How To Make A Will

UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS:

How To Make A Will

by Charles & Williamson

INTRODUCTION: WHY MAKING A WILL IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU CAN DO

Thinking about what happens after you pass away is not something most people enjoy. It feels uncomfortable, distant, or even morbid. However, taking the time to understand **how to make a will** is one of the most responsible and caring actions you can take for the people you love. Without a valid will, your assets—your home, savings, personal belongings, and even your digital accounts—are distributed according to strict legal rules of intestacy. These rules may not reflect your wishes at all, leaving your loved ones with unnecessary stress, legal fees, and potential family disputes during an already difficult time.

Creating a will gives you control. It allows you to decide who inherits what, appoint guardians for young children, name trusted executors to carry out your instructions, and even make charitable donations. Whether your estate is modest or substantial, knowing how to make a will properly ensures your legacy is handled exactly as you intend. In this comprehensive guide, we will walk you through every step of the process, from initial planning to final storage, so you can approach this important task with confidence.

WHAT A WILL ACTUALLY DOES

Before diving into the practical steps of how to make a will, it helps to understand its core functions. A will is a legally binding document that outlines your wishes regarding the distribution of your estate after your death. Your estate includes everything you own: property, money, investments, vehicles, jewelry, family heirlooms, and even debts. A well-drafted will does several things simultaneously:

- **Names beneficiaries** – the people or organizations you want to inherit your assets.
- **Appoints executors** – the individuals responsible for managing your estate, paying debts, and distributing assets.
- **Designates guardians** – if you have minor children, your will is where you name who will care for them.
- **Specifies funeral wishes** – you can include preferences about burial or cremation.
- **Creates trusts** – for beneficiaries who are too young or lack capacity to manage inheritance directly.

Why Intestacy Rules Are Best

Avoided

If you die without a will, the law decides who gets what. This is known as dying intestate. In most jurisdictions, the surviving spouse or civil partner receives a large portion, but this may not cover the specific needs of blended families, unmarried partners, or close friends you consider family. By learning how to make a will, you override these default rules and write your own legacy.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE: HOW TO MAKE A WILL

Now that you understand why a will matters, let us explore the actual process. The steps are straightforward, but each requires careful thought.

Step 1: Take Inventory of Your Assets and Liabilities

Start by listing everything you own and everything you owe. This inventory forms the foundation of your will. Include:

- Real estate (your home, any rental properties, land)
- Bank and building society accounts
- Investments (stocks, bonds, mutual funds, ISAs)
- Pension plans and life insurance policies (note: these often have separate beneficiary designations)
- Vehicles, boats, or other valuable assets
- Personal belongings of sentimental or monetary value (jewelry, art, antiques)
- Digital assets (cryptocurrency, online accounts, domain names)
- Outstanding debts (mortgage, loans, credit cards)

Having a clear picture of your estate makes it much easier to decide how to make a will that fairly distributes your wealth. It also helps your executors later because they know exactly what exists.

Step 2: Decide Who Will Inherit Your Assets

This is the heart of your will. You need to name your beneficiaries and specify what they receive. You can leave specific items to specific people, divide the residue equally among family members, or create a combination of both. Consider scenarios like:

- Leaving your home to your spouse but cash assets to your children.
- Giving sentimental items like jewelry or art to specific individuals.
- Making charitable bequests to organizations you support.
- Providing for a disabled relative through a trust rather than a direct gift.

When thinking about how to make a will, also consider what happens if a beneficiary dies before you. You may want to name alternative beneficiaries to avoid those assets falling into intestacy.

Step 3: Choose Your Executors Wisely

Executors are the people who carry out your instructions. They handle the paperwork, pay debts, manage the estate, and distribute assets. Most people choose a trusted family member or friend, but you can also appoint a professional, such as a solicitor or a bank. You should name at least two executors in case one cannot serve. Discuss the role with them beforehand so they understand the responsibility. When learning how to make a will, selecting capable and reliable executors is one of the most important decisions you make.

Step 4: If You Have Minor Children, Appoint Guardians

If you have children under 18, your will is the place to name a legal guardian. This person will take on parental responsibility if both parents die. Discuss this with the proposed guardian first to ensure they are willing and able. You can also set up a trust for your children's inheritance, with instructions for how the funds should be used for their upbringing, education, and welfare until they reach a certain age (often 18 or 21).

Step 5: Draft Your Will in Writing

Now comes the actual drafting. You have several options. You can write a will yourself using a template or online service, but this carries risks if the language is not legally precise. The safest route is to hire a solicitor or a will-writing specialist. They ensure your document meets all legal requirements and handles complex situations like tax planning, trusts, and international assets. If you choose a DIY approach, make sure you understand the formalities required in your jurisdiction.

Step 6: Sign and Witness Your Will Correctly

For a will to be valid, it must be signed by you (the testator) in the presence of two independent witnesses who are both present at the same time. The witnesses must also sign the will in your presence. Crucially, witnesses cannot be beneficiaries or married to a beneficiary, or they forfeit their inheritance. This is one of the most common mistakes people make when they try to learn how to make a will without professional guidance. Once signed and witnessed, your will is legally binding.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT HOW TO MAKE A WILL

Many people delay making a will

because of misunderstandings. Let us clear up a few:

- **"I don't have enough assets to need a will."** Even a modest estate can benefit from clear instructions, and a will is essential if you have children.
- **"My spouse will get everything anyway."** Not always. Intestacy rules vary and may not cover blended families or unmarried partners.
- **"A will is too expensive."** The cost of a simple will is often far less than the legal fees and stress caused by dying without one.
- **"Once I write it, I'm done."** Life changes—marriage, divorce, births, deaths, and moves—mean your will should be reviewed regularly.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU MOVE OR GET MARRIED?

Understanding how to make a will also means knowing when to update it. Marriage or entering a civil partnership typically revokes any previous will unless it was specifically made in contemplation of that marriage. Divorce or separation does not automatically revoke a will but usually removes the former spouse as a beneficiary and executor. Moving to another country can also affect your will's validity because different jurisdictions have different rules. Review your will every few years and after any major life event.

STORING YOUR WILL SAFELY

Once your will is signed and witnessed, you need to store it somewhere safe and tell your executors where it is. Options include:

- With your solicitor or will-writing service.
- In a fireproof safe at home (but inform someone of the combination or location).
- With a bank or specialist document storage company.
- With the Probate Service in some countries (check local rules).

Do not store your will in a safe deposit box that is only in your name, because your executors may struggle to access it without a court order. A key part of knowing how to make a will is ensuring it can be found when needed.

DIGITAL ASSETS: A MODERN CONSIDERATION

When planning how to make a will in today's world, you must consider digital assets. These include online bank accounts, cryptocurrency wallets, social media accounts, email accounts, subscription services, and even digital photos stored in the cloud. You can include a clause in your will giving your executors authority to access, manage, or close these accounts. Some people create a separate document listing login details (stored securely, not in the will itself) so that digital assets are not lost forever.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

While it is possible to write a basic will yourself, there are situations where professional advice is essential. Consider hiring a solicitor if:

- Your estate is likely to be subject to inheritance tax.
- You own property abroad.
- You have a blended family and want to provide for both your

current partner and children from a previous relationship.
- You have a disabled dependent who relies on means-tested benefits.
- You run a business and want to plan for succession.
- You want to set up complex trusts.

Paying for professional advice can save your beneficiaries significant money and stress later. Learning how to make a will the right way is an investment in their future.

THE COST OF NOT MAKING A WILL

Sometimes highlighting the cost of inaction is more persuasive than explaining the process. Without a will, your estate may be distributed in ways you never intended. Distant relatives you barely know could inherit while your partner and close friends receive nothing. The government could take a larger share in inheritance tax. Your children's guardianship could be decided by a court. Family relationships could fragment under the strain of disputes. When you understand these risks, the question is not "how to make a will" but "why wouldn't I?"

CONCLUSION: TAKE ACTION TODAY

Knowing how to make a will is not about dwelling on death. It is about taking control, protecting your loved ones, and ensuring your wishes are honoured. The process is simpler than most people imagine. Start by listing your assets, deciding who you want to benefit, choosing trusted executors and guardians, and then formalising everything with proper signatures and witnesses. Whether you use a solicitor, a reputable online service, or a carefully drafted template, the important thing is to do it. Once your will is signed, store it safely, tell your executors where it is, and review it whenever your life changes. By taking this step now, you give your family one less thing to worry about when they need it most. That is a gift that truly lasts a lifetime.