

Writing a Memorial Minute

The process of writing a memorial minute starts in your meeting's Ministry & Counsel committee. The committee may choose other members of the meeting to do the writing, but M&C should approve the minute before it is presented to meeting for business.

Purposes of the Memorial Minute:

- To let Friends know the person, to help Friends benefit from the spiritual lessons of the life memorialized.
- To give thanks to God for Grace as expressed in the Friend's life.
- To comfort the Meeting and the Friend's family by honoring their beloved Friend.
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Some Do's and Don'ts for Memorial Minute authors:

Don't:

- Polish the life and hold up the person as a shining example. ("Saint, n.: A dead sinner, revised and edited." - Ambrose Bierce)
- Include information just because it's factual. You may omit details of education, professional life and extended family. This is not an obituary.
- Memorialize the spouse, parents or offspring. Not "from '47 to '54, -'s spouse worked at Raytheon." but possibly, "While -'s spouse worked at Raytheon, - joined Friends protesting the military-industrial complex, outside the gates."

Do:

- Remember that memorial minutes require a tender sensitivity as well as a disciplined focus on the spiritual journey of the deceased.
- Give clearly and succinctly the flavor of the life as well as illustration of how the person's qualities and achievements were demonstrated in his/her life among Friends.
- Go far: failings, weaknesses, needs, are part of Friends' gifts to us. Remember "the general killeth, the particular giveth life." "...served on Fellowship committee." is weaker than "-'s preparation for worship most Sundays included setting up the coffee and tea. When that was perking, - could sit with us, deeply centered."

Consider the following queries:

- How does the inclusion of this information in the memorial minute reflect the movement of the spirit in this Friend's life?
- What gifts of the spirit did this Friend bring to the meeting? To the wider community?
- How did this Friend's service in the Yearly Meeting reveal the light within or the light in others? When we consider our spiritual journeys what part did this Friend play in them?

Before you write a memorial minute:

Line up your resources: Talk to people in your meeting. Talk to family. Call the Yearly Meeting office and ask how this Friend served the Yearly Meeting. If this Friend is a transfer, ask prior meetings.

Work as led. Spirit will move you in the right direction – to know what to include or omit – to know how to present facts so that truth is served.

Allow time for your meeting's Ministry & Counsel to season the work.

Expect changes. Your monthly meeting is likely to ask for changes. Try to be grateful for their interest.

NUTS AND BOLTS – The process a memorial minute goes through

Editing → possible review by other meetings, institutions → approval by monthly Mtg.

The group in your Meeting that handles Ministry & Counsel issues starts the process (see “Writing a Memorial Minute.”) Your **Monthly Meeting for Business** needs time to season a memorial minute. Circulate it widely. You may want to read it at two consecutive Meetings for Business before you forward it to your Quarterly Meeting M&C if there is one or directly to Quarterly Meeting. Meetings are encouraged to send **all** Memorial Minutes through the Quarterly Meeting to Permanent Board.

Acceptance by Quarterly Meeting → Endorsement and forwarding to Permanent Board

Usually hearing Memorial Minutes will just be part of the business of Quarterly Meeting. See “Memorial Minute examples” for examples of endorsement. If Quarterly Meeting feels that something essential has been omitted or some confusion has arisen, it may refer the Memorial Minute back to the Meeting, or mention the item in the endorsement, or undertake slight editing.

Acceptance by Permanent Board → forwarding to the editing committee and Yearly Meeting Ministry & Counsel.

Permanent Board hears Memorial Minutes before or at the Permanent Board Meeting in May or June. Check the calendar at neym.org for Permanent Board meeting dates. Permanent Board doesn't endorse or approve Memorial Minutes but may include guidance for the editing committee when it sends the minutes to YM Ministry & Counsel and to the editing committee.

Editing Committee review and preparation for publication. A booklet is prepared to be distributed at Yearly Meeting Sessions including all Memorial Minutes that have been forwarded. What the editing committee does is described below.

Ministry & Counsel determines how Memorial Minutes will be presented at Sessions. (Details below.)

WHY SO MANY STEPS? Can't a memorial minute just be sent to the NEYM office?

We make many opportunities for Memorial Minutes to be heard because we believe that hearing about the lives of these Friends is vitally important to our spiritual nurture.

And more of us will hear a Memorial Minute each time it is read. Sometimes this enriches the Memorial Minute. A Quarterly Meeting may add particularly cogent memories that arise from hearing the minute, as may Permanent Board.

And what is the editing committee? The editing committee prepares Memorial Minutes for publication. Dates, spelling of names and facts are checked just one more time. Sometimes an awkward sentence may be recast. The text is formatted consistently. (And, very rarely, based on their impact on the individual's spiritual life or presence, some details may be omitted or added.)

How will the Memorial Minutes be presented at Yearly Meeting? Currently, all Memorial Minutes are presented in a printed booklet that you can pick up at the Annual Sessions of the Yearly Meeting. Yearly Meeting Ministry & Counsel, in response to the leadings of the spirit and the constraints of the sessions schedule, discerns how the minutes, or selections from them, will be presented each year.

Some examples

General Format:

James (Jim) Nayler

June 10,1937 – November 5, 2013

*if a quotation is used as the heading, it should be in italics and centered or indented.
Author,work, at right*

Jim Nayler was born, lived and died in England. In his professional life, Jim worked as a medical researcher. In preparation for this life of service, he studied at Harvard Medical School where he earned a PhD in biochemistry. ...

The body \text of the minute *is* left justified. Leave a blank line between paragraphs.

His competence was both a gift and a practice. We saw it reflected in his personal life as well. ...

Approved by Waverly Monthly Meeting, March 29, 2015. Edward Burroughs, clerk

Endorsed by Oceanic Quarterly Meeting, April 26, 2015. Margaret Fell, clerk

The above is shows a memorial minute with a simple endorsement.

A longer endorsement might be something like this:

Endorsed by Oceanic Quarterly Meeting, April 26, 2015, Margaret Fell, clerk, with this addition:

We were reminded of the profound influence Jim had on our young people, when a Friend shared that his deep listening and presence in leading worship sharing at an elementary retreat when she was a sixth grader first opened Quaker worship to her.

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