

# PLANNING THE PERFECT WEDDING



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## Your Wedding Budget

So, you are getting married! Congratulations! Right now, you are probably on top of the world, and you have probably never felt as happy as you do at this time in your life. You have probably never felt quite so overwhelmed at any other time in your life. Weddings are wonderful – and beautiful – but they don't get that way all by themselves, and planning a beautiful wedding can be quite stressful.

The good news is that you really can avoid most of that stress, and this starts by setting a budget. Whether you are paying for your wedding, or your parents are paying for your wedding, there must be a budget in place - from the beginning – and you and whoever else is working with you to create the perfect wedding must stay within that budget.

By having a budget, you will avoid numerous arguments. You will also actually limit your choices. Right now, the choices seem unlimited – and of course that means that they are also overwhelming. Believe it or not, once you have that budget in place, it becomes a great deal easier to make other decisions.

When you start making a budget, you will already have a pretty good idea as to how much you can afford to spend overall. Just knowing this information, however, does not mean that you have a budget. You need to determine how that money will be distributed. Get a pen and paper, gather all of the important players together, and let's make a budget.

The important thing is not to leave anything out. Things to include in the budget are:

Wedding Attire	Photography	Payment for Minister
Cost of venues	Transportation	Cost of Marriage License
Catering	Bridal Shower	Accessories
Wedding Cake	Rehearsal Dinner	Chair/Table Rentals
Decorations	Engagement Party	Guest Book/Pen
Glasses, china, silver	Flowers	Bubbles/Rice/Bird Seed
Napkins, matchbooks	Wedding Party Gifts	Lighting/PA Equipment
Invitations	Hair Appointment	Linens
Music/DJ	Manicure/Pedicure	Thank You Notes
Wedding favors	Alcoholic Beverages	Wedding Planner Fee

There may be additional costs that are specific to your wedding that also need to be budgeted in. Take your time, and make sure that you have everything covered, and also make sure that you are being realistic about the cost of things. This may require some research to come up with a realistic, workable budget.

## Selecting the Wedding Party

Once you have your budget in place, you are ready to get to work. The first thing you will want to do is to select your wedding party. This is a big deal for most couples, and sometimes, the choices are not easy to make – and feelings can be hurt. Therefore, this is an important step, and it does require a lot of thought. It also needs to be done early, so that there are no assumptions or misunderstandings.

Wedding party members include the maid or matron of honor, the bridesmaids, the best man, the groomsmen, the flower girl, the ring bearer, the ushers, the ceremony official, and of course the parents and grandparents of the bride and groom.

If your budget is really tight, you can also select people to serve at the reception. You will need someone to see over the guest book, and several people to serve wedding cake and punch. While this is not typical at expensive weddings, it is very typical at smaller weddings, and perfectly acceptable. The friends and family members who serve at your wedding in this capacity are considered members of the wedding party, and the women will need corsages, and the men will need boutonnieres. These wedding party members, however, do not typically have special clothing to wear – they wear what anyone would normally wear to a wedding, as a guest.

Start by determining who will be the best man, the maid of honor, the flower girl, and the ring bearer. From there, determine how many bridesmaids there will be, and remember that each bridesmaid represents an added expense in the grand scheme of things. Select the same number of groomsmen as there are bridesmaids. Two ushers is the typical number, although if you are having a really large number of guests, you may need up to six. Depending on your budget, the size of your wedding, and the venue, you may also be responsible for hiring or enlisting your own valets as well, to park cars.

Keep costs in mind! Sometimes, the party paying for the wedding also pays for the wedding attire of all members of the wedding. Other times, bridesmaids, groomsmen, ring bearers, flower girls, ushers, the best man, and the maid of honor all pay for their own clothing. Keep this in mind, and make sure that you and the people that you choose know who is expected to pay for what right from the beginning.

Above all, remember that this is your wedding – your special day – and you should not allow anyone to pressure you into choosing your wedding party members. You should choose the people that you want to stand up with you on this special day – regardless of feelings that may get hurt.

## The Wedding Date

With your budget set and your wedding party selected, you need to set a date before you can move forward with anything else. You cannot select venues or order invitations without knowing the date and time of your wedding, and the time of your reception as well.

This can be a source of stress for many couples. Again, gather all of the players together, and start tossing around potential dates for your wedding. There are many factors to consider. For example, depending on the size and complexity of your wedding, you may need a year to plan it. There may be numerous out of town guests who will need time off from work to attend your wedding. You may have your heart set on getting married at a certain time of the year. The list of possibilities goes on and on.

The thing to remember here is that no matter how hard you try, there is never going to be a date that is 'perfect' for everyone involved. The bride and groom, as well as the official, are the only people who actually have to be there, and others will somehow manage to work it into their schedule.

If you come up with several possible dates, and you can't choose one, write the dates down, throw them in a bowl, and pick one. Remember that spring and summer weddings are very popular – and summer weddings work especially well because out of town guests can use vacation time to attend. Winter and fall weddings, however, are also beautiful, and you can often get services cheaper during these times. Seasonal weather may or may not play a role in your decision.

Ideally, you will have your wedding on a weekend. This is usually on a Saturday, but could also be on a Sunday, or on a Friday night. Again, this is up to the bride and groom, but you must remember that most people work during the week, and getting to a wedding may not be easy.

Once you have a date, you need an hour. What time do you want to get married? You can opt to marry in the morning, the afternoon, or the evening – and again, this is up to you. Hopefully, you have chosen an official for your wedding, and you can check dates and hours with that person as well.

Again, picking the date isn't always easy, nor is picking the hour of the wedding. Once you have chosen a time for the wedding, you should plan to have the reception about one hour past the start time for the wedding. This gives you time for the ceremony, and for everyone to change venues for the reception, if they are held in separate places. If they are held in the same place, plan for the reception to start thirty minutes after the start of the wedding ceremony.

## The Wedding Venue and Guest List

With a date and time in mind, you are ready to choose the place where you will marry. For some people, there is no question concerning this. If you attend church regularly, and you have always wanted a church wedding, you pretty much already know where you will marry. All you have to do now is to make sure that the church is available on that date, and at that time.

Some weddings are too big for some churches, or some couples do not desire a church wedding, for numerous reasons. In this case, you will need a different venue. Some weddings take place at private homes, although these are typically very small weddings.

The ideal place for your wedding will be one that can accommodate the number of guests that you plan to invite. Some people make the guest list before they start shopping for a venue, and this is a smart thing to do. Once you know how many people will be attending, start thinking about all of the possible locations that your wedding can be held, and make a list.

With that list of possibilities, discuss the potential locations with your wedding party. Some will be able to tell you why one place will be perfect, while others will be able to tell you why you should mark some places off of your list completely. Listen to what they have to say. The old saying is that two heads are better than one, and three are better than two. Take that to heart.

Once you have pared down your list a bit, call the potential venues for an appointment to view these places. When you call, let them know what date you need the venue, and the time. This, in turn, will allow you to mark more locations off of your list, because they won't all be available. Also inquire about the cost of renting the venue. Some will be out of your price range, and you can mark those off of your list. Now, go to actually see the possible venues that are left. Be sure to take your groom with you.

When you arrive, make sure that the venue has everything that you will require. You may require an area to dress. You may want your wedding and reception to be held in the same place. You may need a PA system. Really look things over, and try to imagine your wedding in action in each of these venues. Where will people park? Where will chairs be set up? Where will the bride and groom each enter? What is the lighting like? Can the lighting be dimmed? Don't allow anyone to rush you through your visit.

Finally, choose a location. Call that location to let them know that you want to book the venue for the date and time of your wedding, and go ahead and put down a deposit for it, so that nobody else comes along and snatches it out from under you.

## The Reception Venue

Like the wedding ceremony venue, the location for your reception must be able to accommodate the number of people that you have invited. It must also be a suitable location for dancing, for a band or DJ, and for caterers to adequately serve food. In most cases, it will have a kitchen available as well.

If your wedding reception will be held in a different venue from the wedding, think about the possibilities that are not located too far away from the wedding venue first. Again, make a list, and discuss it with your wedding party. Next, call the venues. Make sure that each one is available on the date and time of your reception, that each venue can hold the number of people you plan to invite, and that each venue does fit into your budget. Set up appointments to view the ones that are still on your list.

Before you visit these venues, check in with your caterer and DJ. Ask them what they need in the way of a venue. Some caterers or DJs will agree to go with you to view the venues so that they can see first hand if it is adequate for them. Take them along, and again, listen to what they have to say.

Some venues will be more preferable than others. For example, if you book your reception at a hotel, the hotel may be able to cater the reception as well. They will usually include chairs and tables as well, and they are well set up for DJs and wedding receptions in general. Ballrooms and Halls are also great places for wedding receptions.

Keep your budget in mind at all times, and cut costs where you can. Any venue that includes the tables and chairs that you will need should be strongly considered, as this will save you some money – and some work. Also, find out about ‘housekeeping.’ For some venues, you will be responsible for cleaning up the mess after the party, while others will handle all of that for you. Obviously, if you are responsible, you will need to line people up to do that for you in advance.

Don't be too quick to decide that you don't like a venue. You may not realize it right now, but most venues that are large enough for a wedding reception are actually quite ugly – until they are decorated. As mentioned, it is important to see it in my mind – fully decorated and full of people – to truly determine whether the venue is the right place for your reception or not.

As with the wedding venue, when you find the reception venue that you want, put a deposit down on it to secure it. If your florist, caterer, and photographer did not go with you to see the venue initially, they will need to see it at some point after you have chosen it.

## Let Them Eat Cake...and Other Stuff

If there is to be a wedding, there must be a wedding cake, and for this, you will need a baker. The chances are good that you will need a baker, even if you are planning on hiring a caterer. So, which baker will bake your cake?

It is a good idea to get some referrals here. If you have friends or coworkers who have recently married, simply ask them who did their cake. Ask them what they thought of their baker, and if they would recommend them. If so, you've probably found your baker, and you should make an appointment with them to discuss your wedding cake.

If you don't have anyone who can refer a baker to you, you must turn to other resources. Get a list of bakers in your area, and visit their shops. You don't need to make an appointment for the initial visit. What you are looking at initially is their work, in general. Get a sense of whether or not their shop is clean, and whether or not the designs of fresh baked goods in their shop are to your liking. If so, you are ready to discuss your cake with them. Most bakers have pictures of cakes that they have done in the past. Ask to see those.

Once you've settled on a baker and a cake, the baker will ask either for a deposit, or for the full amount of the cake. Get this taken care of, and if you are planning to hire a caterer, and don't have any in mind, ask the baker who they might recommend.

For caterers, you will need to make an appointment. The caterer will need to know the number of guests, and will probably suggest several different menus for you to choose from. While the cake was one flat fee, the caterer will typically charge per head. When they quote you a price, they are quoting the price per person.

You may also need to discuss appetizer with your caterer, as well as beverages. Note that not all caterers provide china, glasses, and silver, and you need to know whether they do or not. If they don't, however, they probably have vendors that they work with that will supply these items. Some caterers will also provide the linens that you need.

It cannot be said often enough – keep your budget in mind, and make sure that you are not going overboard on the food. If you have a tight budget, realize that you don't have to serve food at all at your reception. You can opt to serve cake, nuts, mints, punch, and things of this nature. Just plan your wedding and reception times around normal meal times. For example, if your wedding is at 1:00pm, and your reception is from 2:00 to 4:00pm, nobody will expect to be served dinner.

## Music for the Wedding and Reception

Have you dreamed of your wedding and heard music in the background of those dreams? The chances are that you have. The chances are also good that you have no idea what music was actually playing in those dreams. You've got to find music for your wedding.

First, let's think about the wedding. You need music to walk down the aisle. Some people want a pianist or organist, while some are happy with a CD played over the PA system, or used in a CD player that is loud enough – and clear enough. Either way, you need a pianist/organist or someone to control the CD player.

You can choose any music that you want to walk up the aisle, but the traditional music is from Lohengrin, which we know as the Wedding March. You also need music to walk back up the aisle with your new husband. This song is often referred to as the Bridal March. You may also want a special song played during the ceremony. You may have a friend or cousin who will sing during your wedding. This needs to be planned, and if CDs will be used, the music needs to be burned onto the CD in the order that it will be played.

You will also need music for the reception. If you will be going all out, and there will be dancing, you might want to consider hiring a band, or at the very least a DJ. If you can't afford either of these, you will need to have numerous CDs to play, and appoint someone to take care of the CD player.

If you will be hiring a band or DJ, start interviewing early. If possible, you should attend an event where the DJs or bands that you are considering are working to see them in action. Once you've done that, and you have a list of the ones that you definitely want, start at the top of that list, and work your way down. The first thing you will need to know is if they are available on the date and time that you need them. Next, you need to know what their price is. As with everything else, these two factors will eliminate some musicians or DJs from your list automatically.

Once you've found a DJ or band that is available, and that works into your budget, note that you do not generally give a band or DJ a deposit. Instead, they are paid at the end of the event. You will want to check with them a month before the wedding, and again a week before the wedding to make sure that they are going to show up.

## Wedding Favors

You've been very busy. You've set a date, hired a caterer, hired a baker, found venues for the ceremony and reception, and you have music lined up. Hopefully, you still have lots of energy, because there is still much to be done. But for now, let's do something fun. You get to pick out wedding favors for your guests!

First note that wedding favors do not have to be expensive. In fact, you can put together wedding favor bags that are very elegant, for less than five bucks a bag. For budgeting purposes, multiply \$5 by the number of guests that you will have. If it is more than you can spend, simply buy cheaper wedding favors.

Some ideas for wedding favors include small photo albums or picture frames, ornaments, small bells, flower seeds, chocolates, mini bottles of cider and things of this nature. Think small – but elegant.

Some people have welcome gifts and parting gifts, but you don't have to do this. Instead, you could print up programs for your wedding, and guests can pick these up when they arrive at the wedding. At the reception, include a table that has bags of birdseed or bottles of bubbles which will be thrown or blown at the bride and groom as they leave. On another table, include little gift bags for all of the guests. These will contain your wedding favors.

Don't go broke with wedding favors. Even if you spend just two dollars per guests, if you have one hundred guests you are spending \$200. You can opt to fix small gift bags with wedding mementos for each guest instead. These small bags may contain an engraved matchbook, a bottle of bubbles, a printed napkin, and things of this nature. Also realize that some people don't provide wedding favors at all.

If you do want to give out wedding favors, but money is still an issue, do your shopping online, and order in bulk. For example, at [www.papermart.com](http://www.papermart.com) you can order gift bags in bulk for about forty cents each. At [www.discountmugs.com](http://www.discountmugs.com), you can order engraved glasses and shot glasses for less than a dollar each. If you just do a little online browsing, you can put together fabulous wedding favors for very little money.

You will also need small gifts for the wedding party. Traditional wedding party gifts include necklaces for the women and cufflinks for the men. Don't forget the ushers, as they are part of the wedding party. Wedding party gifts are typically handed out right before the wedding starts, and necklaces and cufflinks are usually worn during the ceremony.

## Wedding Invitations

Wedding invitations are a must, and they should be ordered as soon as possible. In the past, one went down to their local stationary store or printer, and picked out invitations from a book. Today, you can actually do your shopping online, have more selections, and typically get a much better price.

Traditionally, the invitation would include the names of the parents of the bride and groom, and would be worded in a way where the bride's parents are requesting the guest's presence at the wedding. In more recent times, that changed to where the parents of the bride and groom were extending the invitation. It later changed to naming the parents of the bride and groom, but the invitation was worded in a way that made it clear that the bride and groom were extending the invitation.

Today, with all of the mixed up family dynamics, it is perfectly acceptable to leave off the parents names altogether and only include the names of the bride and groom. When there are four parents of one person (mother and step-father and father and step-mother for the bride, and mother and step-father and father and step-mother for the groom) the invitations get a bit wordy – and expensive.

The invitation really only needs the brides name, the grooms name, the date of the wedding and the time, the address of the wedding venue, the address of the reception venue, any special instructions, and of course a request for an R.S.V.P. It is customary to include an R.S.V.P postcard as well, with the invitation, and this postcard should already have the postage attached to it. It should be as convenient for the person that you are inviting as possible.

Invitations vary in price, depending on what you choose. They can cost anywhere from one dollar each up to several dollars each. Again, remember your budget, and when you look at the budget that you've set for your invitations and response cards, also remember that postage must also be included in that number. These days, it costs forty one cents to mail an invitation. You can save money by forgoing the response cards as well. Instead, you can include a line on the invitation, asking people to call in their R.S.V.P.

What you must remember is that each person you invite is costing you money. You are paying for their invitation, for their response card, for their wedding favors, for their food, for their piece of cake, for the chair that they sit in, and even for their dancing at your wedding. This is why there is always so much discussion over guest lists, and why number limits are set right from the beginning. Use good judgment and common sense when making that guest list – and when ordering the invitations.

## Wedding Attire

You can't go naked, and this is a special occasion. You, your groom, your wedding party, and the parents of the bride and groom need wedding attire, and you will spend a great deal of money on this.

Of all of the attire, the wedding dress will most likely be the most expensive item. You don't have to purchase a wedding dress, however. You can actually rent a dress, and this is a more feasible option for some brides. Others are a bit more sentimental, and want to save their wedding dress, and pass it on to their own daughters and/or grand daughters.

Speaking of passing things on, before you spend hundreds or thousands of dollars on a wedding gown, why don't you check out the wedding gowns of your own mother, your grandmother, your future mother-in-law, and your future grandmother-in-law as well?

You may be amazed at what they still have in their closets, and you may also be surprised to find that their dresses are elegant, and still very much in style. Not only will you save a wagon load of money, but you will be wearing something that is very special indeed. Don't worry if it doesn't fit – it can be altered at any bridal shop. You will of course need new shoes, stockings, a garter, and accessories, and depending on the shape of the veil, you may need a new veil as well.

Hopefully, you've already determined whether you will be paying for the bridesmaid dresses and the men's attire or not. You need to pick these items out. Sometimes, bridesmaid dresses can also be rented, and if this is available in your area, this is the way to go.

All of the men's attire, including the grooms, can be rented, and all rentals should be reserved well in advance, with a deposit paid. Rentals should be picked up a day or two in advance, and checked to ensure that all of the pieces of the tuxedos are included.

Generally, the mothers pick out their own dresses. They typically choose the same colors that the bride has chosen for her wedding, and often consult with each other – and possibly even shop together – when purchasing their dresses. The fathers usually wear tuxedos just as the groomsmen do.

Don't forget the small things. Slips or petticoats, stockings, shoes, ties, belts, and things of this nature are often not thought of until the last minute. Note that the women's shoes may need to be dyed to match their dresses, and this is done by more high-end shoe stores.

## Wedding Vows and Speeches

Will you be writing your own vows or saying traditional vows? Traditional vows are beautiful, and meaningful, but these days, it seems that more and more people are writing their own vows. While this comes very easy for some, it is quite difficult for others.

If you are nervous about writing your own vows, let's give you good reasons to relax. First, realize that whether you write your own vows or use traditional vows, you will still be speaking in front of everyone. This is why many people avoid doing their own vows, without realizing it...they are simply a little fearful of 'public speaking' and they realize too late that 'public speaking' is involved no matter what.

Next, realize that your own vows will be much shorter than traditional vows in most cases – unless you already have an awful lot to say. So, if public speaking is a fear, you will actually do better by writing your own vows. Finally, there is no hard and fast rule that says that you must memorize your vows. You can write them down on a card, and read from it during your ceremony. The trick is to not sound like you are reading.

Vows do not have to be original. You can recite a poem that tells your beloved how you feel. You can recite lyrics to songs as well. When you first start saying your vows, give the author credit by saying something to the effect of 'Such and Such said it better than I ever could in his poem entitled (title of the poem).' Follow that with the passage that you want to read. End it with your own words however, telling your beloved that you will love them until the end of time.

Aside from vows, there are also speeches that are typically made during the reception. These speeches can be made at anytime, but are usually made when the wedding cake is served and toasts are made, or while waiting for the meal to be served. The best man usually gives a speech, but in today's world, the maid of honor may also give a speech. There may also be a speech given by the father of the bride, and the father of the groom, depending on what the bride and groom want. Usually, these are the only speeches given, although the groom may also give a speech, toasting his bride.

Usually, the people who are giving speeches write them, and they may or may not memorize them. Regardless of whether or not the speech is memorized, the speaker usually has a note card, in case they get nervous and forget what they were going to say. These speeches are usually not rehearsed with the bride and groom present.

## Wedding Pictures and Video

No matter how expensive or inexpensive your wedding is, one of the things you absolutely will not want to skimp on is the pictures. Even if you want video of your wedding, you will still want still pictures. You need a photographer.

Now, some people try to save money by having Uncle Walter or Cousin Fay taking the pictures. This is almost always a mistake...unless your Uncle or Cousin is a professional photographer. You need a professional photographer.

These days, a photographer will do both still pictures and video. They typically employ assistants to help out, so that everything important gets captured. Photographers always provide their own equipment, and they do require a deposit up front. You pay the balance of what is owed when you pick up your pictures and your video.

If your photographer doesn't ask to see the wedding and reception locations in advance, you might want to worry. Most professionals want to check lighting and such ahead of time, to determine whether they need to provide additional lighting or not. They will also request a safe room for additional equipment that they will bring. This could be as simple as a closet that locks, with the photographer holding the key during the event.

As mentioned, your photographer needs to see the wedding and reception venues ahead of time. At that time, he should be taking notes, and you should be talking. Ideally, you will tell him about particular shots that are important to you, such as the kiss, the first dance, and things of this nature. Make sure that your photographer has all of the information that he needs well in advance.

The photographer that you've chosen should also have a portfolio to show you. The photos that you want to see the most are of weddings that he has done in the past. Look at the clarity of the photos. Look at the shots that the photographer captured. Are these the types of photos that you want of your own wedding? If so, you've found your photographer.

Discuss the video with your photographer as well. Ask him if the video will be raw or edited. The choice is usually up to you. Raw means that everything that the video captures stays, while if the video is edited, bloopers may be edited out. Again, this is your choice, and you need to discuss it with your photographer ahead of time.

Photographers are not cheap, and getting an uncle or cousin to do it will save you money – but the photographer is capturing a once in a lifetime thing on film, and you want it to be as good as possible.

## Wedding Decorations and Flowers

What is a wedding without the flowers and decorations? While you could actually get married without the flowers or decorations, it won't feel quite like a wedding at all. For flowers, you will of course need a florist, but not just any florist will do. You want a florist who can help you to make your wedding beautiful.

First, think about all of the things that you need from your florist, and make a list. Remember that florists can handle more than just flowers, in many cases. For example, if you need to rent an arch for your ceremony, many florists can help you out in this area. Florists can also do big bows made of various materials, and make many of the decorations. Florists can also do candle type decorations, as well as centerpieces for tables. Again, make a list of all of the flowers and decorations that you need before you visit the florist.

As for flowers, not only will you need flowers to decorate the wedding and reception venues, you will also need bouquets for your bridesmaids, a basket for your flower girl with petals in it, a bride's bouquet, boutonnieres for the groomsmen, the father of the bride, the father of the groom, the ushers, and the groom, and corsages for the mothers of the bride and groom.

While your wedding colors play a big role in your flower choices, the season that you're wedding takes place also matters. Certain flowers simply will not be available during certain seasons, and others will be incredibly expensive during certain seasons. For budgeting purposes, plan to use flowers that are in season at the time that your wedding takes place.

For decoration purposes, your florist will most likely want to see the venues, unless you have already decided what decorations and flowers you want, and you can be very specific about it. If this is the case, there really is no need for the florist to view the venues. But if you need the florists help, they will need to see what they are working with. Often, a bride will tell the florist the date of the wedding and her colors, as well as her flower and decoration budget, and just let the florist do what florists do best.

Like photographers, a good florist will most likely have pictures for you to view of different bouquets and arrangements. This makes it much easier to make selections, but if you see a picture of an arrangement that is close, but not quite what you want, discuss it with the florist. You will find that any picture of an arrangement or bouquet can usually be changed to suit you.

While fresh flowers are beautiful, sometimes, it is more cost effective to use silk flowers. Discuss the difference in price with your florist to make the best decision for you, your wedding, and of course you're wedding budget. Also, discuss delivery and set up of all flowers and decorations in advance.

## Wedding Planners

Do you need a wedding planner? After giving it some thought, you may have decided that you really don't want the responsibility of doing everything to make your wedding perfect. You may even think that you don't have the first clue as to what to do in order to bring it all together. You may want to consult with a wedding planner, at the very least, as this is an inexpensive way to get some great ideas for your wedding.

If you will be working with a wedding planner, obviously, you will want to get referrals from friends or relatives before choosing one. Some wedding planners are absolute paragons, while others are more likely to turn your wedding into an absolute nightmare. Never hire the first wedding planner that you speak with. Instead, talk with at least three wedding planners, and then make your decision.

A good wedding planner will be able to handle most aspects of your wedding, but they will need your input for many decisions. Obviously, they need to know who the players are, your preferences for colors and flowers, your preferences for venues, your music preferences, your cake and meal preferences, and much more. With all of these decisions on your plate, you may wonder why you are actually using a wedding planner.

While most decisions are still yours to make, a wedding planner has three roles in those decisions. First, they let you know what decisions need to be made, and they never skip any of the details. Second, they let you know what your choices are for those decisions. Third, a wedding planner makes sure that everything comes together beautifully once the decisions are made – without stressing you.

The third reason is often the reason that a wedding planner is hired in the first place – so that the bride and her family can truly enjoy all of the wedding festivities, without the stress of planning it all and making sure that the dream becomes a reality. That is the wedding planner's job.

A good wedding planner will spend a great deal of time talking with you, and with your groom as well. They need to get a true sense of who you are, and exactly what it is that you want for your wedding. They want to design the wedding that you have dreamed about, and they need your help to do it.

If there is no room in your budget for a human wedding planner, note that there are actually many web based wedding planners. These are essentially web based programs that lead you through the decisions and such, enabling you to make all of the right selections, without leaving out any of the fine details. Many brides find such programs invaluable to them during this happy, yet stressful time. Most of these programs do have a fee associated with them, but they are well worth the cost if you are planning your own wedding.

## Transportation

Transportation is one of those fine details that are often overlooked. Transportation is definitely needed for a wedding, and there are many options. You need various types of transportation for your wedding.

First, you need a way for the bride and the bridal party to arrive at the wedding venue. The groom and groomsmen typically find their own mode of transportation, but the bride and bridal party are usually brought to the wedding venue by private car. You can opt to hire a limousine service, or you can arrive in a horse and carriage. To save money, you can have a relative with a really nice car drive you and your party to the wedding venue.

You need transportation that will take the bride and groom, as well as the rest of the wedding party, to the reception venue. Usually, the bride and groom are alone in one vehicle (with a driver), the bridal party is in a second vehicle, and the groomsmen are in a third vehicle, depending on how big the wedding party is.

If there isn't much in the budget for transportation, just worry about transportation for the bride and groom, and arrange private transportation for the rest of the wedding party in advance. Make sure that everyone knows how they are to get from point A to point B in advance.

Finally, you will need transportation for the bride and groom once again, when they leave the reception to start their honeymoon. The rest of the wedding party arranges for their own transportation home. Transportation for the bride and groom may take them to their new home, to a hotel, or to the airport. It may even just take them a few blocks away to their own private vehicle.

It is wise to call and book cars and drivers well in advance. Do not put this off, or you will find that there are no cars and/or drivers available for your big day. If this is the case, consider renting cars for the day, as well as driver attire, and enlist the help of friends or relatives that are not part of the wedding party for driving duties.

Don't forget the valet parking. If parking isn't included with the venues that you reserve for your wedding day, you should consider hiring private valets. Some areas have professional valet services, and some do not. If your area does not, contact a temp agency to hire valets that way. The number of valets that you need depends on the number of people who have been invited to the wedding. Depending on your venues, and available parking, you may not need a valet service at all.

## Preparation for the Big Day

About two weeks before the wedding, everything should pretty much be done for your wedding, and it should only be a matter of the big day arriving, and putting everything into place. Here is a preparation checklist that you can use:

### Two Weeks before the Wedding:

- Double check with all services and professionals - Confirm that they will be there on the big day, at the proper time. This includes photographers, bakers, caterers, valet services, car services, bands/DJs, and florists. Check with the venues to make sure that everything is in order.
- Get the Attire – All fittings should be finished, and you should be able to pick up all of the brides attire, as well as the attire for the bridal party. Double check that everything is there and that it all fits just right.
- Make Appointments – Make appointments for the bride and her party with hair stylists, makeup artists, and if the budget allows, with a masseuse. Often, the day before the wedding, the bride and her party will spend the day at a spa for a full beauty treatment, and some much needed relaxation.

### One Week before the Wedding:

- Finish paying for services and venues – Some services should not be paid for until after the event, such as photography and music, but others will need to be paid the day of the event. To avoid this added stress on your big day, pay these fees the week of the wedding, instead of the day of the wedding.
- Get the Attire for the Men – Make sure that all rented tuxedos are picked up, checked, and tried on. Do this several days before the wedding. Invariably, a piece of a tux is always missing, or the wrong size is given. Take care of any problems that arise with the attire.
- Parties – Usually, friends throw bachelor and bachelorette parties. Sometimes, they make the mistake of doing this the day before the big day, and this is a mistake. Instead, plan these parties two or three days before the big day, so that everyone is able to fully recover.

### **The Day before the Wedding:**

- Visit a spa. Make the appointment in advance. This is more for relaxation than for anything else, and it is important. If you've been under stress planning your wedding, your spa day will definitely take the look of stress out of your face, and the feeling of stress out of your body. Make sure that you get that much needed massage.
- Triple check with professionals – Check in once again with all of the services and professionals associated with your wedding to ensure that everything is on track. You don't want to be worried on your wedding day about the photographer showing up.
- Go to bed early, and get at least twelve hours of sleep. If you find that you are too excited or nervous to sleep, take an over-the-counter sleep aid to help you get the rest that you need. Tomorrow is going to be a long day – but a very happy day.

### **The Day of the Wedding:**

- Keep Appointments – The day starts early, and generally starts with hair, makeup, and nail appointments. The bride should go ahead and take a relaxing bath before these appointments. These appointments should be made early enough in the day that you can relax during these appointments, without worrying about being late to your own wedding. When you make the appointments, make sure that these professionals know that this is your wedding day, and that you cannot be late.
- Make sure everyone knows their role – The day of the wedding can be very hectic, but it doesn't have to be. Enlist the help of friends and family in advance to take care of last minute details. For example, have someone arrive at both venues early in the day to ensure that everything is ready. Someone will need to meet the florist and caterers early, so that they can get set up. Someone needs to be in charge of paying for services that are paid for the day of the event. Again, don't leave anything to question. Plan for these things in advance, and enlist help.
- Get Ready for your Wedding – Your hair and makeup are beautiful. Everything is in place and taken care of, and it is time to put on your wedding gown, grab your bouquet, and walk down the aisle. Relax and smile. This is the day that you have been dreaming of.

## Wedding Planning Resources

The Knot

<http://www.theknot.com/>

Wedding Resources

<http://wedding-resources.com/>

Brides

<http://www.brides.com/>

Wedding Solutions

<http://www.weddingsolutions.com/>

Bridalocity

<http://www.bridalocity.com/>

Wed Alert

<http://www.wedalert.com/>

American Bridal

<http://www.americanbridal.com>

50 Free Wedding Invitations

<http://www.50freeweddinginvitations.com/>

My Wedding Market

<http://www.myweddingmarket.com/>

eWedding

<http://www.ewedding.com/>

Brides Center

<http://www.bridescenter.com/>

Alfa Wedding Programs

<http://www.alfawedding.com/programs.htm>

Wedding Party Center

<http://www.weddingpartycenter.com/>

Wedding Warehouse

<http://www.weddingwarehouse.com/>