



MB Wedding Planning Guide

Great Information, Tips & Checklists to Help You
Plan the Perfect Wedding Day!

A Complimentary Wedding Planning Guide from:

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Table of Contents



1. Getting Started
2. Your Wedding Budget
3. The Reception
4. Ceremony
5. Catering
6. Wedding Attire
7. Invitations
8. Flowers
9. Wedding Cake
10. Photography
11. Videography
12. Musicians & Live Music
13. Disc Jockeys
14. Transportation
15. Planning Your Honeymoon
16. Wedding Vendors & Contracts
17. Dealing with Wedding Stress
18. Money Saving Tips
19. Worksheets & Checklists

12-Month Countdown
Wedding Budget Worksheet
Traditional List of Who Pays
Bridal Attire Checklist
Wedding Flowers Checklist
Invitation & Stationery Checklist
Groom's Countdown
Wedding Accessories Checklist



Getting Started

Congratulations, you're getting married! If you're like most, you've dreamed about your wedding day ever since you were a child. Now the time has come, but the difficulty is knowing where to begin.

First, you should announce your engagement and share your wonderful news with family and friends. Some brides like to formally announce their engagement in their local newspapers. Others simply prefer word of mouth or an engagement party. Whatever you choose to do, be sure to enjoy this wonderful and magical time in your life.

As with any large undertaking, you should begin with the big picture and then work your way down to the details. The first issue you need to think about is money, as it will affect the rest of your wedding planning.

I know it doesn't sound very romantic, but you've got to set up a budget, otherwise you could be still paying off your wedding bills on your 10th anniversary. You'll need to determine how much you can spend on your wedding and who's going to contribute to your wedding expenses.

With that in mind, your next step is to develop an overall framework for your wedding. You need to begin thinking about what kind of wedding you want. Here are a few questions you should answer to help you decide...

- How much money do I want to spend on my wedding?
- Do I want a small or a large wedding?
- Do I want an indoor or outdoor wedding?
- What time of year do I want to get married?
- Do I want to get married during the day or evening?
- Do I want a traditional style wedding or something more contemporary?
- Do I want an elegant, formal setting or something more romantic and intimate?
- Do I want a formal sit down dinner, a cocktail reception or something in between?
- Do I want to get married close to home or at some destination location?

Once you've answered some of these general questions, it's time to set up your wedding budget.



Your Wedding Budget

It's time to set aside the romance for a moment and talk dollars and cents. Unless your one of a chosen few, where the "skies the limit", you need to set a budget for your wedding.

First, you've got to determine two things:

- How much money you want to spend on your wedding?
- Who will be contributing to the wedding and how much?

The traditional rule of the bride's family paying for the entire wedding is fast becoming history. Today, there is much more sharing of expenses between the bride's family, the groom's family and the bride and groom. Many couples are getting married later in life and are well established with their own careers. These brides and grooms are able to pay for more of the expenses and sometimes want to pay for the entire wedding themselves. (For the Traditional List of Who Pays – See Page 26)

A good way to help you define your budget is to set priorities. The bride and groom should discuss which elements of the wedding are most important to them. For instance, is the reception location, the bridal gown, or the entertainment that is most important? You should choose about 3-4 items that are your top priorities and set the rest of your budget from there.

Now, let's look at some of the costs. Your reception, including food and beverages, can average 50-65% of your total budget. Therefore, the reception location (and caterer) along with the number of guests you invite will have the most impact on your budget.

Today, the average wedding costs between \$15,000-\$21,000. Here's a recommended guideline based on a \$18,000 wedding budget for about 100-125 guests:

Reception Site, Food, Alcohol & Beverages	55%	\$ 9,900
Photography & Videography	11%	1,980
Music & Entertainment	8%	1,440
Apparel & Accessories	10%	1,800
Flowers & Decorations	8%	1,440
Invitations	3%	540
Wedding Cake	2%	360
Transportation	1.5%	270
Miscellaneous	1.5%	270
Total	100%	\$18,000



The Reception

Your reception site is the most influential in determining the overall mood, theme, and atmosphere of your wedding. You want to select a reception site that matches your individual style, taste, and budget. This is not an easy task and can certainly require a significant amount of time and effort.

Keep in mind that many popular reception sites book up a year *or more* in advance. So, if you have a particular reception site or certain date in mind, don't wait!

LIST OF POTENTIAL SITES:

Reception Hall or Banquet facility	Art Gallery
Country Club	Yacht
Restaurant	Marina
Resort	University or College Facility
Hotel	Botanical Garden
Inn or Bed & Breakfast	Ranch
Historical Building or Mansion	Private Home
Museum	National Park

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR RECEPTION FACILITY:

- **Size and particulars of the facility.** Can the facility comfortably accommodate the size wedding and number of guests you are planning? If you're planning a large wedding, inquire as to the largest reception the facility has handled. Does it have air conditioning? Is there a room available for the bride to use during the reception to change clothes or just freshen up?
- **Your Wedding Date.** Is it available? Ask if there are any other events or weddings booked for that day. Some facilities will only book one wedding a day while others may book two weddings back to back. And of course, large hotels can have many weddings going on simultaneously. Just be sure you know all of the details for the day of your reception.
- **The decor of the facility.** If you haven't seen it already, ask to see pictures of the facility as it would be set up for a wedding. Can you make any changes? Make sure that if there are certain decorations that you see now and like, that they will still be available on your wedding date.

The Reception (Cont.)

- **Number of hours.** Most receptions last for four or five hours. Ask how many hours you will have for your reception. Some facilities will give you four hours and charge you additionally (sometimes another \$500) for every additional hour. Be sure to ask when you must be out of the facility and if there is an additional charge for going over the allotted time.
- **Fees and Extra Charges.** How much is the total rental fee? And specifically, what does the price include? Ask about the deposit, how much and when is the balance due? If it's a banquet hall or historic estate, do you have to rent chairs and tables? What about linens and glassware are they included? Is there a cake-cutting fee? What about a corking fee? (When you purchase your own alcohol for the reception, a corking fee is sometimes charged for each bottle of wine opened.)
- **Wedding Packages.** Ask if they have any "wedding packages". Sometimes facilities will offer a wedding package including food, flowers, wedding cake and even a limo. Although you limit some of your choices, it can save you lots of time and money!
- **Catering and Food Service.** If the facility will be providing the food for the wedding, make sure that you've had an opportunity to sample the food and talk about menu choices. If you choose a location that requires an outside caterer, ask if you're required to choose from their approved list or can you choose any caterer?
- **Alcohol and Bar Service.** Does the facility provide the alcohol and bar service or do you bring your own alcohol? What about bartenders? Are there any restrictions about the type or quantity of alcohol that can be served? Do they require a cash bar or is open bar an option? Ask about their liability insurance and if it is sufficient for your size wedding.
- **Entertainment.** Make sure the dance floor is big enough to accommodate your guests. Ask the facility manager to show you where the band or DJ would set up their equipment. Make sure the facility can accommodate them adequately.
- **Restrictions.** Ask if there are any restrictions in regards to using the facility. For instance, some historic estates have certain restrictions or rules regarding smoking, lit candles, live music and alcohol.
- **Overnight accommodations.** Ask if the facility has overnight accommodations for your out-of-town guests. If it is a hotel, can you reserve a block of rooms at a discounted rate?
- **Wedding coordinator.** Ask about a wedding coordinator. Some facilities will have a Wedding Day Coordinator on staff and at no extra charge. The Coordinator keeps the wedding on schedule and is "the person" for the caterer, DJ/band, florist, or even the bride to go to if they have questions.



Ceremony

Just as with all your other wedding vendors, the Officiant you choose should match your personal style and the type of wedding ceremony that you'd like to have. Here are some questions and issues that you should discuss with your Officiant.

Religious Issues

- Will you marry us if we are of different faiths?
- Will you marry us if we are not current members of your church?
- Do you require pre-marital or religious counseling before getting married?
- Are we allowed to write our own wedding vows?
- Are there any restrictions on the types of readings that can be used?
- Can we use contemporary readings or are they required to be religious or scripture readings?

Ceremony Music

- Are there any restrictions on the type of music that can be played?
- Can we use contemporary songs?
- Can we bring our own musicians or must they be affiliated with the church?
- Are there any restrictions on wedding attire? Some churches may have rules about bare shoulders or skirt lengths.

Photography

- Are there any restrictions on photography? Some churches may limit or may not allow ANY flash photography. Others may have restrictions on where the photographer may and may not stand.
- Is it permissible to videotape the ceremony? Are there any restrictions for the videographer?

Decor

- Are there any items or decorations that could be used during the ceremony, such as candles, candelabras or pew decorations?
- Are we allowed to take the floral arrangements to the reception?
- Are we allowed to throw rice or birdseed outside the church? What about rose petals or bubbles?

Logistics

- How many guests will the church hold?
- Is there another wedding scheduled on the same day?
- Can we hold a receiving line outside the church? What happens if it rains?

What about the timing and logistics of obtaining the marriage license? Officiants are usually well versed in the rules for their state.



Catering

As far as wedding expenses go, the catering or food bill is one of your largest expenses (40-45% of most wedding budgets). So, spend plenty of time with your caterer talking about your budget, the style of reception you'd like (i.e. buffet, food stations, sit down dinner or cocktail reception) and the types of food that you'd like to serve.

There is so much variety and choice when it comes to menu selection. It's no longer "chicken" or "beef". It all depends on your personal preference and budget.

Let your caterer know your budget upfront. Don't assume that a buffet or food stations is less expensive than a sit down dinner. Remember, it depends more on what type of food you serve that determines the price.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CATERER

- **Taste Testing** - Ask if your caterer will do a "tasting" and make sure some if not all of the main dishes you are asking your caterer to prepare are included in the tasting. Pay attention to the food presentation as well as the taste.
- **Tableware and Linens** - Does the price include table linens, napkins, dishes, and glassware? Ask to see samples. Remember, if you don't like the tableware or linens they offer, most everything can be rented, but usually at an additional price.
- **Decorations** - Ask to see pictures of their table displays. Some caterers will include floral arrangements and other decorations as part of their buffet tables or food stations. As your wedding plans progress, talk to your caterer about your color theme so that all decorations and floral arrangements will coordinate.
- **Guaranteed Numbers** - Many caterers will quote prices based upon a certain number or minimum number of guests. For instance, many caterers base their figures on a minimum of 100 guests. If you're final guest count is for only 80 guests, there may be an additional fee.
- **Ratio of Servers to Guests** - This can vary depending on the type of reception you have. However, even a buffet style reception should have good service – i.e. waiters clearing dinner dishes and serving coffee. One good rule of thumb is to have one server for every 8-10 guests.
- **Dress Code for Wait Staff** - Will they be dressed formally in a black and white tuxedo look?
- **Tax and Gratuities** - Are they included in the price? Are there any additional fees that are not included in the quote or proposal?
- **Licenses** - Your caterer should be licensed by the state. Most display their license in their office, but if you're not sure, ask!



Wedding Attire

It's not everyday you go out and buy a white, formal gown, made of expensive silks and lace. It's not everyday you wear this dress either, but it's probably the single most memorable dress you'll ever wear.

Many thoughts go into choosing the right dress. You get an image of what you like and how you want to look and feel. When a bride finds the right dress, she just "knows" it is the right dress because she'll get an emotional flood that takes over all her senses. Here are a few things to remember when you go shopping for that dress:

Shopping for Your Wedding Gown

- When you go shopping for your gown, don't bring ALL six bridesmaids and your mother. If you bring too many people shopping, it can be very confusing with several different opinions. Try shopping with just one or two people.
- When you go shopping for your dress – try to look your best. Sometimes even the most beautiful gown won't look just "right" if your hair is a mess and you're wearing sweat socks.
- Bring magazine clippings with you to your appointment at the bridal salon. This will give the salon a much better idea of what types of gowns you like.
- Try on as many different styles as you can. A wedding gown is unlike any other dress and sometimes you just can't tell which style is going to look best on you.
- Keep an open mind. That unattractive thing hanging on the hanger just may be the dress of your dreams in hiding.
- Trust YOUR instincts and you'll know exactly when you've found THE DRESS.
- When you go to order your wedding dress, order the dress in your current size. Don't order a smaller size anticipating to lose weight. It's always easier (and LESS EXPENSIVE) to take in a dress rather than letting it out.
- Wedding dresses often run small. Even though you might be a size 10 in casual attire, you'll likely need to purchase at least a size 12 wedding dress.
- Before you order your dress, be sure to check into the shop. How long have they been in business? With lead times of over 6 months sometimes, you want to feel comfortable that the shop will be in business 6-12 months from now.
- When you decide, and the dress has been fitted, do make sure it feels comfortable to wear and walk around in.



Headpieces & Veils

Headpieces and veils complement your dress and add another dimension of style to your wedding day. Below is a look at different types of headpieces and veils.

Types of Headpieces

Wreath - Typically a circle of flowers or beading, it encircles the head.

Barrette or comb - This is typically secured into the back of an up-do.

Rings - These headpieces are in the shape of a ring and the hair (up-do) is brought up inside the ring and then styled.

Tiara - Think "princess". It is a jeweled decoration that sits like a crown.

Headband - It is secured behind your ears and rests at the top of your head.

Hat - Decorated elegantly, it can be in any number of shapes and sizes.

Types of Veils

Flyaway - A short veil that ends at the shoulder.

Fingertip - Extends just below the waist, brushing your fingertips.

Sweep - Ends at the floor.

Chapel - Measures 9 feet long and trails along the ground.

Cathedral - Measures 12 feet long and has a significant train.

Tuxedo Tips

- Tuxedos should be ordered two to three months ahead of time (remember prom time can be very busy).
- The wedding party should rent their tuxedos from a reliable shop.
- Make sure that everyone receives a proper fitting. Failure to do so can cause needless grief and even embarrassment when the tux fits improperly.
- When the men pick up their tuxes, make sure they double-check their order before leaving the store. Check shoes, number of cuff links, vests, etc.

Each person should return their own tux or designate one person to do this for all.



Invitations

Your wedding invitation is the first thing your guests will see so it should set the tone and theme of your wedding day - formal, semi-formal, or casual. You can choose to have your invitations printed or make them yourself.

Here are more tips about invitations:

- Many brides are saving hundreds of dollars by designing their own invitations on their personal computer. There are so many software programs available that guide you through the entire process and include several design options.
- Invitations should be mailed 4-6 weeks prior to your wedding date. You'll want to order invitations at least four months before the wedding to allow plenty of time for their preparation, addressing and mailing. For engraved invitations order them even five months ahead. (GREAT TIME SAVER: When you order your invitations, ask if you can have the envelopes right away. This will give you extra time to address the envelopes.)
- Allow yourself plenty of time to proof the invitation and order form before submitting it to the printer. Have a friend or family member check the draft or pre-press copy before giving the final "OK". When your invitations are ready, be sure to count your invitations and proof them before leaving the printer's office.
- Always order 15 to 20 more invitations than you think you'll need. It can be very expensive to order additional invitations at the last minute - and you may not get them in time! You'll need extra invitations for any mistakes made in addressing the envelopes, any "last minute" additions to the guest list, and a few for keepsakes.
- Review your guest list to make sure that all the names are spelled correctly and addresses are up to date.
- Usually, the bride's family sends out the invitations. However, if the groom's parents are sharing in the expenses, then they can be on the invitation as well.
- Take a typical invitation "package" (what you will be sending to your guests) to the post office and have it weighed. Be sure to apply the appropriate amount of postage stamps so that your invitations are delivered on time and with no postage due!
- Common Invitation Mistake: Do NOT address a wedding invitation as

"Mr. and Mrs. Jones & Family".

Always take the time to address the inside envelope with the name of each member of the family. Begin with the parents, "Mr. & Mrs. Steven Jones" then, write the full name of each child in order of age, beginning with the oldest child. All Children over the age of 16 should receive their own invitation



Flowers

The beauty of your flowers will enhance your wedding day from beginning to end. So, it's important to choose the right floral designer to match your style and taste. A good floral designer will offer knowledge, guidance and lots of creative ideas. Before you meet with the florist, look around their shop:

- What is the decor of the shop like?
- Is it nicely and creatively decorated?
- Do they have interesting floral arrangements?
- Do they use unique vases or baskets in their arrangements?
- Next, look in the cooler - Do the flowers look fresh?
- Do they have interesting varieties of flowers or just your standard roses or carnations?

Remember, you're not just buying flowers - you're buying the creativity and style of the floral designer.

When you meet with the florist, you should discuss the overall theme and mood you want to create for your wedding. Be sure to bring with you pictures of your wedding dress and bridesmaid's dresses and bring swatches of material if you have them.

Here are a few questions you should ask:

- **Ask to see photographs** of other weddings done by the florist. Do they look different or do the arrangements all look the same? Again, you're looking for creativity and style. Be sure to tell the florist what you like and what you don't like about certain arrangements.
- **Ask about their service the day of the wedding.** Who will be setting up the day of the wedding? Will there be a delivery person dropping off the flowers or will the florist be there to assist the wedding party with their flowers. Ask how many weddings are done in one day.
- **Are they familiar with both the ceremony and reception location?** If not, ask if they can make arrangements to visit them prior to the wedding.
- **Ask about delivery and set up times.** This is especially important when it comes to the hotter weather. If the flowers are dropped off too early they can wilt and won't stay fresh throughout the entire reception.

When you choose your florist, make sure that your **contract or receipt details** all of the arrangements, bouquets and any other decorations that the florist is to provide. Include a detailed description of the color and variety of flowers to be used. You don't want to ask (and pay for) roses and end up with carnations.



Wedding Cake

Your baker should work with you to create a magnificent cake that matches your individual style, personality and wedding decor. When you go to visit a baker, there's more to do besides just tasting cakes! You need to consider and discuss with your baker the following:

- Your style and preferences. Bring pictures of cakes that illustrate a particular style, element or decoration you like.
- Your budget.
- Is the cake going to be the only dessert served? You want to choose a cake or dessert that will compliment your menu.

Order your wedding cake as soon as possible or at least two to four months before your wedding. It's always better to book your vendor as soon as possible and then finalize the details closer to your wedding date.

Questions to Ask Your Baker

- **Flexibility in design choices** - Will they "custom-make" your cake based on your individual preferences? Unless you want your baker to replicate a particular cake, all wedding cakes should be custom made.
- **How the cake is made** - Some bakers may use packaged cake mixes while some use all homemade ingredients. Either one of these should not be the issue. What you need to ask is "What is the source of your ingredients? Are your ingredients fresh or frozen?"
- **Request pictures of their work** - Take a look at their portfolio of cakes. Does it reflect good workmanship, a steady hand, and creativity? Do you like the baker's style?
- **Extra charges or deposits required for pillars, cake tops, or columns** - If there are pillars or columns that are rented, ask how much the deposit is and about how and when those items need to be returned.
- **Delivery and set up charges** - If your baker is close by, there may not be an additional delivery charge. Some may charge \$35-\$60 for delivery. Usually, the set up charge is included in the price of the cake.
- **Setting up the cake table** - Talk to your baker about how you'd like the cake table to be set up. Usually, they will use fresh flowers and greenery to decorate the cake table. However, flowers should be used in moderation because you don't want the flowers on the cake table to draw attention away from the cake.
- **Price per serving** - For a three-tiered cake, prices will start at \$3.00 per slice. Depending on the type of cake, its ingredients, the design, etc. some cakes may be as high as \$10.00 per slice. Also, the butter cream style is usually less expensive than the rolled fondant style.

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Photography

Your wedding day will go by so fast – but your pictures will last a lifetime. You'll want to take great care in choosing your photographer. Here are some helpful hints and questions you should ask your prospective photographer.

- **Experience** - Has this person photographed other weddings? Does he/she do this for a living or just for fun? A brand new photographer may be pretty good, but do you want to trust your once in a lifetime event to a newcomer?
- **Quality and Style** – Do you like the photographer's style? Can you picture yourself photographed the same way? Is there a satisfactory mix in different styles?
- **Who's Taking the Pictures** - Is this the photographer that will be photographing your wedding or will they send in whomever is available. Don't be shocked, this happens more often than you can imagine. Be certain that you know which photographer is going to be there and see their work and meet them.
- **Personality** - Is the photographer that you meet someone that you can get along with? Is the "chemistry" there? This is a person that you are going to spend most of the day with; the most important day. Does he or she seem service oriented?
- **Appearance** - Ask the photographer how he/she intends to dress. Is this person well groomed?
- **Price** - Although, the last thing you want to do is shop by price, is this person within your budget? If not, is he or she worth the difference? A lot of times we tend to surpass our budget constraints to get what we really want. If you see and like it, you'll find a way. In any case, make sure you understand what everything costs, including reorders.
- **Offering** - Whether it's *a la Carte* or packages, do you understand what you get? Is there any room for changes and will it cost to do so? Sometimes the packages are fixed, sometimes they can be customized, in any case, ask. How much time will he spend? What if you need more time?
- **Delivery** - How long does it take to get your proofs back, your finished album, your bridal portrait, etc.? Some photographers take months to deliver your proofs. Be sure of how long things take to turn around.
- **References** - A personal reference is always the best and people love to talk. Get a list of current references from the photographer and check them out personally. A photographer who doesn't have references or is afraid to give them to you will not be the person that you should hire.



Videography

Many of today's brides are hiring videographers to record their special day. Knowing what to look for in a videographer and what to record in writing will help ensure that all goes smoothly.

Make sure you know which videographer will be filming your wedding. Ask to meet with your videographer and view his or her work prior to your wedding day. Here are more tips and questions you should ask:

- **Ask about the filming style** of the videographer – and be specific about what you want. Some brides and grooms prefer a documentary style where the videographer is less obtrusive and stands in the background to record the events of the wedding. Others prefer the videographer to get close ups and “interviews” with the bride and groom, the wedding party and guests.
- **View full-length demonstration tapes** of the videographer and check them carefully for lighting, sound and the inclusion of important wedding traditions.
- **Ask for recommendations** from banquet managers and photographers.
- Make sure that your videographer does not use a VHS camera. The standard **video camera for professionals** is HD Digital and should support 1080.
- Ask that your **final copy** be recorded on digital tape. It is more durable and should last longer than even CD's.
- Be sure to check to make sure that your **ceremony site** allows videotaping.

Include in Your Contract:

- General wedding information – the date, times and locations of all events and the number in your wedding party.
- The video – what you want included in your videotape (music, baby pictures, any special effects, etc.) how many cameras will be used in the shooting, the name of the cameraman, how many final copies you will receive and the length of the video.
- Other important information – what package you're getting, how many hours it includes, your deposits and remaining balance and when these payments are due.



Musicians & Live Music

When hiring musicians for your ceremony or reception, be sure to begin your search as soon as possible. Professional musicians, orchestras, bands and soloists may be booked a year in advance. Here are some guidelines to use when making a decision about the type of music you want and whom to hire:

- The music should compliment your special event, and not be too overpowering. Take into consideration the size of the venue and the acoustics.
- Don't be afraid to ask for and check references of the performer you are considering. Chances are, if other people have been pleased with the musician, you will be, too.
- Take the time to audition musicians. This will give you an overall feel for their style of music and on-stage presence. Auditions can be in person, over the phone, by cassette tape or video.

Audiotapes let you sample the style and expertise of the musician. Video additionally allows you to see the appearance of the performer. Make sure you like the quality of the music and that it is appropriate for your event.

- If you have particular selections you want included, be sure to discuss this in advance with the musicians. Make sure they can honor your requests and will have enough time to get the music and rehearse.
- For wedding ceremonies, always check with your Officiant before making selections. Some faiths or houses of worship do not allow secular (non-religious) music or particular selections. Knowing this in advance of hiring a ceremony musician will help you determine who to hire. Also, if you are getting married in a church, check with your Officiant to make certain hiring a ceremony musician outside the congregation is permissible.
- Discuss your expectations with the musicians. Musicians should dress and present themselves according to the theme of your event. Be very clear on what duties you expect of the musician, such as introducing special dance songs or when to play a certain selection. Be as detailed as possible, and get everything in writing. Don't leave anything to chance.
- Amplification is important for any sizable event. Ask if the musicians are providing their own sound system and be sure it is electrically compatible with the venue or is battery operated.
- Most importantly, look for a harmonious working relationship. If the musician is not responsive to your needs during consultation, keep looking.



Disc Jockey's

Wedding professionals agree that good entertainment is the key to having a successful wedding.

Here are some great tips to help you select your DJ:

- Once you have a list of DJ's talk to them. Pay attention to their professionalism on the phone and ask for literature and referrals.
- Your wedding will most likely require music to satisfy all ages and musical tastes so ask about variety and their policy on requests.
- Find out about equipment. A DJ should have professional sound equipment - not "home consumer" gear. If lighting is important to you, ask about these special effects.
- A good DJ will take the time to explain how they will handle the details of the introductions, first dance, toast, blessing, cake cutting, bouquet & garter toss and special requested dances. They will be able to communicate well with you and should be willing to listen to your ideas and meet any special needs.
- Your DJ should be familiar with most of the music you want and should know how to organize the reception within your guidelines. Try to determine if your DJ has the ability and willingness to "read" and motivate the crowd.
- Most reputable DJ's will be willing to provide you materials, song lists and informational planning sheets.
- A professional DJ will be well attired, will mix music types well and blend motivational dances & special activities with your requests. Your DJ should do it all with style, microphone presence and proper volume.
- Most DJ's will be willing to meet with you. Take advantage of those opportunities, as it will give you a chance to share your ideas, get suggestions and meet the DJ in person.
- If a video is available, request to see it. Also be sure to check references and recommendations. Auditioning a DJ at a stranger's wedding is not usually practical.
- The perfect DJ will be affordable, experienced, and have good references. He or she will know music, communicate in a friendly and helpful manner, and should be interested in what you and your guests want.



Transportation

Here are some important considerations and questions to ask when selecting your transportation company. With a little extra effort up front... all you'll have to do is sit back and enjoy the ride!

- **Type of Vehicles** - Ask about the types of cars or limousines that the company offers. There are six, eight and ten+ passenger (super stretch) limos. Ask how many passengers will the car hold comfortably? You may think you're getting a great price - until a 6-passenger limo shows up to take you and your 8 bridesmaids to the church.
- **Condition of Vehicles** - Ask the year and model of the car. If it is an older car, is it in good condition? If possible, try to visit the company before you book them and ask to see the type of limo that would be picking you up. Be sure to inspect both the inside and outside of the car.
- **Chauffeurs** - Choose a company that places a high value and emphasis on the quality and professionalism of their chauffeurs. Ask how the chauffeur will be dressed. Will he/she be wearing a tuxedo?
- **Price** - Is it based on a time limit (2-3 hours) or on distance? If it is based on time, what happens if the allotted time goes over - is there an extra charge?
- **Tipping** - Is it already included in the price? If not, what is an acceptable tip. Usually 15% is customary and 20% is given for exceptional service.
- **Discounts** - Many companies will offer discounts to the bride and groom when they reserve additional vehicles for their wedding day or for their bachelor or bachelorette parties.
- **Directions** - Ask if the driver is familiar with the area where you will be traveling. In either case, it's a good idea to send written instructions to the company detailing the directions of where the bride is to be picked up, the ceremony and reception location.
- **Wedding Specials or Packages** - Ask about any "wedding specials" such as complimentary champagne, a red carpet or any other special services.
- **Check References** - As with all of your other wedding vendors, it is always important to check references. The company should be happy to share this information with you.
- **Confirm EVERYTHING** - Confirm your reservation the week before the wedding and make sure they have all of the directions.



Planning Your Honeymoon

Planning your honeymoon is just as important as your wedding. Many of the same rules apply. First, talk to your fiancé about your preferences – do you want a relaxing beach vacation – or an outdoor excursion?

Next, set a budget for your honeymoon just like you would for your wedding. Determine how much you want to spend on hotel, transportation (airfare, car, or taxi), meals, entertainment and shopping. When you set a budget **and** put it in writing - the chances that you will stay within your budget and NOT over spend are much better!

Here are more honeymoon tips:

- Your honeymoon is an important event, so talk to your **travel agent** and **QUESTIONS!** Be specific. Ask questions about the hotel or resort, the room, your flight. Don't leave anything to chance.
- If you can avoid it, don't book your flight for **EARLY** the next morning after the wedding, particularly if you're planning an evening reception. Once you finally get to sleep, it may be hard to wake up at 5:00am for that early morning flight or worse you may not even hear the alarm!
- **Splurge** a little – it's your honeymoon! Do something special that you wouldn't normally do on a regular vacation. Spend a little extra for a room upgrade – or the honeymoon suite! Plan a romantic dinner at a gourmet restaurant or go on a sunset cruise. Go on a few excursions or tours.
- When **packing** for your honeymoon, think about packing some romantic items like candles, massage oil, and some new lingerie.
- Give yourself plenty of **time** to pack. Make a list of all the items that you'll need. Anything that you forget, such as suntan lotion, aspirin, toothpaste will always cost more to purchase at your destination.
- The new security procedures at **airports** require you to show a current picture identification. It is important to purchase your airline tickets with your maiden name in order to match your photo ID, license or passport.
- If you are using **disposable cameras** at your wedding, buy a few extra and take them on your honeymoon! Disposable cameras are great for when you don't want to risk losing or damaging your expensive 35mm camera.
- When making reservations for your honeymoon, let your hotel, resort or cruise line know that you are "**newlyweds**". You'll likely receive lots of special treatment like free champagne, breakfast in bed, a "goodie basket" or even the honeymoon suite!
- If you are looking to save money on a vacation, in most cases an **all-inclusive** package will be the best value. It is one price that usually includes your airfare, hotel, food, drink (including alcoholic beverages) and some water sports.



Wedding Vendors & Contracts

What You Should Know Before You Sign:

- Read your contracts carefully. Read every word. Ask questions if something is unclear. Ask to change wording in the contract if you are uncomfortable with any of the language. Don't just assume it's a "standard" contract and that everything will be all right.
- If the contract is lengthy, ask to take it home to review. Or, ask the vendor to fax you a copy of the contract before you meet with them.
- Before you give a vendor a deposit, always get a written contract that includes the all-important information such as the date, time and what the wedding vendor is expected to perform.
- Be as specific as possible in the description. For example, don't just say flowers to be delivered – put the number of bouquets, the type of flowers and the date, time and location for the delivery.
- As you make changes throughout the planning process, be sure to update your contract – even if you just hand write the changes and sign and date it.
- Think carefully about your choices before placing deposits with vendors. Most deposits are nonrefundable.
- Most vendors will require a deposit to hold your date. Try to pay as small of a deposit as possible and never pay the full amount up front when booking several months ahead. You never know if a vendor may go out of business and take your deposit with them. Avoid any vendor who insists on being paid in full up front!
- Whenever possible, use credit cards for all payments to vendors. If there is a problem or dispute, you will have a much better chance of getting a refund than if you pay by cash or check -- even if it is several months later.
- When paying your wedding vendors and making purchases for your wedding, use a credit card that "gives you something back". There are credit cards that will earn points for everything now – air miles, gifts, long distance calling – you name it!
- If you have any questions or doubts about doing business with a wedding vendor, call the Better Business Bureau in your area.
- **ALWAYS check RECENT references!** Don't rely on someone who used their services a few years ago.



Coping With Wedding Stress

Whether you are a bride or a groom, wedding planning is a time where all kinds of stress can manifest itself. Many times, brides and grooms experience different kinds of stress. Brides are usually more emotional about the wedding plans and grooms can be more concerned about money. Here are a few tips:

- **Expect that there will be stress** in planning your wedding. Why? There are a lot of decisions to be made, many details to be worked out, and others may want, or try to influence you. That's not bad or wrong; it just requires that you and your fiancé be aware of what is really happening. Try to respond to issues and avoid reacting to things.
- One of the greatest challenges facing brides and grooms is their feelings of wanting to **satisfy everyone**. There are so many people involved - family, friends and relatives. Setting **realistic expectations** is very important.
- **Don't expect perfection**. Expect a "terrific" day. Setting expectations that are too high will create stress and lead to frustration, and then more stress.
- Feeling stressed about certain elements of the wedding such as, saying your wedding vows or your first dance? Then, **visualize** the event. Spend some quiet time alone, relax and really visualize in your mind the events going smoothly. Do this exercise several times a day if you need to!
- One of the best ways to combat stress is to **exercise**. When things start getting out of control - STOP. Take a break and go to the gym or go for a brisk walk.
- Wedding planning can cause a great deal of stress between the bride and the groom. Individually, they should be aware of their **thresholds for stress**, and how much stress they can handle in a given time period. If you notice that one of you is nearing your "threshold", then take a short break from your wedding planning and do something fun together.
- Parents can also experience wedding stress as their children get married and leave "the nest". This is commonly referred to as "**separation anxiety**". It can be a time of great anxiety for the parents, which can then create stress, and highly emotional issues for the bride and groom. Being aware of what is happening, REALLY happening, is a big part of dealing and managing stress.
- **Time pressure** can cause a great deal of stress. Don't try and do everything yourself. Delegate as much as you can to others. Use the Internet.
- Are you and your fiancé **arguing** more than normal? Realize that this is **normal** because you are spending more time on wedding planning versus spending time on your relationship. That's why it is so important to take time away from wedding planning and spend time with each other. A romantic dinner, a bike ride -- whatever you both like to do together (just don't discuss the wedding plans!)



Top Money Saving Tips

- Keep the guest list small.
- Consider not having a dinner reception. Opt instead for a brunch, afternoon tea, cocktail or dessert party.
- When selecting your menu, be careful of all the "extras" that the catering manager may suggest...such as the five course dinner...soup and salad... two types of dessert and wedding cake! When everything sounds so delicious, it's easy to get carried away and so does your catering bill!
- Supply your own alcohol if you're able to. In addition, spend less money on the champagne – most people only take a sip for the toast.
- Focus your "wedding dollars" where they will get the most attention. For instance, when choosing flowers for the ceremony - focus on the altar because that is where your guests will focus their attention.
- If there is another wedding ceremony scheduled for the same day, ask your Officiant if you could contact the other bride and groom. Then, ask the other couple if they would be willing to share expenses for the ceremony flowers.
- Use your bridal bouquet and bridesmaids' bouquets as floral decorations at the reception. You can use them as the centerpiece for the head table or you can place them at the cake table, gift table, favor or place card table. They make a beautiful floral display and your guests will love to see the bouquets up close!
- Decorate with more greenery and baby's breath, and less flower blooms. If you have a large area to decorate, consider renting shrubs, trees or plants. It is much less expensive than using large floral arrangements and still looks very attractive.
- Choose a smaller floral centerpiece. Then, add ribbons, candles and/or mirror plates to make your centerpiece look larger and more elaborate.
- Use silk flowers. They are always less than fresh flowers, plus they can be rented!
- If you're buying your wedding dress and bridesmaids' attire from a bridal shop, purchase all the dresses from the same shop. They'll usually give you a pretty good discount off the dresses or free alterations.
- Make your own veil. Most craft stores sell how-to books and supplies. You can save hundreds of dollars by making your own.
- Make your own invitations. There are many software programs available that can help you with this task.
- Check out local universities for qualified and inexpensive musicians, photographers and videographers. Professors will be able to point you to the best students in the program.

The 12-Month Countdown

Six to Twelve Months Before Your Wedding

- Select a Wedding Date and Time (and possibly a backup date)
- Announce your engagement in the paper
- Plan an engagement party with family and friends
- Talk with a bridal consultant or wedding coordinator
- Find out what bridal shows are in the area and plan on attending
- Agree on a preliminary budget
- Decide who will pay for what and how expenses will be shared
- Call your church or synagogue for an appointment with the Officiant
- Consider and ask friends and family to serve as wedding attendants
- Start a "planning system" and system of organization
- Start your wedding guest list
- Start thinking about ideas/themes for your reception and catering plans
- Determine what type of entertainment you want to have for your reception
- Decide the type of wedding you would like to have (size, formality, and setting)
- Think about your color schemes
- Start health and fitness plan if you're not already in one!
- Select your reception location
- Select your professional photographer
- Select your videographer
- Select professional caterer (if necessary)
- Select Musician or Disc Jockey
- Select your florist
- Shop together for your wedding rings
- Select wedding dress and headpiece, and set a date for fittings and delivery
- Select your bridesmaids' dresses and accessories
- Choose a honeymoon and location

Four Months Prior To The Wedding

- Check the requirements for marriage license
- Select and discuss your color schemes with the florist/decorator of choice
- Reserve your wedding day rental equipment
- Decide upon a gift registry and select your gift choices
- Order your invitations and related stationery needs
- Start shopping for the men's' wedding attire
- Reserve your wedding day transportation
- Research and select readings for ceremony
- Make music selections for ceremony and reception
- Decide upon and order favors
- Select your baker, then choose your cake, and groom's cake
- Help both mothers coordinate and find their wedding day clothing

Two Months Before Your Wedding

- Have engagement portraits taken
- Place your engagement announcement in the newspaper
- Mail out invitations and announcements
- Decide on the men's' wedding attire

Two Months Before Your Wedding

- Have engagement portraits taken
- Place your engagement announcement in the newspaper
- Mail out invitations and announcements
- Decide on the men's' wedding attire
- Arrange and plan your rehearsal dinner
- Purchase your wedding day accessories
- Arrange attendants' parties
- Consider a hairdresser and/or makeup artist and book appointments
- Finalize all honeymoon plans

One-Month Left!

- Final wedding dress fitting
- Final fitting for your wedding attendants
- Obtain marriage license
- Have your attendants' parties
- Create a calendar of events for the wedding day.
- Make sure your accessories are in order (rings, pillow, garter, etc.)

Two Weeks Remaining!

- Finalize arrangements with the entertainer(s)
- Provide a list of music you would like played (or not played)
- Finalize music during special events such as first dance, dance with dad, etc.
- Pick up your wedding rings and make sure engravings are correct.
- Make sure wedding rings fit!
- Contact the guests who have not responded to your invitations.

One Week To GO!

- If you can, take the week, or part of the week off from work!
- Make sure your marriage license is in order
- Prepare seating arrangements, if necessary
- Purchase travelers checks, confirm honeymoon reservations
- Pack your baggage for your honeymoon
- Have your wedding ceremony rehearsal
- Instruct your wedding party on what they will be doing on the day of the wedding
- Have your rehearsal dinner
- Make sure all wedding attire fits properly
- Inform your caterer of the total guest count
- Confirm out-of-town guests have transportation and sleeping accommodations
- Reconfirm arrangements with all of your wedding vendors.

Your Wedding Day....

- Your primary goal today is to get married! Have fun!
- Allow plenty of time for dressing, applying makeup and hair styling.
- Remember to bring the rings and marriage license
- Take a deep breath, don't worry, be HAPPY and SMILE!

Wedding Budget Worksheet

A wedding budget can be considered a work in progress. Items will always need to be adjusted. Here's a good worksheet to keep you on track.

Categories	Budget	Actual	+/-
Reception Site			
Catering & Spirits			
Equipment Rental			
Officiant			
Wedding Cake			
Flowers			
Invitations			
Favors			
Bridal Attire			
Groom's Attire			
Photographer			
Videographer			
Band/Musicians			
DJ			
Transportation			
Attendant Gifts			
Wedding Accessories			
Bridal Hair & Makeup			
Honeymoon			
Miscellaneous			
Total			

Traditional List of Who Pays

Groom and His Family

Bride's engagement and wedding rings
Groom's wedding attire
Rehearsal dinner
Marriage license
Accommodations for out-of-town ushers
Alcohol at reception
Wedding gifts for the bride, best man and ushers
Flowers for the bride's bouquet, corsages for the mothers and grandmothers
Boutonnieres for ushers, ring bearers and fathers
Officiant's fee
Honeymoon and transportation to the honeymoon

Bride and Bride's Family

Wedding consultant's fee
Invitations, personal notes and mailing expense
Transportation for the wedding party
Wedding dress, headpiece and accessories
Lingerie
Attendants' bouquets
Groom's gift
Guest book
Cost of the reception
Cost of the ceremony
Photography and videography expense
Groom's wedding ring
Favors
Accommodations for out-of-town bride's attendants

Bridesmaids

Wedding attire - Bridesmaid dress, shoes & accessories
Travel costs
Shower and wedding gift for the couple
Shower given by bridesmaids and/or maid of honor

Groomsmen

Wedding attire rental
Wedding gift for the couple
Travel costs
Bachelor party given by best man and/or ushers

Bridal Attire Checklist

- ___ Bridal Gown
- ___ Hoop Petticoat
- ___ Veil/Headpiece
- ___ Shoes
- ___ Stockings
- ___ Garter
- ___ Lingerie
- ___ Strapless bra
- ___ Gloves
- ___ Jewelry
- ___ White Handbag
- ___ Going Away Outfit

Tradition

- ___ Something Old
- ___ Something New
- ___ Something Borrowed
- ___ Something Blue

Wedding Flower Checklist

BOUQUETS

- Bride
- Maid/Matron of Honor
- Flower Girl Bouquet or Basket
- Bride's Throw Away
- Bridesmaids # ___

BOUTONNIERES

- Groom
- Ushers # ___
- Bride's Father
- Grandfathers
- Best Man
- Ring Bearer
- Groom's Father

CORSAGES

- Bride's Mother
- Grandmothers
- Groom's Mother

CEREMONY FLOWERS

- Main Altar
- Aisle or Pew Decorations
- Other Floral Arrangements

RECEPTION FLOWERS

- Head Table Centerpiece
- Gift Table Centerpiece
- Bar Centerpiece
- Table Centerpieces # ___
- Buffet Tables Centerpiece # ___
- Fresh Flowers for Cake

REHEARSAL DINNER

- Table Centerpieces # ___

OTHER

- Aisle Runner
- Floral Headpieces
- "Thank-you" arrangements for Bride and Groom's Parents
- Arrangements for Out-of-Town Guests

Invitation & Stationery Checklist

Now, you certainly don't have to order everything from a printer. Some of the items you can make yourself and some you may not need at all. But here's the complete list!

In the Invitation

- ___ Invitations
- ___ Outer Envelope
- ___ Inner Envelope
- ___ Reception Card
- ___ Response Cards w/Envelope
- ___ Travel/Hotel Info Card
- ___ Maps
- ___ Ceremony Cards
- ___ Pew Cards
- ___ Rain Cards

Other

- ___ Ceremony Programs or Scrolls
- ___ Seating/Place Cards
- ___ Wedding Announcements
- ___ Thank You Notes
- ___ At Home Cards

The Groom's Countdown

Feeling a little lost as to what the duties of a groom are? Below is a list of things you can do, with or without your bride, to ensure that the wedding goes smoothly.

12 to 18 Months Before

- Meet with both sets of parents to discuss the budget
- Go with your fiancée and book the reception site.
- Reserve your ceremony location.
- Choose your groomsmen. Figure on one usher per 50 guests.

9 Months

- Decide on an Officiant.
- Write out a preliminary guest list. Be sure to get input from your parents.
- Register at one or several locations.
- Before selecting a caterer, go to a tasting.

6 Months

- Choose and order your attire and your groomsmen's outfits.
- Plan and book your honeymoon.

3 Months Before

- Finalize the guest list.
- Order your wedding bands and decide on inscriptions.
- Check state requirements concerning marriage license and required medical tests.
- Decide on living arrangements and order furnishings.

2 Months Before

- Buy wedding gifts for your bride and groomsmen.
- Get blood test for marriage license.
- Pick up your wedding rings, make sure they fit properly and check the inscription for accuracy.

2 Weeks Before

- Pick up your marriage license.
- Give ushers instructions for seating the guests at the ceremony, especially if there are guests requiring special assistance.
- Practice your toast to the bride's family.
- Pick up your rental attire and remind your groomsmen to do the same.
- Arrange for someone to bring the gifts from the reception to your home.
- Get a haircut.

1 Day Before

- Attend the rehearsal and rehearsal dinner. Give gifts to groomsmen.
- Do something sweet for your bride. A short letter, a flower on her pillow.... she's worked hard, show her how much you appreciate her.

Wedding Accessories Checklist

There are so many details that go into planning your wedding. Choosing the right wedding accessories is important too. Here is a checklist of items that you might need:

Reception

- Placecard Frames
- Cake Tops
- Cake Servers
- Toasting Flutes
- Wedding Cameras
- Wishing Well (or other holder for envelopes and cards)

Room Decorations

- Confetti
- Balloons
- Rose Petals

Ceremony

- Unity Candle
- Guest Book & Pen
- Ring Pillow
- Flower Girl Basket

Wedding Favors

- Bells
- Bubbles
- Candy Favors
- Personalized Favors (Mini-Hershey Candy Bars, Pens, Mugs, etc.)

Wedding Attire

- Bridal Purse
- Garter (One for tossing – one for keeping)

Other

- Car Decorations (i.e. Just Married Sign)
- Wedding Luminaries
- Wedding Countdown Clock
- Wedding Time Capsule