, or they chose none. None is a choice. *After a long illness* is a choice. *Unexpectedly* is a choice. A diagnosis in public is a choice they may have refused. Hart will sit with cause in a card at the back of this book. This night only says: if they omitted it, you do not insert it as a gift to the town.

They chose a charity, or they chose flowers, or they chose *in lieu of flowers*, a *donation to* a place with a name you can print. Keep the place if it still exists. If it

does not, you name a successor the family actually has, or you say nothing about gifts. You do not swap their charity for yours because yours is nicer.

They chose length. Their page is short. Print is short. You may not owe them a novel because you have a funeral-home site with no cap. Short was their mouth. Short can live.

Honor is also this: if the page is a private journal with a heading *if I die* and a paragraph about a fight no stranger needs, you do not file the fight. Private is private. A notice is public. You take the facts they clearly meant for a desk (name, dates they had, survivors they named, the word they used), and you leave the fight in the journal. Filing a private score is not honor. It is a leak.

two winters ago is not this week

Their page is dated. Facts moved. A person they listed has died. A person they listed has married and changed a name. A workplace closed. A charity merged. A city they said they were *of* is not the city they last lived in.

You update facts. You do not update taste.

A survivor who died: they are no longer a survivor. They may belong in *preceded in death by* if you are using that furniture, or they may simply leave the survivor line. You do not keep a living list that includes the dead as if the paper were a time capsule.

A name change: use the name the survivor uses now, unless they have asked you not to. Their old name in a dead person's page is not a tribute. It is a confusion.

A charity that no longer exists: name the successor, or omit gifts.

Of [city]: the city they last lived in, or the city they wrote if that city is still how the town will find them. If they wrote a city they left twenty years ago as a romance, you may keep it as a biographical line later in the notice, and you still need a city a stranger can use in the first line. First line is a finder. Romance is optional and later.

Guide 15 — Two obituaries

group the line

Sometimes the war is so loud that naming anyone is a theft.

You may write a grouped line: *survived by family*, or *survived by his wife and children*, without a roster, if a roster is a weapon. Grouping is a truce. It is also a hurt. People want to see their names. Missing a name hurts. Grouping all names is how you miss all of them equally. Equal miss is not kindness. It is a stop when the stop is all you have.

A grouped line that hides a partner is not a truce. It is Guide 6 in a cheap coat. If they used *partner*, and the family will not print *partner*, you do not group the partner out of existence. You print the word, or you let the family pay for a page that refuses it, and you pay for yours that includes it. Two notices. Ugly. True.

A grouped line that hides a child to punish a living adult is cruelty. Do not use grouping as punishment. Use grouping when a roster cannot be true. Use two notices when two truths will not sit in one paragraph.

June groups *survived by his family* on a first draft. She looks at it. She hears the partner disappear. She puts the partner back, the word Ned used. She groups the rest. That is a choice she can sign. The brother can buy a roster if a roster is what he needs to see.

the home will host only one memorial

Del asks the funeral home to put two notices on the official site. The home says no. One memorial page per death, one informant, one login. That is a gate. It is not a moral. The brother can still buy a paper. He can still use another host. He can still print a sheet for a church table if the church will take it.

What he cannot do, and what you cannot do, is turn the official guestbook into a second obituary. Pasting a rival notice under a condolence is a fight in a box.

Guide 18 will sit with the box. This night only says: one official page does not make you the owner of the name. It makes you the person with a login. Use the login for the page you will sign. Tell him, once, where else a page can live. Do not offer to paste his hymn into yours as a compromise because the home has one URL.

If the home offers to “combine,” you already know. Combined is a committee in a new building. You may refuse. You may say: run mine. If they have another, they have another, elsewhere.

Guide 16 — The machine wrote it

brackets on a page you almost sent

A later hour, less sleep. You let the panel finish. You replace two nouns. You miss a bracket.

We announce the passing of [Name], a beloved member of the community.

You send. The funeral-home site has a bracket. A cousin screenshots it. The bracket is a confession that a machine was the author and you were the find-and-replace. The dates might even be right. The bracket is what they will remember.

A cousin of this miss: you replace the name and you miss the city. The notice buries Rosa in a town she left in 1994, because you pasted an old biography and the panel kept it. The service is in Allentown. The first line is a ghost. Ghosts are how people miss a visitation.

A cousin: the panel writes *she is survived by her husband Robert* and Robert died in 2019. You did not read the survivor line against a list you made with June's night in mind. The site now has a living husband who is dead. Correction is Guide 18. Prevention is a pair of eyes, Guide 17, and a mouth, tonight.

Open draft_panel.txt if you must rob it for a clause that is true. Copy nothing that still contains a square bracket, a field, a *legacy*, a *tapestry* of life, a *landscape* of memory, a better place you would not say, or a count

of grandchildren you have not listed on paper.

If the panel wrote a sentence you would actually say (*she kept a radio on in the shop from open until close*), you may keep that sentence after you check that the radio existed and the shop existed. The panel does not know your Tuesday. You do. If you pasted a bullet and the panel turned it into a novel, you still have to recognise the radio. Recognition is authorship. Paste is not.

the AI draft

A tab. A panel. You typed *write an obituary for my mother* because the blank box was a hard thing to look at after ten. The panel returned a person who touched hearts, left a legacy, is in a better place, and will be missed by all who knew her. The panel asked for nothing it could not invent. It invented a hobby she did not have. It invented grandchildren counts. It invented *beloved wife of 58 years* because you mentioned a marriage and the panel likes numbers it was not given.

You highlight a sentence and you search it. The hits come back as if grief were a product. Template pages. Slides. A kit. The same mouth, with [Name] still wearing brackets in one of the copies.

You sit with that. The panel will give you another paragraph if you ask. It will give you a cause if you ask, including a cause you did not name. It will give you *without warning* and *long courageous battle* in the same breath.

Delete the paste from the box you will send. You may save the draft as `draft_panel.txt` so you do not pretend

the panel never happened. Then you type the first line yourself.

Rosa Diaz, 81, of Allentown, died on Tuesday, March 4.

That line has a name, an age you have checked against dates, a city, a verb, a date. It may still be the wrong age if you guessed. It is a line a person said. You read it aloud. You do not sound like a pamphlet.

The panel can stay installed. It does not get the list. It does not get the cause. It does not get the word *partner*. Those are nights you already sat in. A model does not sit.

Guide 17 — Send

dates

Birth. Death. Age if you print an age. Service day.

Age is arithmetic. If you print 81 and the years say 80, a sister will do the math in a pew and the pew will talk. If you are not sure, omit the age. Age is not required. Dates are required in the sense that a notice without a death date is a rumour.

Write dates in a form a stranger can use. Tuesday, March 4, and a year. Not *last Tuesday*. Not *recently*. Not *this week*. Papers live longer than a week. Sites live longer than a feeling of this week.

If they died on a Thursday after midnight, confirm whether the certificate, the hospital, and the family are using the same calendar day. Fights about Tuesday versus Wednesday are ugly and they are also facts. Pick the date the legal paper uses if you have it. If you do not have it yet and the desk will not wait, pick the date the informant and the home are using, write it, and be ready for Guide 18 if the paper comes in different. Readiness is not fear. Readiness is a copy you kept.

A birth date you never knew: omit it, or get it from a person who has a document, not from a guess at a birthday party in 1987. Guessed birthdays become wrong ages. Wrong ages become corrections you cannot fully unprint.

June puts a finger on Ned's birth year. The brother says 1952. The spouse says 1953. June looks at a licence, a Bible page, a certificate, whatever object

exists. She does not average. She does not write *born in the early 1950s* as a cute truce. She writes a year she can source, or she writes no birth year. Cute truces die in print.

times

Visitation Tuesday from 5 to 8. Funeral Wednesday at 11. Those are two clocks. People miss both.

Write a.m. or p.m. or the words morning, afternoon, evening, if the numeral can swing. 11:00 without a word is how a person arrives at night to a locked church. You think no one could mistake a funeral for 11 p.m. People driving from another town, reading on a phone in a dark car, mistake it.

If there is no visitation, do not invent one because a template had a line for it. If the visitation is family only, say so. If the service is private, say private, and do not print an hour that will collect strangers at a door that will not open. Guide 11 already sat with private. Tonight you check that private is still true on the proof. Families change their minds between Wednesday and Friday. The proof must match the door that will actually be locked or unlocked.

Cemetery committal at 12:30, church at 11:00. Put both if both are public. Put the address of the public place, not a drawing. If the cemetery is private, say the service at the church is public and the committal is private, if that is true. Do not send people to two places at one hour.

Del reads the home's software. The software defaulted the visitation to the home's usual 2 to 4. The family

asked for 5 to 8. The box still says 2 to 4. That is the miss this night exists to stop. Del changes the box. Del reads it again. Del has the second pair read the box, not the email thread. The box is what goes live. The thread is a feeling of having asked.

names, again, at the last hour

Legal name. Maiden in parentheses or *née* if that is the house style and the family uses it. Nickname in quotes if they were known by it. Professional name if the town will not find them without it.

You already had a chapter on the name they were known by. Tonight is only the catch: the proof has a missing letter, a swapped hyphen, a maiden name in the first line and not in the search line the paper uses. Papers search badly. Sites search badly. Put the names a stranger will type.

June's list: a living person asked to be left off. The proof still has them because an old draft had them. That is not a second-notice fight. That is a stale paste. Cut it. Stale paste is Guide 16 leaking into send.

A title: Dr., Rev., a rank. Use it if they used it and the family will sign it. Do not invent a rank from a story. Do not forget a rank they used every day if the town will not recognise the civilian name. Recognition is a finder. Pride is optional.

the photograph, one last look

One picture they would recognize. Not a stock smile. Not a cropped stranger in the background you forgot to look at. Not a photo with a house number sharp on a porch. Not a photo with a licence plate. Not a photo of a child who is not yours to publish if the child is living and the family has not agreed. This You is still an adult filer. A notice *about* a person of any age is a fact night; you still do not use a living child's face as decoration without the adults who can say yes.

If the desk will not take a photo, you send without one. You do not delay the hour of a visitation for a better portrait. Hours beat portraits.

If the photo is the wrong person, you will not laugh later. Check. A second pair who knew their face, not only you, who have been staring at the file for three days.

Guide 18 — After it is live

the error

The hour is wrong. The city is wrong. A name is wrong. A living person is listed as dead, or a dead person is listed as surviving. A private service was printed as public. A public service was printed as private and people who should have come did not.

You feel a drop in the stomach. You want the whole internet to rewind. It will not.

Online, through the funeral home or the paper's desk, a correction is often possible. Call. Name the error. Give the correct hour, the correct spelling. Ask them to change the live page. Ask whether a notice can be added to a paper: a correction line, a new short notice. Some desks will. Some will not. Some will charge. There is no national average in this book. There is a desk. Call the desk.

Paper: yesterday's edition is on tables. Libraries. Recycle piles. Clipping boards. You cannot pull them all. You cannot unprint easily. That sentence is the spine of this night. You do what you can with the live page and with a correction if a desk will take one, and you tell the people who need the hour through a channel that is not the diner counter. Phone. Text. A family list. The official site once it is fixed.

Do not issue a long public apology that restates the entire hymn. A correction is a fact: *The funeral is at 11 a.m. Wednesday at St. Mary's, not 11 p.m.* Dull. Clock. Stop.

Do not use a correction to start Guide 15. A correction is not how you add the brother. Adding the brother is a second notice or a fight you already refused. If you try to sneak him into a “correction,” you have stolen a desk in a new coat.

fake donation, copy site, impostor call

Piracy you already named. After it is live it grows teeth.

A site that is not the funeral home has Ellis’s photograph and a button. A page uses Rosa’s name and a slightly wrong charity. A caller says they are the home and there is an outstanding balance, and would you pay now by card.

You already printed like a stranger would copy you. Now you act like a stranger has.

You do not pay a bill on an inbound call. You dial the number you already have. You do not donate on a page you found by searching the name. You go to the link the home gave you, or the charity’s own site you typed. You do not argue with a copy site in a comment thread. You keep your screenshot of the official page. If a family member is about to send money, you send them the official charity name once.

This book is not a fraud course. It is a notice. The after-night is: the page you filed is now bait, and bait is why houses and phones stayed off, and why you still do not put them on in a “correction.”

AARP named funeral and bereavement scams in public. You do not need a percentage. You need a rule

you already have: the notice is public, write it as if a stranger with bad manners will copy it, and after they do, you do not help them with a house number you withheld on Friday.

