



ONLINE FUNERAL AND MEMORIAL CEREMONIES

An Inspiring and Informative Resource
for Celebrants, Funeral Directors, Religious Ministers and
community members, family and friends

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Note: To support the flow and ease of this guide, I've used the term 'Celebrant' to refer to any officiant at an online ceremony. This term therefore can be interchangeable to mean Funeral Director, Religious Celebrant, Ministers of Religion, Funeral Officiant or any other term referring to the person holding the space and conducting the online and interactive ceremony. Thank you for your understanding.

Introduction

In this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, many ceremonies – weddings, funerals and memorials, have been cancelled, downsized or postponed. It can be confusing, disappointing and heartbreaking, and can touch into a secondary, unseen grief and heartache; that of being apart from family and friends in times of challenge.

More than ever, it is our time, as Celebrants, Funeral Directors, Religious Celebrants and Ministers of Religion, family and friends, to come together and respond to the changes and challenges creatively and collectively.

Viktor Frankl, writer and psychiatrist, is attributed with saying,

“Between the stimulus and the response there is a space.

In that space is our power to choose our response.

In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

We are called to find new ways of being, working, playing, living and also honouring life's celebrations and ceremonies. We are called to connect with each other across the street, through a window, over the phone, by writing a letter or connecting online.

No longer can we offer reassurance through a physical hug. I am by nature a hugger, so I fully understand how hard these physical limitations are for so many people, but it has also been my experience that it's possible to connect deeply in other ways.

We can do this online and we can do it very well.

Our deep yearning to come together in a community gathering – to hold each other, to mourn, to cry, to tell stories and anecdotes and laugh at the good times – remains as strong as ever, and so we are forging new ground to ensure this connection is not lost.

While many people are choosing to postpone their wedding, funeral and memorial ceremonies, the grief of losing a loved one cannot be rescheduled and so with this in mind, my particular focus at this time has been on funerals. However, this process may work for all ceremonies held to commemorate and celebrate life events.

Let's look at the possibilities currently available for funeral ceremonies. More will emerge with experience and time.

Live Streaming or Virtual Attendance

Many Funeral Directors already offer live streaming, enabling family, friends and community members to connect and listen in from their own homes from the local area and around the world. Live streaming a funeral ceremony has often been used for the ceremonies of public figures and celebrities.

Many guests have also been able to attend a ceremony by being on a FaceTime or What's App call during a ceremony. This inclusion has brought some solace.

As at 26th April 2020, in Australia, ten people can attend a funeral ceremony aside from the funeral service staff. This is often a painful choice for a family. Who to include? Who to leave out?

Watching a live streaming of a funeral ceremony can convey the grief and loss, but for some people watching, there is also a tangible sadness seeing mourners sitting in a near empty, large space with a sense of estrangement as they physically distance themselves.

We have to be careful not to pass judgement on any ceremony without checking in with how it is for those present, as there are some families who have embraced and made peace with this quieter form of farewell. Also, for some guests, being able to cry freely at home on their own while watching the live stream ceremony has also served them well.

However, for those families who are wanting more connection and inclusion, another option coming to light is the *online and interactive* funeral ceremony which may help meet these needs.

Online and Interactive Funeral Ceremonies

An online and interactive funeral or memorial ceremony may seem strange and cumbersome for these heartfelt occasions, particularly for those who feel completely at sea with modern technology. However, with the right support, using a platform such as Zoom can offer a way to create a close connection with a mourning community. This could be in addition to the live streaming or stand on its own as the main ceremony.

As testament to the effectiveness of an online ceremony, Dr David Straton, Psychiatrist, who participated in one of the online funeral ceremony roleplays I conducted wrote, 'Very moving, and beautifully done. Given a choice between a live funeral and a Zoom funeral like that, I would choose the latter.'

Online funeral ceremonies with a Celebrant officiating is a new movement borne out of these difficult times and offering a dynamic alternative to face-to-face ceremonies.

Connecting Online

Even the people who are familiar with using IT for work and leisure, often ask the question, 'How do we connect through a screen especially at such a difficult time as the death of a loved one?'

People can be quite passive when watching a screen, yet the invitation for an online, interactive and engaged funeral ceremony is to be alert and present. It's my experience, that as celebrants, we can offer guidance and encouragement for those participating in the ceremony to give a quality of presence that embodies full attention, deep listening, and authentic care. We can do this through our facial expressions, body language, requests to breathe collectively and offering verbal or silent empathy. These are some ways in which we can build real connection online.

Let's keep celebrating and mourning together with ceremonies that are engaged, connected and real.

Funeral and Memorial Online Options

Depending upon the needs of the family and the current regulations in your area at this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, here are some possible funeral and memorial ceremony options:

Private Farewell

If regulations allow some family members to be with the deceased's body, the family may choose to have a private farewell at the Funeral Director's venue before or after an online ceremony.

Live-Streamed Funeral or Memorial Ceremony

The grieving family can hold a private or live-streamed ceremony at the cremation or burial venue, offering the opportunity for guests locally and around the world to watch the ceremony as it's happening. This has met some needs for connection and inclusion however there is little room for engagement from guests unless you have other cameras and monitors in operation which, unfortunately, is often not an option.

Online Funeral Ceremony

An online funeral or memorial ceremony can be offered on its own or as an additional support to the live-stream.

The online ceremony can be conducted either before or after the burial or cremation. Usually, we gather at a funeral ceremony before the deceased is cremated or buried, offering love and support as the family and community say farewell.

If the online funeral ceremony is held before the burial or cremation of the deceased there are two options:

- The online funeral ceremony is held without a view of the coffin
- The online funeral ceremony is held with a view of the coffin

A View of the Coffin

If no-one other than the crematorium or burial ground staff are allowed to be in attendance with the coffin¹, having a view of the coffin on the screen may support the understanding of family members and friends that someone they love has died. It can also be heart-wrenching that they cannot be with the body of their loved one at this time, so the decision to have a view of the coffin at the ceremony needs to be given careful consideration.

1

This is the case in some parts of the world at the time of writing.

Having a view of the coffin during the ceremony would also be dependent upon current regulations and the Funeral Director being willing and able to be a part of the online ceremony. They would need to login to the Zoom ceremony and their camera would portray the proceedings or a still image of the coffin in place.

A closed coffin:

- The Funeral Director's screen view can be focused on the deceased's coffin while the online funeral ceremony occurs
- A photograph of the coffin can be 'screen shared' by the IT person during the period of reflection or offering of blessings, or on the Funeral Director's screen for the duration of the ceremony
- It may be possible that the coffin is carried into the Funeral Director's chapel by pallbearers or funeral service staff and then placed in sight, with a photograph of the deceased on top of the coffin
- If the person has died at home, as may happen with terminally ill patients who are receiving palliative care, the coffin may be photographed at home and viewed as part of the online ceremony. Or, it may be in the form of a recording of the ritual of the body leaving the home. If this was to occur, then I would recommend online guests be informed prior to the ceremony that this recording will be played and viewed as part of the proceedings

An open coffin with a view of the deceased:

- It would be essential to notify guests, as would happen in a face-to-face ceremony, that there will be an open coffin with the deceased in view. If the times of the open coffin are specified, then people can choose to logon to the ceremony for that period or afterwards when the coffin is closed and the ceremony has started

I was honoured to watch a recording of a Zoom call where a burial took place in Australia while the family overseas watched and participated by speaking with the guests prior to the ceremony; and then witnessed the burial take place. After the burial was complete and the ceremony was closed at the cemetery, the Zoom screen was closed down in the cemetery and the remaining family and friends stayed on the Zoom call and were able to laugh, cry and talk together.

As this is new ground we need to support our community to be prepared with this new way of sharing 'death'.

Regulations are changing all the time in this current pandemic, so check local government and health authority updates before discussing with families and making any plans.

Online Memorial Ceremony

An Online Memorial Ceremony can be conducted after the private or live-streamed funeral ceremony and the body has been cremated or buried.

A photograph of the urn which contains the ashes or an alter dedicated to the deceased can be photographed and 'screen shared' as part of the ceremony.

TAKE A MOMENT...

- Reflect upon what you've read so far and write down any thoughts that arise. Notice any questions, doubts or concerns, and equally, acknowledge any excitement at the possibilities.
- Noting these now may help you to identify where your purpose or area of speciality conducting funerals might be focused.

The Online Ceremony

We have conducted trial roleplays to understand what elements of the online ceremony work best. This guide will continue to develop as the needs and creative impulses of family and friends and the wider community come to light.

The feedback from Celebrants, Funeral Directors and friends who participated in the roleplays as 'guests' of the deceased, about the connection they felt at being involved, has been particularly encouraging.

*"What touched me was a sense of a collection of individuals, rather than a crowd, which one sees in a live funeral. I thought this was better."
(Dave S)*

*"Thank you, Wendy for sharing (the ceremony); it was touching. I cried and cried with the joy of human connection."
(Lucy S)*

This guide will help you, as the Celebrant, to facilitate the meetings and ceremony online and includes essential points with regard to the practical and technical aspects. This is not a foundational funeral celebrant training course rather; this guide is for a skilled and experienced celebrant who wishes to take this next step into online ceremonies.

After we have looked at the practical and technical sides of setting up online meetings and ceremonies there is an overview of these ceremony styles:

- Scripted public ceremony
- Scripted and spontaneous public ceremony
- Spontaneous small ceremony

What I am about to share may sound rather technical and daunting but please take heart, because while there is a lot of information to digest, if the IT aspect of conducting online ceremonies doesn't resonate with you then you have the option as to how much of the IT requirements you fulfil yourself.

Some Funeral Directors already have staff who manage the IT side of the ceremonies and can add this skill-set to their repertoire. As an independent Celebrant you may wish to take on IT support as I have chosen to.

There are still some foundation skills you will need to learn and master and of course, the best way to gain your confidence is to practice, practice and keep practicing! I would have to add, getting the support you need is vital as well. I have provided a simple checklist of 'what to do' that you may want to look over first to relieve some of the anxiety that may occur as you read through this guide.

As one experienced Celebrant said to me, "It does seem a bit daunting when it is all written down, unfortunately. I think for many of us the biggest fear at any ceremony has been that the PA will fail - and now we are looking at quite complex and sophisticated technology. Nevertheless, I would be prepared to give it a go but the more I think about it, the more important the IT support!" (Sonia C)

I hope that everything you need to know is in this guide and please feel free to contact me if there's anything I may have missed. I value your input and will continually update and revise this document as information comes to light. When you register for my newsletter at www.wendyhaynes.com you will be advised of updates to this guide.

To contact Wendy – info@wendyhaynes.com

The Short Version: A Checklist

Before launching into more in-depth information, it might be helpful to get an overview of what you will need to attend to.

Initial Phone Call

- Check if the family of the deceased are able to get 'online' or if they need further support and information?
- Make a date and time to meet online
- Schedule your first Zoom meeting and send the link information

First Online Meeting

- A warm welcome and acknowledge that this is a new way to meet
- Follow your usual checklist for a first meeting and include the Online Ceremony requirements
- Email invitation for the ceremony so it can be distributed by the family

Second Online Meeting

- Schedule the second Zoom meeting and send the link information
- Review the order of service and the ceremony draft with the family
- Check that everyone understands how to use Zoom
- Check their camera view, the background and lighting

Pre-Ceremony

- Re-send the ceremony invitation with Zoom link to the family
- Book the ceremony with your family/housemates/neighbours
- Run sheet for you and IT support
- Conduct a mini-rehearsal using the final copy of the ceremony and the run sheet. This ensures your IT person has the right information
- Know your arrival time

Day of the Ceremony

- Arrive on time, put a 'please be quiet' sign on door, pets outside
- Flowers or a drink to make a toast?
- Plug your computer into the power source and turn on
- Close all background apps and silence your IT devices
- Playlist, slideshow and image files open and ready to share
- Open up the Zoom meeting. Turn on waiting room
- Check your name is correct on the screen
- Check your background, image placement, lighting, video and audio settings
- Get comfortable – your glasses, cushion for chair, water, tissues etc
- Prepare ceremony script and Zoom app on the screen
- Check the remote mouse works for scrolling
- Look over the run sheet. Need anything else?
- Open up a private message to your IT support
- Sit quietly for at least ten minutes

Arrival of Guests

- Are the key family members online?
- Rename family members or appointed speakers
- After the IT support is closed, mute microphone and turn off video
- Screen share the image of the deceased and play music

The Start of the Ceremony

- Unmute your microphone
- Stop screen share
- Breathe, smile and speak slow and steady

Delivery of the Ceremony

- Detail the 'housekeeping' in the introduction of the ceremony
- Note important reminders on the script - to breathe, look directly into the camera, to speak at a slow but steady pace etc
- Follow the run sheet
- When you screen share, or when others are speaking, mute your microphone

Close of Ceremony

- Turn off your video and mute yourself
- Leave the meeting open for guests to reflect on the image and music
- Call the family if you have arranged to do so
- Check-in with yourself and get support if needed

TAKE A MOMENT...

- Create your own checklist adding other items that come to mind. Simplify your checklist as much as possible to suit your needs.

Getting Started

Online Ceremony Requirements

- Quality broadband reception and sufficient data availability
- A quiet and considered space with appropriate lighting
- Competent IT skills and/or support
- A quality microphone either inbuilt or separate to the computer
- Confidence, calm and the capacity to connect with others online

Platform for Delivery of Online Ceremony

I was a Zoom user prior to the Covid-19 pandemic so it was a natural choice for me, however if you are familiar with another means of connecting with large groups then by all means, use what you know.

Zoom

You will need to sign up and create an account. There are different levels of plans. Click [here](#) for more information. To access more than 40 minutes of 'meeting' time you will need to pay for the next level account. Also, note the number of guests you are allowed to have on your chosen plan as you may need to include an add-on to invite extra participants.

The best introduction and training programs to become proficient at using this platform are offered free by Zoom. Click [here](#) for more information. In particular, be familiar with [Attendees controls in a meeting](#), know how to troubleshoot your own sound and video functions and learn the basic Zoom [shortcuts](#) for your computer.

While I managed to facilitate the IT aspects of the initial private meetings I conducted, it was challenging to get the flow of managing the IT (music, photo slide show, participant questions, muting all, unmuting speakers etc) and conducting a ceremony at the same time. This led me to source IT support for the ceremony which has proven to be invaluable. Most Funeral Directors will already have an IT person and they will find Zoom very user-friendly.

Before using Zoom for a first meeting or a funeral ceremony, arrange a few private roleplays to rehearse with your own family and friends. Doing this will assist you to familiarise yourself with yours and the attendees meeting controls in a safe environment.

Zoom offers a simple and effective way to meet with your grieving family for the initial meeting, while abiding by the 'physical distancing' rules. It also gives them an opportunity to ensure they are comfortable with the platform before the online funeral ceremony.

Offering Guests IT Support

In the ceremony invitation, include links to IT support tutorials that are suitable for the beginner to get online. You may also wish to include links to IT support services.

For example, [Youngster.Co](https://www.youngster.co.au/), based in Australia, is a group of tech-savvy youngsters helping people over 55 get connected to communication devices and programs.

To minimise technical problems impacting the ceremony, you may also wish to offer guests the opportunity to login before the ceremony begins, so you can provide them with support to get any IT concerns resolved early and ensure they are fully engaged with the ceremony when it begins.

If you are proficient with Zoom (or your chosen service) you can provide this service for your guests or, alternatively, your IT support person can. This offer can be noted on the invitation to guests.

IT Support Role Requirements

You may wish to get an IT support person or you may do the IT yourself. Either way, these are important considerations and desirable attributes.

- Calm, friendly, confident, organised, punctual and emotionally intelligent (needs to be able to *be* with conversations about death and grieving; and the emotions that can arise)
- Zoom proficient – can share images, videos and music, mute and unmute guests, use the chat facility and facilitate breakout rooms if necessary
- Can troubleshoot problems on the go
- Able to help others remotely using appropriate language for all levels of Zoom user
- Able to pass messages from the chat room, if necessary, to the Celebrant
- Understands the 'run sheet' and what is required and has all files ready to go
- The IT person may have their video on prior to the ceremony helping guests with technical issues, after that they must be muted and have their video turned off
- Ensure their profile image is appropriate for viewing when their video is turned off

Working with Your IT Support... or Yourself!

- Keep calm
- Create and use a run sheet

- When you open the meeting room, make your IT person the host and they can then make you the co-host
- Use the chat room to give cues or communicate with each other, ensuring that your message is private and only goes to that person
- Understand who is doing what. Agree that only the IT person mutes and unmutes, initiates and stops the sharing image otherwise it may get confusing
- Do a mini rehearsal with your IT person using the run sheet and the final copy of the ceremony to ensure all of the media works (still photos, music and photo slideshow) and that you are both clear about your areas of responsibility

Cost of the IT Support

You need to talk with the family or Funeral Director prior to the ceremony about this expense and be clear who is paying for the IT support. Keep in mind, that many other costs for a family that apply to a funeral ceremony, such as venue hire and catering, will no longer be required.

One celebrant commented that family members - particularly perhaps younger adults or older teenagers would probably be really comfortable in that IT support role and would look on it as their 'contribution' to the ceremony - in the same way that many of them now organise the order of service or the photo tribute.

The IT support role can be demanding, so ensure, as the officiant, that you are satisfied with the person nominated. You need to be able to work as a team and have calm and competent support.

Recording the Ceremony

If the family want a recording, automate the record function when scheduling the ceremony and it will start recording when the meeting opens. The beginning can always be edited out. If you decide to start the recording manually then write it in the ceremony script, as there is so much going on it can be easy to overlook.

With Zoom, when you click record you will be asked if you want to save the recording to the Cloud or to your local computer.

The recordings can be quite large, especially if your ceremony runs for an hour or more, so if you save to the Cloud, remember to ensure you have enough space available.

In the section titled 'recordings' you will find there is a very discreet 'trash' icon on the right. Be sure you have saved a copy to your hard-drive or USB, as once you delete the file from the Trash area you cannot recover it.

If you have an IT person who is nominated as the host or co-host you will be able to record two different screen views - one as the gallery view and the other as the speaker view. These two recordings can then be edited to one video for the family.

If you do one recording, you will still have the capacity to do a simple edit and cut out any unnecessary behind the scenes work before or after the ceremony.

The recording is of your screen view so if you toggle between gallery view and speaker view the changes between the screens will be recorded. If you have only one screen recording, during a period of reflection you could have the gallery view on and scroll slowly through the pages so guests so the family, when watching the recording later, can see everyone who was present at the ceremony. You may want to let guests know that the ceremony is being recorded although everyone should have the notification on their screen.

If your Zoom page is on half the screen, which it will be if you are using the computer 'teleprompter' set up, then you will have fewer guest images on the Zoom screen than if you had the Zoom app on full screen.

Your ceremony document or any other open apps and sidebars will not be on the recording.

When you receive the saved files there will be a video, audio and chat text file. The chat text file can be edited easily to remove IT comments or questions.

IT and Workspace Preparation

- Create a ceremony space in your home or office. If you have the right tech requirements you can set up a virtual background – in the Zoom app go to preferences/background. If not, then take some time to arrange the background space - think elegant, clean, uncluttered and appropriate given the occasion.
- Make your seat comfortable and steady so that you can sit relatively still, rather than moving about. If you sit on a rotating chair or on a large exercise ball while at a computer any slight, regular movement can be disturbing
- Put your name, website details or a photo on your profile as this will appear on the screen if you turn off your video
- Check that your image is in the top third of the screen area
- To be able to look at eye level into the camera you may need to raise your laptop. This was difficult for me as I could not access the keyboard easily so I opened my laptop to its fullest capacity and then supported it on a frame so the camera is at eyelevel and the keyboard is on an angle but easily accessible
- Plug your computer into the power source

- Turn on your computer at least an hour beforehand in case any unexpected updates to programs decide to take place and ensure you keep your updates updated
- Know the shortcuts for how to: mute and unmute, zoom in or out on documents, minimise app screens, toggle between apps etc
- Clean up your desktop in case you accidentally 'share your screen' and your desktop is seen. I have an image of the ocean as my desktop photo and only one folder that is visible which has all my other folders and files within that
- Check your audio and video settings and microphone quality. Know how to troubleshoot problems with these settings

Unwanted Guests

Ensure you or your IT support person take the necessary precautions to stop Zoom-bombers or hackers who may interrupt your ceremony. It's unlikely to happen, however it's easy to take a few simple precautionary steps when scheduling your meeting. If they do slip through and disrupt the ceremony, it's also important you know how to quickly remove them. It's easier to remove them online than a disruptive guest at a face to face ceremony!

There are some simple steps to help prevent Zoom-bombers or hackers interrupting an online ceremony:

- Use a Unique ID for each ceremony
- Require a Meeting Password
- Create a Waiting Room
- Make Sure Only the Hosts Can Share Their Screen
- Create an Invite-Only Meeting
- Remove a Participant or Put Them on Hold
- Disable Someone's Camera
- Prevent Animated GIFs and Other Files in the Chat
- Disable Private Chat

These points come from a checklist compiled by PCMag. Here is the [link](#) for more instructions on how to do each action.

TAKE A MOMENT...

- Map out a learning path you will need to follow to become proficient and confident in conducting online ceremonies
- If you are IT phobic, notice what arises as you read this section. What do you need to do in order to stop this aspect of an online ceremony becoming an obstacle?
- Who can be your IT support person? Is there someone you can ask to get a recommendation?

Initial Phone Call

It is likely that you will have an initial phone call with the contact person arranging the funeral to discuss your availability, what they need and what you can offer at this time.

It may be hard for families to imagine or understand what an 'online, interactive and engaged' ceremony is, so it's important at this time to share your experience of how the ceremony would unfold and how people connect online.

The family may have special needs that will have to be considered before committing to an online ceremony. For example: they may be new to Zoom and need to watch the tutorials and require assistance to get online. This may seem like a huge hurdle to a grieving person and they may need to understand what support they can get to be connected to technology for the ceremony. An elderly person may need nursing home staff to set up a means for them to be involved, or a young family may need more information about how to participate in a seemingly long ceremony for young children.

It may be that a family member is concerned about crying in view of everyone, which also happens at face-to-face funerals. It is my experience with families that many of the tears and fears, the feelings of nervousness or embarrassment from crying or 'being out of control' publicly can be met with empathy at these smaller meetings and that with understanding and connection they may open to feeling supported and at ease with their emotions being viewed online.

Photograph of the Deceased

At my first meeting with a family, if it's appropriate, I will ask to view a photograph of the deceased.

If they're able to, you may wish to invite the family to email one or a few photographs of the deceased person through to you before the first online meeting, as it can be difficult for people to work out the screen share facility during the meeting. Or, they can simply hold the photograph/s to the camera for you to see.

Online Meetings with the Family

The First Online Meeting

Once you have made an agreement to meet online, email the contact person a confirmation of the date and time of the first meeting and an invitation. The invitation will provide information about the basic requirements for getting online, a link to the Zoom tutorials, as well as a link to the first meeting with you.

Ask that they confirm receipt of your email and if you do not hear from them, follow up with a phone call as they may need IT support.

Invitation to the First Meeting

You can write a covering letter and attach an invitation to the email or you can include it as part of the email. Information you might want to include in the invitation to the first meeting:

- Approximate start and finish times of the meeting, remembering to include the time zone if other family members or friends will be joining from interstate or overseas
- Meeting link and information
- Information about logging onto Zoom and available tutorials
- Phone details for anyone who may be dialling in from a phone
- Your contact details as the Celebrant or Funeral Director
- If they will be needing a sign or language interpreter (see the section on 'working with an interpreter')
- Information to support the meeting, for example: "Please find a quiet space where you are not likely to get distracted for the duration of our meeting and turn your phone to silent mode"
- Invite them to bring a cup of tea, box of tissues, some photographs to share

Acknowledging the Challenges

To open the meeting, offer your welcome and acknowledgment that aside from the grief and loss of their family member or friend, there may be further grief that they cannot be with each other at this challenging time.

'Normalise' the situation and help people relax about the technology, perhaps offer this as 'a wonderful and creative way for us to gather in these times' rather than focusing on the limitations. Be encouraged to create the online ceremony afresh, as a new and innovative alternative, rather than viewing it as a lesser substitute.

Take a moment to ensure that everyone's audio is working well and follow your usual way of meeting with a family. You may have to request for background noise to be quietened. You don't want to have to strain to listen.

If there are only a few people on the call then it's best to have all the microphones unmuted, so there is an easier flow to the conversation.

Update your current checklist for a first meeting by adding Online Ceremony requirements:

- Checklist of speakers and request their early online arrival to check audio, connection, and to change name if necessary. Discuss if they think the speakers will need support to keep to time, or is it ok to interrupt?
- Who will create the invitation and email it to guests? You can provide the information regarding the requirements and link for the ceremony.
- Give requirements for the music playlist and photo slide show for your (or your IT person's) computer being used
- Do they want the ceremony recorded?
- What will they do after the ceremony? Support each of them to have a plan
- Suggest an early online arrival time to the ceremony to check their audio and connection. Once the check is complete they can turn off their video until the meeting is due to begin
- Who is the contact person to speak with (via the chat room or live online) if someone is late to a ceremony? Have at least one phone number you can call if needed

The Second Online Meeting

Once the ceremony has been drafted and the tributes have been collated, you may wish to arrange a second online meeting with the family to further your rapport with the family, answer any questions and offer detailed support about setting up their space for the ceremony and using the IT.

Fine Tuning the IT Set Up for the Family

- Ideally, the guest's heads should be in the top third of the screen image, suggest that if they could raise the laptop computer (on a stable small box or a pile of books) so the camera is located slightly above head height, it will give more of an impression of looking into the camera rather than down at the camera. However, remember this can make the keyboard inaccessible
- A lamp or bright overhead light placed in front of the person is ideal. It is best not to have any lights or open windows that shine light in behind the person, otherwise the person will be silhouetted

TAKE A MOMENT...

- Review your current checklist for meeting with the family and friends of the deceased and update it with the points that are essential to remember

This guide is focused on setting up and facilitating a ceremony online. If you need guidance to facilitate the meetings and creating a funeral or memorial ceremony then you may wish to go to www.wendyhaynes.com to read more about my informative step by step guide to creating an inspiring funeral and memorial ceremony. It is available as an e-book or a paperback.

The Practicalities

Invitation for the Ceremony Guests

The guests will need a link to join the call, so either you or the family can create the invitation with the necessary information. The invitation will need to include the details of the deceased, the date and time of the ceremony, Zoom app information, the link to join the ceremony and 'what to bring'.

Remember, attending a ceremony online is new ground for most people, however the invitation can be very similar in format to an order of service and include photographs and readings as well. See the appendix for an example.

The invitation can be sent by the family, posted on the family's or the deceased's social media page or with a notice in the local newspaper.

If there is to be a notice in the local newspaper, then you might want to put an RSVP email address for guests to obtain the Zoom link for the ceremony. A new email address can be made just for this occasion e.g. funeralforbill@gmail.com

The family can delegate this task to a friend or to the Funeral Director. They might screen emails or have the autoresponder activated to reply with the funeral ceremony and link information. This can help to minimise unwanted guests or hackers from attending. Read the section on preventing unwanted guests. Be prepared.

Time Zones

If you know you have guests attending online from out of state or overseas, then include the time zone where the ceremony is scheduled to start.

The funeral ceremony for Bill Humphreys
will be held on Thursday 26th March 2020 at 1pm AEST, Sydney, NSW.

Even though the ceremony may be held in Coffs Harbour, NSW, Australia, use your state or country's capital city as it is easier to find using online Time Converters. I wouldn't recommend converting the time for interstate or overseas guests, rather you may wish to provide a link to a time converter app so people can check it themselves. This avoids any mistakes... from you!

Prior to the Ceremony Starting

- Re-send the ceremony invitation with Zoom link to the family. This will ensure it is close to the top of their inbox and easier to find
- Email the 'run sheet' to your IT person or, if you are doing the IT yourself, print out and have it next to the computer. Ensure you do not ruffle the paper during the ceremony
- If you are still in your 'bubble of quarantine' at home with other people, let them know you are doing a ceremony and request that they don't interrupt you. If you have young children, they will need to be supervised. If you are a single parent at home, this is an important consideration as it can be very disturbing to have interruptions at a sensitive moment in a ceremony. Place a quiet sign on the door
- Give the dog a bone (in another room) or put them somewhere they won't disturb you. I would highly recommend keeping the cat or other pets out of the room as well
- Once you start the ceremony it's important not to attend to outside matters. If you know your neighbour mows their lawn on this day, at this time, then you might be able to request a reprieve until after a certain time. If someone walks past your window or accidentally comes into the room avoid looking up or out at them. Your distracted eye movements are very noticeable on the screen
- Dress appropriately for the ceremony. For those wearing a dress or top, ensure the neck line is not too low, a full cleavage on the screen may be inappropriate
- Place a sign on the door, 'Ceremony in progress, please do not disturb'
- Bring extra items you may need for the ceremony, e.g. flowers, drink for a toast
- If you have IT support, arrive at your computer at least 45 minutes before the ceremony start time to ensure you have everything ready. If you are doing the IT yourself then allow at least 70 minutes. Invest ten minutes of this preparation time to sitting quietly to centre oneself
- Plug your computer into a power source and turn on
- Check the lighting is on your face not behind you
- Ensure all of your background apps are closed, especially those that may receive notifications (Skype, Messenger, What's App) are all signed out. Ensure your phone is switched to silent and turn off the vibrate mode. For ease, you may just want to switch your devices to 'Do Not Disturb'
- Open the Zoom meeting and turn on the waiting room feature. This ensures guests who are checking the link won't disturb you while you are setting up
- Ensure your name is correct on the screen
- Audio and video check. Even if you don't use a headset have one nearby in case it is needed
- Have your ceremony script on the computer screen so that your eyes are looking toward the screen when you are reading. See note on computer 'teleprompting' in the Appendix

- You might also need:
 - A glass of water
 - Tissues
 - A pen to make notes from speakers
 - If you need them, your reading glasses
- If you wear glasses, you may want to lower the brightness of the screen so that the reflected light on the lens is not so bright
- Sit quietly for at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the ceremony with your video off and microphone muted. You are about to enter a complex mental and emotional setting so taking time to ground yourself and become present will support you to hold the space
- If you have IT support who has offered pre-ceremony support to guests, you can start your video 5 minutes prior to the start time, otherwise you might need to open up your microphone and camera earlier to assist any guests with IT troubles.
- If you are offering IT support to guests, aim to finish at least ten minutes prior to the ceremony start time so there is a period of music to settle guests and yourself before the start.

Arrival of the Guests

- Are the key family members online? Check in with the organising family member if a family member is late so they can follow up if need be
- Do family members or appointed speakers need their screen to be renamed?
- After the IT support is closed, mute your microphone and turn off your video
- Screen share the image of the deceased and play music
- Feel grounded, sit tall and dignified, tuck the chin in slightly and breathe.

IT Challenged Guests

There are support services popping up everywhere during the Covid-19 pandemic to help people stay connected using technology. There may be a friend or family member who could help over the phone to set up a Zoom meeting practice run. If a family member is in a nursing home they may be able to approach the nursing staff to offer support.

In Australia, we now have an IT support service funded by the government and offered by young people to older people which is free for the first call. [Youngster.co](https://www.youngster.co)

There are also other community and private service providers available for all age groups.

Late Family Member Needing Support

If a key family member arrives on the call late and they are experiencing technical difficulties, support them as best you can or, if you have IT support, guide them to the chat facility and the IT support person's name. If you are doing the IT on your own ensure you understand how to guide a guest to check their audio settings, turn on the video etc. If all else fails, ask if they can call in on their phone or ask if another guest would be willing to support them to get online using the chat facility or even by a mobile phone call. This can be quite stressful to manage – remember to breathe and stay calm.

Taking Care

You may wish to offer suggestions that you feel are appropriate to help people be with challenging emotions or thoughts that arise, knowing that some people may be home alone and not able to see anyone during this period of grieving. Assure them that this can be a safe container for their feelings of sadness and mourning the loss.

Some Tips for Taking Care

- Become present through awareness of the body and the breath
- Have a drink of water
- Gently place one or both hands over your heart
- [The Trauma Hold](#) as described by Peter Levine: right hand placed under left armpit, left hand around the right shoulder

Towards the close of the ceremony you may wish to acknowledge that some guests will find themselves 'home alone' and that could be very painful. Mention that the support services will be listed on the final screen after the ceremony is closed if people need to reach out for help beyond family and friends.

Empathic Support Team

In some cases, for example, a tragic death of a young person, a suicide, the death of a young child or other situations where guests may be at a higher risk of being stimulated, it can be helpful to have an empathic support person at the online ceremony. This can be supportive for you as the officiant and also for any guests who are struggling and may need to avail themselves of a support person during the ceremony. The support person might be a registered psychologist, grief counsellor, mental health worker or someone skilled in empathic listening.

We are currently working on establishing a group of volunteers who make themselves available for online funeral ceremonies to offer a 'listening ear'. For updates please sign up to my newsletter at www.wendyhaynes.com or keep an eye on the [Online Funeral and Memorial Ceremonies Facebook](#) page.

Appointed Guest Speakers

Offer the appointed speakers reassurance and tips on how to present poems and readings as you might in the usual face-to-face setting. Ask the speakers to arrive on the call early to check their sound and connection. Check they have their correct name on their screen or rename if necessary. This will assist you or the IT support to unmute them if necessary, as you can find them in the alphabetical list of participants more easily.

Or, you may prefer to ask the guests to unmute themselves before they speak their tribute. If so, request that they write 'turn on microphone' at the top of their notes. If you cannot hear your speaker after you have introduced them they may still be muted. In this case, unmute their microphone and, if necessary, ask them to start again.

Discuss with the family prior to the ceremony whether it's ok to interrupt speakers who talk for too long. Interrupting speakers online is not as discreet as it can be at a live ceremony, where you might stand up first and gain their attention. Basically, online you have to turn on your microphone and excuse yourself for interrupting, acknowledge their contribution so far, offer empathy by connecting with their need for expression and then politely ask them to close their tribute.

If you are feeling the speaker has wandered off track or spoken for too long, then you can be certain that others may be feeling uncomfortable too. Ensure you give guidelines to the speakers beforehand, connecting with them personally, explaining that they have 2-3 minutes (or however long the family has requested) and thanking them for speaking. Build a good rapport so they feel a connection with you if you have to interrupt them.

Spontaneous Speakers and Raising Hands

If you invite guests to spontaneously offer tributes, depending upon the size of the group, you can request people to raise their 'electronic' hand using the Zoom meeting controls. This feature can be activated in the participant area of the meeting controls or, for a mobile device without the app, the guest can press *9. As the officiant you can then check the participant list and invite a guest with a raised hand next to their name to speak and unmute them at the same time.

If it is a smaller gathering and you can see all guests on one screen they could physically raise their hand and you can choose a guest to speak and unmute them at the same time. Or, you can invite those guests wishing to offer a tribute to unmute their own microphone and speak.

For a phone user, who is not using the Zoom app, to unmute and mute their phone they need to press *6. This option may result in some chaos.

To inspire guests to speak spontaneously you could ask 'open ended' questions for example:

"The family would like to invite anyone who is interested to speak now on how Bill touched your life. You might like to start your tribute with, 'I remember when...'

It might be words of Bill's wisdom that you recall or the name of a poem that he loved. If you could please introduce yourself, where you are from and how you know Bill first and then offer your tribute. Thank you."

Interpreters and Accessibility Tools

Working with an Interpreter

- Contact the interpreter with regard to what they will need
- For deaf or hard of hearing guests you may wish to contact them via email or through a family member. They might find it helpful to have an outline of the ceremony. The person/s requiring the interpreter will have to focus on the screen of the interpreter, as the interpreter will not be highlighted as they would be if they were speaking.
- Speak clearly and at your usual pace
- Request that the interpreter tell you if they require you to change your pace. This is best done verbally as it would be difficult to send a message via chat and stay focused. If they do ask you in the ceremony, thank them for doing so as it is important for everyone present

Closed Captions

Click [here](#) to watch the tutorial on getting started with Closed Captioning.

Live Interactive Transcripts for Zoom

Otter.ai Live Video Meeting Notes is a paid service that will enable you to open a live transcript directly from Zoom. People can comment on the transcript and also add photos and tributes. Click [here](#) for more details

The Guest Book

The chat room can become a 'Guest Book' for guests to leave their name as a record of their attendance and also write messages of love and support for the grieving family. You can post a pre-prepared message into the chat room at the beginning of the ceremony and remind guests during the ceremony about how they can contribute.

“You are welcome to leave a message of love and support for Bill’s family in the chat room. It might be a few words as to how Bill touched your life or a few words that describe him best. It may be words of Bill’s wisdom that you recall or the name of a poem that he loved. Please also write your first and last name in the message itself so the family know who to attribute it to and as a record of who was in attendance today.”

Mention the guest book/chat room again at the end of the ceremony so guests can leave a message while the music is playing.

All messages are saved in the chat file. You can delete the IT/support messages (e.g. how do I increase the sound? Can everyone see the video?) from the saved ‘chat file’ and arrange the text into a professional format before emailing to the family.

Closing the Ceremony

On the ceremony invitation the family can request guests come to the online ceremony prepared with flowers or a picture of flowers, a drink to make a toast, a favourite cap, hat or scarf to wave, or another symbolic object that would be relevant to the ceremony and the memory of the deceased e.g. wear a Hawaiian shirt, sport a superhero outfit.

At the close of the ceremony you can invite people to place the flowers near the camera or wave a scarf – whatever feels appropriate.

To close the ceremony, you might ask guests to:

- Place a flower or a picture of a flower to the screen
- Raise their glass and make a toast (remember to unmute all the microphones at that moment)
- Dance (be sure to have the music ready)
- Wave goodbye – you might wish to unmute the microphones for people to say goodbye as well. Mute the microphones again to play the final piece of music
- Invite guests to go to an online Memorial Page to leave comments
- Place their hands, a short distance from the camera, with inner wrists touching, fingertips pointing away from each other and out to the side. When they are in alignment with the edge of the screen, it creates the image on the screen of an imaginary holding of hands. Practice this beforehand so you get an idea of how to guide others through it

After the Ceremony

- Discuss with the family what they will do after the ceremony, given that they may be home alone. Encourage them to have a plan. Ask if there is someone they can call after the ceremony to debrief with, or would they like you to call them? Email them a list of support services available nationally and locally
- Do they want to organise an online 'wake' after the ceremony using an app such as Houseparty or Zoom? As the Celebrant, I would not recommend organising this, you may just wish to point them in the right direction

TAKE A MOMENT...

- What points do you recognise you need help with?
- Where will you go to get the skills and support you need in these areas?

An Outline for All Ceremonies

Prior to the Ceremony

- If offering IT assistance, ensure you have everything else ready
- Screen share the photo of the deceased with music playing
- Mute yourself during any screen sharing and remember to unmute before speaking
- Ensure all key family members and appointed speakers are ready

Introduction

- Mobile phones off
- Invite guests to put the Zoom app onto full screen
- Point out the meeting controls to change from speaker screen view or gallery screen view and let them know there may be more than one page of speakers; and that whichever view they choose does not affect anyone else's screen
- Point out the chat room option if they need help and that the IT person is on hand to assist (if you have facilitated this option)
- Remind guests to refrain from eating or drinking throughout the ceremony and to please turn off the video if they feel the need to move about, so as not to distract other guests
- Let guests know how to leave messages of support for the family

Welcome

- If you can have your welcome memorised and flowing naturally, you can look directly at the camera at the top of your screen, giving the impression that you are looking directly at the guests. Of course, it is tempting to look at their faces on the screen while you are talking, which you can learn to do in your periphery vision

Acknowledgement

- Acknowledging close family and friends who could not be present online for the ceremony
- Acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land

The Guest Book

- Invite guests at the beginning and at the end of the ceremony to type a message of support into the chat room which will serve as the Guest Book. Remind the guests to leave their name in the message itself

Music Reflection

- For the period of music or quiet reflection an image of the deceased can be screen shared

Taking Care

- Offer the guests some tips for taking care and if you have a support person joining the ceremony introduce them and let guests know how to reach out to them

Tributes

- Know how long you have for this section of the ceremony. Pause and do a time check if you have a definitive time frame you are working with

The Committal or Offering of Gratitude

- As guests have been seated for a while invite them to readjust their posture and take a deep breath, to ensure they are sitting comfortably and upright to offer the committal reading or the close of the ceremony

Closing the Ceremony

- If there is a toast or something special happening be prepared
- Let guests know the ceremony is coming to a close and what will happen afterwards i.e. the deceased's image will come onto the screen with music etc
- Remind them to reach out for support

After the Ceremony

- Turn off your video and mute yourself
- Leave the meeting open for guests to reflect on the image and listen to the music
- Breathe and check in with how you are feeling
- You may wish to call the key person or family member(s) to check in with them if you have arranged to do so

TAKE A MOMENT...

- What are important aspects of a ceremony that you want to include in an online ceremony?
- Will you need to adapt them to present online?

The Scripted Ceremony

The ceremony may follow the usual outline that you would offer in a face-to-face ceremony with the inclusion of offering IT information and, if it feels necessary, ideas on how to take care of oneself while being 'socially distanced' and how to get support if it is needed.

The following section provides an outline of the ceremony. If you need a hand to write the funeral or memorial ceremony, then you may wish to go to www.wendyhaynes.com to read more about my informative step-by-step guide to creating an inspiring funeral and memorial ceremony. It is available as an e-book or a paperback.

Arrival of Guests

- Screen share the photo of deceased with music playing
- Mute everyone

Introduction

Welcome

Acknowledgement

Taking Care

Quiet Reflection

- Screen share image; in silence or with music

Eulogy and Tributes

- Introduce each speaker and their relationship to the deceased. Have the IT person unmute the speaker at this time

Photo Reflection.

- See the section in the Appendix on Audio and Visual Media for the Ceremony
- Screen sharing videos or slideshows and music can be problematic as it requires good bandwidth on the internet, however, when it does work, it is really engaging
- The family may also want to upload a video onto YouTube (or another such outlet) which can be watched later

The Close of Ceremony

- Let guests know that the ceremony will close soon. It gives them time to adjust to the change about to happen

End of the Ceremony

- Final screen share of the photo of deceased and music playing
- mute everyone's microphones and turn off your video
- Image of the thank you note from the family
- List of grief support services
- Contact information for the Celebrant, Funeral Director, IT Support, Musicians etc

The Partially Scripted Ceremony

These ceremonies can be scripted, while also allowing more space for what is usually termed an 'open microphone'. This section is a little less formal in nature and there is space for spontaneous sharing, which will require the Celebrant to be able to sit comfortably in short periods of silence, give empathy, listen well and trust in one's capacity to be present for the unknown. The structure itself can create a safety net for the Celebrant and guests.

Settling guests in with a warm welcome, housekeeping, the usual introduction, tips for taking care of oneself while 'social distancing' and possibly some reflection music. The tributes can be a mix of prepared tributes or people speaking spontaneously.

When opening the space for people to speak spontaneously, the Celebrant can invite those listening to give the speaker their full silent presence, and requesting guests refrain from asking question or making comments on a previous speaker's tribute. It's not a 'chat', rather it's a safe space for people to voice their tribute and feel heard.

The Non-Scripted Ceremony

I have used the non-scripted ceremony in more difficult funeral situations, for example: suicide, deaths involving young people, blended families where there are some challenges. These much smaller ceremonies have usually been held prior to a larger community funeral ceremony and are suitable for up to 12 to 15 people.

With my experience of holding online support groups, I sense this outline will also work for a smaller online funeral ceremony by a skilled Celebrant.

Working with the key person(s), sense what the needs and hopes are by holding this smaller, more intimate ceremony. Ensure it is clear that the ceremony is not a counselling session, it is instead, an important opportunity for support, feeling heard and feeling deeply connected to family and friends. It is a ceremony of a different kind.

For more information on this smaller style of ceremony and the people who can support you to facilitate them please email: info@wendyhaynes.com for more information.

To develop your skills in empathic listening and compassionate conversation you may wish to connect with a communication group who offer training and practice skills in this particular field.

My practice has been developed using mindfulness and nonviolent or compassionate communication. In particular, a program called Ongo. Find out more about the Ongo guide [here](#).

Contact Ongo teachers, [Catherine Cadden and Jesse Wiens](#), or myself, for more information about the 12 week program.

The Scripted, Partial or Non-Scripted Ceremony?

TAKE A MOMENT...

- What form of ceremony appeals to you?
- If you would like to conduct a partially or non-scripted ceremony, what do you need to address in terms of getting support and learning skills?

Post Ceremony

If the family wish to have a copy of the recorded ceremony you may need to edit the original file and send them the link to download. Save a copy to your back up hard drive and request that the family confirm when they have downloaded the file before you delete it.

The chat room comments will be saved with the audio and video files. You can edit out the IT or other irrelevant comments before forwarding the messages to the family.

Feedback

It can be helpful for the family to express feedback about your services and will support you to develop your practice and improve what you offer.

Post Ceremony Support

For the independent celebrant, debriefing often happens unconsciously after a funeral ceremony when we engage with family, friends and/or the Funeral Directors. In person, you would most likely receive feedback about your service, giving a strong sense of being part of the community even if you don't stay for long afterwards.

However, after an online ceremony, when the ceremony has finished and the Zoom session is closed, you are sitting in a room on your own and there is no feedback at all.

Depending on how the ceremony and the technical aspects of the gathering went this may not be a problem. For some, even if there were challenges it won't have ruffled their feathers. Yet for others, it may leave a feeling of being on edge.

There may be a need to move after sitting for so long or an urgency to get a cup of tea or something to eat. You may wish to go for a walk or lie down.

Whether standing, walking or remaining seated, take time to check in with yourself. You may wish to offer yourself some self-empathy.

Self-Empathy Practice (Offering the gift of kindness to yourself)

Based upon the practices and teaching of mindfulness based stress reduction program (MBSR) and nonviolent communication (NVC).

Look around the room and take a deep breath. Depending on where you are you might wish to soften your gaze or close your eyes.

Take a few minutes to notice the sensations in your body and how you are feeling. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly.

Now notice what you are telling yourself about the ceremony, about interactions that may have happened. If your mind keeps wandering it may support you to place your hand on your forehead. You might be replaying something you said, or didn't say, or something someone else said. Notice what thoughts are on your mind. You might wish to write them down.

Take another few deep breaths. Now bring your attention to how you are feeling when you tell yourself those things. You might want to choose one specific thought at a time to work with, remember to go gently.

Soften into the belly and notice again the body – sensations arising, feelings coming and going. If it feels particularly challenging, you may wish to place one or both hands over the heart area to soothe your body. Notice the quality of your breath, letting the breath flow naturally and easily.

Invite your shoulders to relax and rest. Soften your jaw and belly. Be open to accepting things just as they are, not trying to change something, rather just being in this moment, as it is.

Consciously breathing for a few moments, offering a compassionate, kind presence to yourself.

When it feels right to move on, notice what you might be needing in this moment – reassurance, kindness, connection, time out, food, a rest.

You may find you have a call to do something specific – contact a friend or colleague, go for a walk or take a rest.

Or, you may wish to just sit quietly and breathe with one of the qualities or needs that you recognised and get a sense of this need being met. If for example, you find you have a need for reassurance, then sitting quietly, get a sense of 'reassurance', of reassurance being present and available to you right now.

Breathe and let the feeling of reassurance permeate every cell.

If it doesn't feel complete, then you may wish to work through this process with another thought that is particularly unsettling. If you need support, then reach out to a colleague or a trusted friend.

When you feel complete, look around the room, stretch and offer gratitude for taking this time out to look after yourself.

If you would like to follow a guided practice or learn more about mindfulness and/or the processes of self-empathy and nonviolent communication (NVC) please visit www.wendyhaynes.com for more information and current online programs.

If you feel the need to reach out, call another Celebrant or a friend to talk about the ceremony. Find someone who will listen deeply and offer empathy rather than giving advice and dismissing your fears; it is at times like this you need to be heard. You may like to have pre-arranged this support, so you are both prepared.

Share what's on your mind and if you need prompts, share what you thought worked, possibly where you were challenged, what you are telling yourself, how it affects your body, feelings etc. Talk until you feel heard. This will often help you to find your own way and meet any needs you may have for reassurance and clarity.

You may even need to have a cry if it was a particularly emotional and difficult ceremony. Crying is highly under-rated as a means to release tension.

Take care, be gentle and do what you need to do to find peace and equanimity.

TAKE A MOMENT...

- How do you look after yourself when you need support?
- List the things that make you feel cared for and support your well-being
- Who are your support people if you need them?
- Write a list and be prepared as it can be hard to remember what action you will take or who to call if you are in a difficult place

Practice, Practice and More Practice

I'm concerned that this looks more complicated than it actually is.

It may be more challenging if you are not technically orientated, however, you may do as I did and get technical support. I am definitely a Celebrant first and foremost. I also know that with practice, and more practice, a comprehensive checklist, a good IT person, a colleague or friend you can lean on and get support from; and a few rehearsals with family and friends, you can do this!

While we would like every ceremony to be perfect, our connection to others is paramount. Go gently on yourself, keep learning and practicing, then go out and do your very best. See your mistakes as great opportunities to learn, practice some more and get the support you need.

It took me three trial runs to glean the things that worked, that could be improved on or that just outright didn't work. Even then, there was still room for improvement, especially with the IT learning.

I hope that my experience, together with this guide, will help you to have an easier transition to online ceremonies.

The Roleplay Video

There is a video recording available on [Wendy Haynes, Online Funeral and Memorial Ceremonies, YouTube Channel](#) showcasing some of the elements discussed in this guide for the delivery of an Online Funeral Ceremony. If this link becomes unavailable (due to it being updated) then please go to www.wendyhaynes.com for a current link.

Further Roleplays and Staying Connected

To join Wendy in future roleplays and shared learning sessions, connect with other funeral officiants and support the development of online ceremonies worldwide visit the Event and Celebrant Resource section at www.wendyhaynes.com

To engage Wendy for a specific online training in your area or share how your online ceremonies are working for you please email Wendy at info@wendyhaynes.com or leave a comment on Facebook, [Online Funeral and Memorial Ceremonies](#)

Please also share your experiences with your professional network and find the support and encouragement you need as we step outside our usual paradigm.

May we continue to create sacred spaces to mourn and to celebrate the important moments in our lives, together.

Heartfelt Thanks and Gratitude

I have felt wholeheartedly encouraged and supported by many fellow Celebrants, Funeral Directors, colleagues, family and friends, for which I am deeply grateful. I am indebted for their courage to roleplay and participate in the first few trials, for their honest feedback and their willingness to brainstorm and share ideas.

To my teachers, friends and colleagues from the Mindfulness and Meditation Programs, Nonviolent Communication (NVC) Training, Heart Talk Matters and Ongo, a heartfelt appreciation for the skills, support and empathy you have poured into me.

Jackson from [Jax Oliver Studios](#) has been great to work with and provided invaluable IT information and technical support online for this project.

In the first three trial roleplays so many friends took part for which I am deeply grateful. We learnt a lot together. For the final recording I am grateful to actors Nick Hardcastle, Kimberley Cooper, Lynnie Robertson, Tegan Hannaford, Chez/Cherie Scott, Paul Tipper and Margot Pleasant and many guest Celebrants, Funeral Directors and friends who were enthusiastic and awesome to work with.

To Kate Raffin, Catie Wood, Sonia Collins, Dave Straton, Rochelle Martin and Sally Biffin for their valuable feedback and edits on the manuscript.

“Thank you so much for the opportunity to be on this Zoom experience. I am really grateful. It was a great insight into what is possible. Thank you.”
(Paulette B)

Thank you for your interest and dedication to creating heartfelt, meaningful, interactive and engaged ceremonies.

Together we can make a difference.

Project Investment and Support

If you would like to invest in projects that are dedicated to creating connection, compassion, care and presence, please contribute by visiting

www.wendyhaynes.com

Your contribution for this guide will support the actors, IT Support, technical staff and administration staff who are part of my dedicated team. Investments in ongoing projects will support trainers and the associated costs with conducting online and, after Covid-19, face to face programs. Thank you.

Appendix

- Sample Invitation for The Ceremony
- Sample Run Sheet for IT support
- Sample of Front Page Image of the Deceased
- Ceremony Script for Online Funeral Ceremony Roleplay
- Sample of End Images
- Computer Teleprompter
- Audio and Visual Media for the Ceremony

Sample Invitation for the Ceremony

This can be formatted with graphics and a photo or kept simple as below.

Farewell William (Bill) Humphreys
19.7.1958 – 25.3.2020

Dearly loved husband of Keith. Cherished father of Chloe and grandad of Lucy. Loving brother and brother in law of Sarah and Wayne. Beloved uncle of Mick, Jeff, Linda and Karen.

You are warmly invited to Bill's ceremony that will be held online,
Thursday 26th March 2020 at 1pm AEST, Sydney, NSW

We invite you to dress for the occasion and please bring some flowers (or a photo of some flowers) and have a drink on hand for the toast at the end of the ceremony. We do ask however, that you refrain from eating or drinking during the ceremony as it can be distracting to others.

We kindly ask you choose a quiet space where you are not likely to get distracted for the duration of the ceremony and to turn off your mobile phone. It can help the family to see you clearly if the light is shining towards your face, not behind it.

Please bring your full presence and attention to support Keith and Bill's family during this challenging time. Thank you.

If you cannot join us but wish to leave a message or story, Bill's sister, Sarah, has kindly offered to accept and collate them for her family. Sarah's email is xxxxxx@gmail.com

To join the online ceremony please click this link:

<https://zoom.us/j/example only xxxxxxxxx>

Password: xxxxxx

Dial in details for telephone access. Xxxxxx

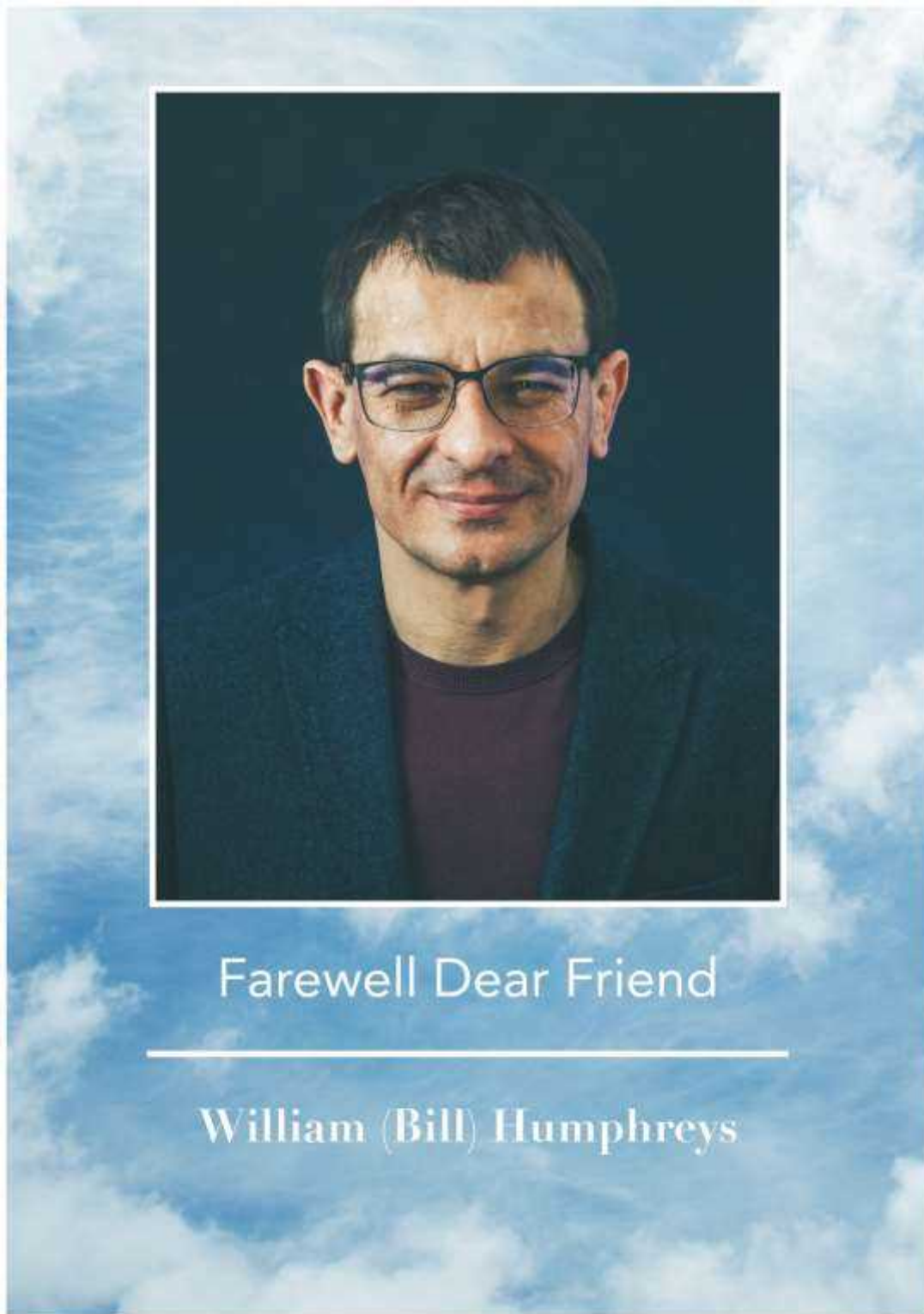
Celebrant, Wendy Haynes
Email: info@wendyhaynes.com
Phone: +61 (0) 422 507 517

Sample Run Sheet for IT Support

Ceremony for William (Bill) Humphreys
Thursday 26th March 2020 at 1pm AEST, Sydney, NSW

WHEN	WHO	ACTION	
12 noon	Wendy	Arrive	
12.20pm	Wendy	Make Jax the Host	
	Wendy	Make Wendy the Co-Host	
	Jax	WAITING ROOM ON	
		Open Chat – Jax and Wendy	
12.30pm	Jax	TURN WAITING ROOM OFF Admit and Welcome Guests	
	Jax	Turn on IT video screen and unmute Field any IT enquiries	
12.45pm	Jax	Turn off IT video screen and mute SCREEN SHARE BILL'S IMAGE AND PREPARED PLAYLIST OF MUSIC	
	Jax and Wendy	Mute and turn off video	
12.55pm	Jax and Wendy	Phones off	
1.00 pm	Jax and Wendy	START RECORDING	
	Wendy	Private chat message to Jax giving the all clear to start	
1.00pm	Jax	BILL'S IMAGE ON SCREEN PLAY FIRST TRACK FOR CEREMONY	
1.04pm	Jax	STOP SCREEN SHARE AND FADE OUT MUSIC	
	Jax	Unmute Wendy	
	Wendy	Welcome and introduction	
SILENT REFLECTION	Jax	No need to do anything	
SPEAKERS	Jax	Mute and unmute speakers	
	Keith		
	Chloe		
	Lucy		
	Sarah		
	Sonya		
	Gary		
	Jill		
OTHER SPEAKERS	Wendy and Jax	Guests to raise hand. Wendy to unmute guest. Jax to mute guest when finished speaking	
PHOTO REFLECTION	Jax	SCREEN SHARE AND PLAY MUSIC	
TOAST - Keith	Jax	Unmute everyone	
CLOSE	Wendy	" "Thank you for your presence here today. May peace be with you." Three seconds of Wendy looking at the camera.	
2.00pm	Jax	SCREEN SHARE BILL'S IMAGE, NOTICE OF THANKS AND THE FINAL IMAGE OF SUPPORT SERVICES	
2.00pm	Jax	Mute Wendy and turn of video	
2.10pm	Jax and Wendy	STOP RECORDING	
2.15pm	Jax	End Ceremony Meeting. Close for All.	
2.20pm	Wendy	Call Jax	
2.30pm	Wendy	Call Family Member if pre-arranged	

Sample of Front Page Image of the Deceased



Ceremony Script

Online Funeral Ceremony Roleplay for Bill Humphreys

Breathe, smile and speak SLOWLY yet STEADILY

- Welcome everyone. Before I start I'd like to let you know that if you are having any IT problems you can send a personal message to our IT person in the chat room. You can access the chat room by clicking on the icon in the meeting controls and look for Jax, IT support.
- You might want to put the Zoom app onto full screen and you can toggle between the speaker view and the gallery view by clicking on the icon at the top of your screen. This will allow you to see everyone that is here today. Whatever screen view you choose it will not affect anyone else's view.
- Mobile phones off and turned face down.
- We would like to invite you to give your full attention to being here online for the ceremony. If we could ask you to refrain from eating or drinking casually throughout the ceremony and if you do need to move about can you please turn off your video so as not to distract other guests. Thank you.
- Again, if you need IT support at any time during the ceremony please send Jax a private message in the chat room. Thank you.

Take a moment to ensure you are sitting comfortably. Some of you may have been busy before coming online or had unexpected challenges to get online and felt pressured – I invite you to take a breath together, as Bill's family, friends and community....to start the ceremony.

My name is Wendy Haynes and I am the family's celebrant for today's ceremony.

We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, in this place, Gumbayngirr country, where Bill and Keith have been living for many years. Also, as there are many of you from far and wide, family and friends from Europe where it's 2am in the morning, from New Zealand and also the US and Canada we honour the indigenous people of all countries and pay our respect to the elders past, present and those emerging.

PAUSE

On behalf of Bill's husband, Keith, and Bill's daughter, Chloe, I welcome you and thank you for joining us for this farewell ceremony for William John Humphreys, or as most of you know him off stage or down in the surf, Bill.

BREATHE

These are unprecedented times for us where we cannot come together to hug and be close to one another physically. Yet, we can be here in this way together and create a beautiful space to celebrate Bill's life and to honour and pay respect for all that he has given to this life by being a wonderful husband, a loving dad and grandpa, a funny neighbour, inspiring colleague...and a dear friend to many.

For many of you this is a new way to be together, without the physical closeness of support – shaking hands or hugging. You may be on your own and not able to be with anyone soon. So, just a few ideas on how to take care of yourself while we are here together where many feelings and emotions can surface.

If you feel a bit overwhelmed you might want to connect with your body, feel your feet on the ground; or connect with your breathing and feel the life within you, within us, which can help us to feel connected; or another way of grounding ourselves is to place a hand over our heart – if that feels right for you – and feel the heartbeat. This very gesture may help to soothe and calm your body and heart.

PAUSE

Today we come to give space to what's important, to what you would most like to share in this time of your loss and grief, honouring your strength and vulnerability, your joy at having known Bill and creating a ceremony that is what Bill would have appreciated. Although we all know he would have liked a much bigger dance party ...

At this time, as we gather, Bill's body and casket are at the crematorium. The beautiful staff there were on the phone with Keith and Chloe this morning and showed them sensitively how they had laid out Bill's body, as the family had wished. As you can imagine, it was an incredibly hard for Keith and Chloe. Tears were shed, even by the staff, yet there was some comfort in knowing that his body is being taken care of by such kind people.

There have been many tears and also much laughter from the stories that have been told over the last few days and today we hope, in our time together, to share music, stories, insights and most of all...to share our love and presence.

Let us take a moment to sit quietly and reflect upon our relationship with Bill. The things Bill said or did that have touched you, that you are reminded of as we come together. Allowing whatever is here to be felt, just as it is. If that feels a bit hard, you might want to bring your hand and just rest it over your heart...or connect with your breath.

PAUSE

These are hard times, so let us be courageous and present together, no matter what comes.

I would like to invite those who were closest to Bill to share some stories and pay tribute. Keith, Bill's husband, would like to speak first.

JAX - UNMUTE and MUTE

Keith – Bill's husband; to speak spontaneously

Note to Celebrants: I included in the document for the ceremony all the scripts for the following speakers in case I needed to refer to them for any reason or read them out if necessary.

Chloe – Bill's daughter.

Lucy – Bill's grand daughter

Sarah – Bill's sister

Sonya – Bill's friend

Gary – Bill's friend

Jill – Bill's friend

Joe Newton a dear friend of Bill's wrote and played the music at the beginning of the ceremony and for the photo reflection that the family have compiled.

SLIDE SHOW with music

Check time, invite other speakers? Raise your hand

*(For a phone with no app: raise your hand *9; to mute/unmute *6)*

Bill and Keith's friend, Thomas, who was a dancer with the Perth dance company and who died last year, said, "Life doesn't end, it just changes form. Life is a choreography of grace; it's all being done and we just have to go with it." Bill took this to heart when he was diagnosed with cancer late last year. Keith told me that when Bill knew he was not going to recover, he kept reminding him to just go with it, which was both reassuring and heartbreaking.

Grief can come when we least expect it and it comes in many ways...at times a numbness, a deep sadness and in the next moment, laughing at recalling something precious.

These last few months in so many ways, have felt surreal and disorientating for those close to Bill. In this gathering, as a community, we come together as friends and family, to foster that sense of belonging, of caring, of bringing our presence to the loss and also to the celebration of Bill's life.

Let us give thanks for Bill's life and the gift of his presence. Later this afternoon Bill's body will be cremated so let us make this offering of love and gratitude now.

As we have been sitting a while, I'd like to invite you to readjust your posture and establish yourself in an upright position; and to take a slow and deep breath in and out together.

Bill's loving, caring, loyal and compassionate nature
will be how we remember him
We remember his wit and humour
His laugh, his style and charm
His love of dancing, surfing and music –
And lots of singing!
And his all-important need for 'self-isolation'.

When you are reminded of him wanting his own way
Adamantly... and stubbornly...
May you smile and remember,
As you said Keith, he was always doing his best
He was dedicated to his path,
And held a fierce determination to find resolve
To overcome his personal challenges
He loved you all, he loved life
And trusted life would look after him...and you.

Keith you said, Bill's form leaves this world
His spirit goes on...
May your thoughts and hearts be nourished
by Bill's capacity to love and his deep-felt generosity of spirit.

We have many people who have joined us today for the ceremony – Keith and Chloe, there's likely to be many guests today you won't know and if we had been gathered in person, they would have introduced themselves, said hi and told you how they had known Bill.

Keith and Chloe, I'm wondering if you would like to take a moment to look at the gallery view of your screen (and scroll through the 4 screens) and see those family and friends and community members who are here today.

If you brought some flowers could you please hold them to your screen as Keith and Chloe say hi to you all or you can just wave hello.

PAUSE

Thank you everyone for being here together in the spirit of deep listening and warm-hearted presence. Keith, Chloe, Lucy and Sarah, our love is with you.

Take care everyone, be gentle and kind with yourselves, and call each other often in this time of 'stay at home'. We might be distanced physically however we can stay very closely connected by offering each other our attention, our deep listening and care when we do connect over the phone or online.

Would you please get your drink ready for Keith to make a toast.

TOAST – from Keith

The family are planning on having a small gathering online after this ceremony to reconnect and offer support to each other. They also plan to hold a memorial ceremony when this will become possible again.

Before I close the ceremony, just a few things. If you didn't get a chance before, after the ceremony you are welcome to leave a message of love and support for Bill's family in the chat room. It might be a few words as to how Bill touched your life, or something he said or did and how it made you feel, or a few words that describe him, maybe even a few words of Bill's wisdom that you recall. Please write your first and last name in the message itself so the family will know who wrote it, and who came today. As I mentioned you can also leave messages on Bill's Facebook page which the family are checking. Thank you.

In a moment Bill's photograph and another favourite track of his will be played. The family have also left a message of thanks and some information about support services that are available if you need them.

Keith and Chloe thank you for your presence here today.

Go gently,
Find the support you need at this time
Ring your friends and family,
Go for a walk
Listen to a track of your favourite music
Or learn some lines of poetry, as Bill would have you do.

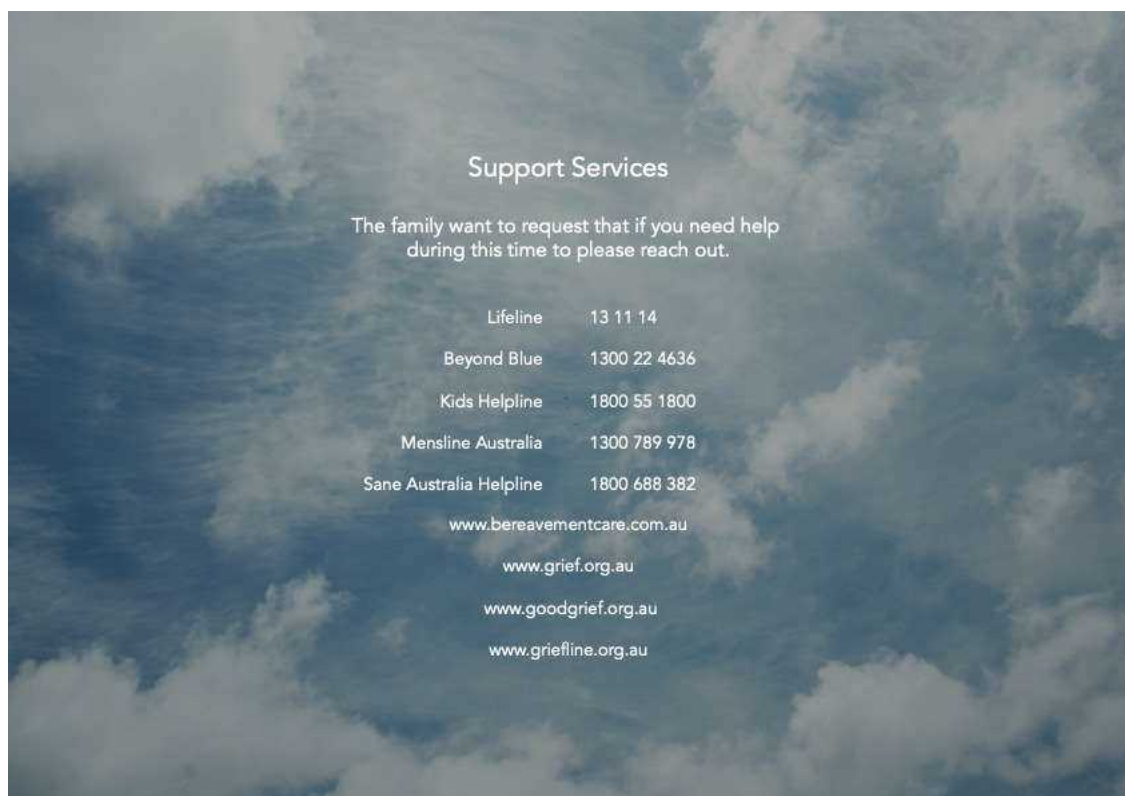
Thank you for being here today.
May peace be with you.

BILL'S IMAGE AND MUSIC

IMAGE OF FAMILY'S THANKS AND SUPPORT SERVICES

(To leave on the screen for ten minutes with music playing)

Sample of the End Page Images



Sample of the 'Guest Book'

A guest register can be compiled from the edited messages in the chat room



Computer Teleprompter

One of the challenges of online ceremonies is maintaining eye contact while reading the ceremony, viewing people's faces on the gallery screen and possibly also doing the IT. One option that makes it easier is to create your own 'teleprompter'.

If you have the ceremony on paper then the viewers will only see your eyelids as you look down while reading and speaking. Also, it can be noisy as you turn or move the paper. This may be ok, however there is another option.

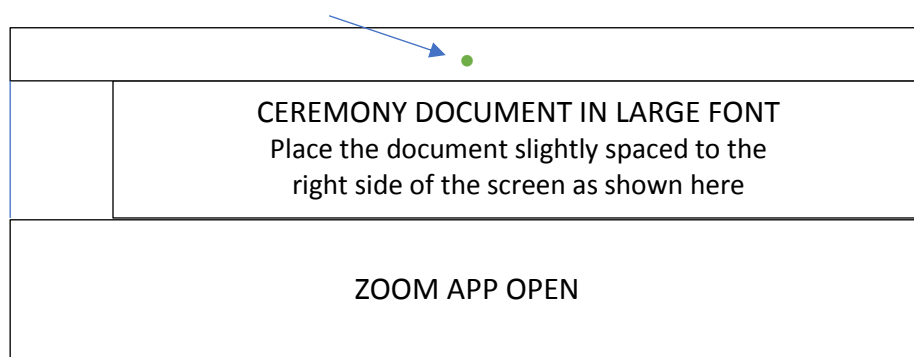
Arrange the ceremony document on the top half of the screen and the Zoom app below so you can still see the family and friends on the screen. You won't be able to see all the participants on the smaller screen, however when there are other speakers you may want to 'toggle' between the full Zoom screen and the partial Zoom screen. Be sure you are confident to do this.

Preparation of document for 'teleprompting' on your computer:

- Open up your document and select all the text
- Change font to a very large size
- Save changes
- Minimise the document to a wide rectangular screen
- Place the document at the top of your screen, a little over to the right.
- Minimise the Zoom screen to the same proportions
- Place the Zoom screen at the bottom of your screen

Using the mouse, scroll the text up as you read. You can then engage with the text, looking into the camera and seeing the Zoom screen. It's a juggling act, however having your eyes toward or focused into the camera does make a difference to your ability to engage with guests.

CAMERA on COMPUTER SCREEN



Audio and Visual Media for the Ceremony

Guides for creating a simple photo slide show and images to screen share, creating a music playlist, playing pre-recorded music, hosting live music and/or singing together. Courtesy of [Jax Oliver Studio](#).

Photo Slide Shows

There's a variety of programs to create photo slideshows (e.g. PowerPoint, Keynote, iPhoto, Movie Maker) however, it's often simpler to share a slideshow of images from a photo browser which you will already have on your computer.

Preview (for Mac) and Photos (for PC) are both useful for this application.

Collate the images in a folder in the order you would like to display them. This can be done by renaming them in sequence, e.g. Image 1, Image 2.

Open all images at once and you'll have a slideshow ready to go. Open all the images at once (for Mac) by holding Command and selecting the images and for a PC, hold Control and select all images. Then right/double click.

Put the application in full screen and ensure that you're selecting that window when you are screen sharing on Zoom.

Using this method, you will have to manually change the slides with the arrow keys.

You can use a stopwatch to help you keep time and change slides consistently. About 4-5 seconds is a good amount of time.

- You can rearrange photos in the browser by dragging them up or down
- When screen sharing, move your cursor off the screen once you go to the slideshow window, as all cursor movements will also be shared and can be confusing and/or annoying for guests watching
- Have a run through of the presentation and screen share before going live and give each photo enough time before changing to the next

Creating Images to Screen Share

If the family wants to share information with the guests, creating beautiful images to share on screen is not too difficult. For the ceremony you may wish to prepare the following images to be 'screen shared'.

- Photo of the deceased with their name, date of birth/death and/or a quote
- Message from the deceased's family offering thanks
- Information about another online 'wake' or gathering post ceremony
- Information about a Memorial Facebook page for leaving messages
- Information about support services for Loss and Grief, Suicide Support, Mental Health Services, Empathy support groups etc.

You can create graphics and title pages using a variety of software, however they can easily be compiled using PowerPoint or Keynote. If there are a few images to flow one after the other, then you may wish to create a slide show and save as a high-resolution file.

See sample images in the appendix.

Ask the family how long they want the images to be played after the close of the ceremony.

Creating a Music Playlist

For funerals, you can source high quality, royalty free music that is appropriate for broadcasting on Zoom. There are several websites that offer royalty free music.

Alternatively, you might have other music that you want to play throughout the ceremony, e.g. the deceased's favourite songs.


You can easily create a playlist of audio files to play via iTunes or another media browser on your computer. VLC is a good option for creating simple playlists and controlling music for ceremonies. VLC can be downloaded [here](#).

Another option, if you have a YouTube account, is [YouTube studio](#). Go to [Audio library](#) on the left to preview music and download for free. Here is [YouTube's information video on copyright](#).

Check out the information [here](#) for Copyright for videographers in Australia.

Playing Pre-Recorded Music

Have the playlist open and ready ahead of time. A good idea is to make the songs loop so that you're not left with silence when the songs end.

Looping a song can be turned on and off by going to 'Playback > Repeat one' on VLC or wherever you see this icon  on your media player.

To share music over Zoom, select 'Share Screen>Advanced>Music or Computer Sound Only' or, if you're sharing music and the slideshow at the same time, then select the 'Share computer sound' tick box at the bottom of the window when you're sharing your screen.

If you're managing your audio playlist and image slideshow at the same time, make sure you have your music playing in the background before you start your photo slide show. Once you've finished the slideshow, fade the music using the volume slider in the media player before you stop your screen share.

Live Music

If there is to be a guest playing live music for the ceremony, ensure they have a good quality microphone and test the sound beforehand. It is also recommended that the musician enables 'use original sound' on their device. Click this [link](#) for more information.

Singing Together

There are YouTube clips about singing together on Zoom as, unfortunately, the time delays can be problematic. The simplest way is to have the key singer or musician's microphone unmuted and have people sing-a-long with their microphones muted. The words for the song can be shared using the screen share facility or in the chat room.

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