What is a holographic will, and when is one legally valid?

Key facts

- A holographic will is valid if its signature and material provisions are in the testator's own handwriting, whether or not witnessed (Uniform Probate Code Section 2-502(b), as enacted in South Dakota Codified Law 29A-2-502, checked 2026-09-19).
- Roughly half of US states recognize holographic wills for any adult; several more recognize them only for active-duty military members (AllLaw, checked 2026-09-22).
- California requires the signature and material provisions handwritten, and an undated holographic will can be invalidated by a conflicting later will (California Probate Code Section 6111, checked 2026-09-19).
- Texas and Oklahoma require the entire document, not just the key provisions, handwritten (Texas Estates Code Section 251.052; Oklahoma Statutes Title 84, Section 54, checked 2026-09-19).
- Virginia requires that a will's handwriting be proved at probate by two disinterested witnesses, even though none are needed when it is signed (Code of Virginia Section 64.2-403, checked 2026-09-19).
- Florida does not recognize a holographic will made by a resident or a nonresident, even if it was valid where written (Florida Statutes Section 732.502, checked 2026-09-19).
- New York accepts one only from a member of the armed forces in a war or armed conflict, or a mariner at sea, and it expires one year after discharge (New York Estates, Powers and Trusts Law Section 3-2.2, checked 2026-09-19).

Holographic will checklist

- [ ] Confirm whether your state recognizes holographic wills, and how much must be handwritten
- [ ] Write, do not type, the signature and every required provision
- [ ] Include a clear statement that the document is your will
- [ ] Date the document, even if not strictly required
- [ ] Name specific people and describe specific property, avoiding vague terms like "my savings"
- [ ] Name an executor if you want to choose one
- [ ] Sign at the end
- [ ] Store the original where your family can find it, and tell them where
- [ ] Follow up with a formal, witnessed will when possible, stating it revokes earlier wills
- [ ] Record the will's existence and location in your family guide