How to write an Elegy

An elegy is a poem that doesn't even have to rhyme! It has three sections (described below).

**Your elegy should have 3 sections, at least 18 lines, and at least 1 metaphor.**

**Express Sorrow**

In the first portion of your elegy, describe where and when you found out about the person’s passing or simply describe your emotional response to the news. Attempt to capture the grief and sorrow of the moment of loss. Using a metaphor may help you describe the event and create a sense of lament.

Oh Captain, My Captain, Walt Whitman's famous elegy in memory of the late president, Abraham Lincoln, contains a sorrowful wail: "But O heart! heart! heart! O the bleeding drops of red, Where on the deck my Captain lies, Fallen cold and dead." These lines display the shock of Lincoln's assassination using the metaphor of a ship captain dying at the helm.

**Sing Their Praises**

In the second part of your elegy, praise the deeds and achievements of your subject. This is not about exaggeration, but about honest reflection on their unique attributes and skills. Brainstorm special memories, items, and events that were relevant to the subject of the poem. Use all the senses in describing specific details, as this imagery will make your elegy unique and vivid. Be sure to mention some of the significant achievements and core values of this person that you hope others will emulate. These details will make the poem personal and memorable. For example, W. H. Auden's poem, In Memory of W.B. Yeats includes honest and heartfelt praise such as the line, "You were silly like us."

**Offer Solace (comfort)**

In the final part of your elegy, offer words of consolation, perhaps focusing on the peace that the subject finds in passing. For example, in the final stanzas of A. E. Housman's elegy, To An Athlete Dying Young, the athlete continues to wear his laurel wreath in the afterlife and is admired by the other deceased. This part of the elegy focuses on the person's lasting impact and the legacy they have left behind, such as children or work.

Example on the back.
Elegy For Jane
by Theodore Roethke

I remember the neckcurls, limp and damp as tendrils;
And her quick look, a sidelong pickerel smile;
And how, once startled into talk, the light syllables leaped for her,
And she balanced in the delight of her thought,

A wren, happy, tail into the wind,
Her song trembling the twigs and small branches.

The shade sang with her;
The leaves, their whispers turned to kissing,
And the mould sang in the bleached valleys under the rose.

Oh, when she was sad, she cast herself down into such a pure depth,
Even a father could not find her:
Scraping her cheek against straw,
Stirring the clearest water.

My sparrow, you are not here,
Waiting like a fern, making a spiney shadow.

The sides of wet stones cannot console me,
Nor the moss, wound with the last light.

If only I could nudge you from this sleep,
My maimed darling, my skittery pigeon.

Over this damp grave I speak the words of my love:
I, with no rights in this matter,
Neither father nor husband.