

10 Steps to an Easy Wedding Rehearsal and a Flawless Ceremony

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Couples often ask me if wedding rehearsals are important. People are busy. Budgets are tight. Attendants have to arrive in town early to attend. A wedding rehearsal usually means a rehearsal dinner and therefore an additional expense. There are a lot of reasons to skip the rehearsal. However my answer is, "If you have more than one attendant on each side, or you are having unity or cultural traditions, then yes". Often times the bride and groom may have attended and even been in weddings before. They know it is just a matter of walking up an aisle, standing along side the couple and walking back down the aisle. Pretty simple steps actually. Yet the average wedding ceremony is only about 20 minutes long, therefore each thing that occurs during those 20 minutes tends to stand out in peoples memories. Your wedding is an important event in your life. It takes a lot of dreaming and planning. It will be remembered by both of you, as well as your family and friends for many years to come. Unfortunately however, it is often the bloopers that get talked about over and over and replayed in people's memories. If you would like your wedding to be remembered for its beauty and love and not for its bloopers, it is advisable to have everyone practice the steps ahead of time. While some of your attendants may be very experienced in the process of a wedding, others probably are not. And many people are fearful of "performing" in front of an audience and are also fearful of the unknown and the sense that they really don't know exactly what to expect, or what is expected of them. A well conducted rehearsal takes care of all of these issues. Everyone runs through the steps a few times. The bride, groom, attendants and ushers get comfortable. If attendants have come from out of town now they can ease into the big event without anxiety. They don't have to worry about a delayed flight on the day of the wedding. All in all a rehearsal is a very good thing! As a wedding officiant I have been conducting wedding rehearsals and performing wedding ceremonies for many years. Over and over again I have seen the value of a good rehearsal and have also seen the unfortunate confusion and "bloopers" of the decision to pass on one.

The ideal situation is for your rehearsal to be at the location of the ceremony and for all of the attendants and ushers to attend. The ideal person to conduct your rehearsal is either an experienced officiant, venue coordinator, or wedding coordinator. It is also a very good idea, when possible to have your officiant attend, because he or she is an integral part of the ceremony. Yet we don't live in an ideal world. Sometimes attendants cannot arrive early. Sometimes the venue is not available. Sometimes the officiant is not available. That doesn't mean you should pass on the rehearsal! As a last resort, you can even have a rehearsal as a conference, or video call. While not quite as effective, it still works pretty well and sure beats going into the ceremony cold! The following steps will walk you through a rehearsal, to help your important day run smoothly and be attended by a relaxed and confident bridal party.

Wedding Rehearsal Order and Checklist

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Preparation.....Before the rehearsal

* Decide who will conduct the rehearsal.

Ideally have your officiant conduct it. If this is not possible ask your wedding venue if they provide someone for this service. If not, select a friend or relative who will not be in the bridal party to accept the honor. Select someone who is well spoken and comfortable taking the lead. Make sure this person is willing to tell the attendants to pay attention and make adjustments in the way they stand, walk, etc. Attendants tend to be excited, because they are once again with all of their closest friends. Running a smooth rehearsal requires a person who is not afraid to tell the attendants to settle down and get down to business!

* Decide where the rehearsal will be.

The best place to hold the rehearsal is at the location of the ceremony. Ideally, for outdoor venues you should practice in both the outdoor location, as well as briefly in the indoor back up location. If the wedding venue is not available, practice somewhere you will be able to kind of “recreate” the setting. If possible have photos and/or the layout of the actual wedding venue with you. This way you can discuss where people will meet, wait, start walking from, stand, etc. You should also discuss where musicians, or dj’s will sit or stand during the ceremony. Leaving it up to them to decide an hour before the wedding, can present unanticipated problems. Decide where the license will be signed right after the ceremony. Done right, this is a beautiful, but often neglected photo opportunity.

*Decide what props will be needed.

If you are having a unity candle lighting, sand ceremony, or other unity tradition you will most likely need a small, attractive table. It is especially important to have an attractive table for outdoor ceremonies, because wind can blow table clothes around and make the scene less than ideal. It is also helpful to bring artificial bouquets, flower baskets, ring pillows, the runner, etc. In other words, anything that will require attendants to “act” should be available to practice with. A lighter may be needed, as well as an extra votive candle to light the tapers from. Hurricane covers are also helpful to keep candles lit outdoors. (Of course outdoor unity candle ceremonies are an entirely different subject.) A copy of the ceremony, as well as individual copies of any readings by guests or attendants should also be on hand. You will want to decide who will be in charge of bringing all of the props on the day of the rehearsal and wedding. Forgetting these things is a common occurrence when there is so much to think about! Get the props to this person ahead of time, so there is no need to scramble at the last moment.

*Before your ceremony and ideally at your rehearsal make sure to give your officiant the license to prepare, show them your photo ID and give them any final payments due.

Wedding Rehearsal Order and Checklist P3

General Information on Order and Positions.....

*TraditionalOfficiant stands facing the guests. The groom stands to the left of the officiant. His best man stands to his left....groomsmen stand to his left.

(note) We can begin by the officiant and the groom at the front only. Or it can be the officiant, the groom and the best man. Or it can be the officiant, groom, best man and groomsmen. It really does not matter and offers you flexibility if you have an odd number of male and female attendants.



*It has become a tradition in the weddings I perform for me (the officiant) to enter first. The groom then escorts his mother, or mother and father together, to their seats and then joins me in the front. The groom's mothers truly love this. It provides a very special and meaningful moment for them in their sons wedding. When deciding this order, please don't forget the bride's mother. If the groom is escorting his mother, its important that there also be a special someone to escort the brides mother. If not the groom can walk them both up together, or one at a time.

*Bridesmaids enter....either alone, or escorted by groomsmen. If escorted, then they split apart a few feet from the officiant....bridesmaids stand to the officiants right and groomsmen stand to her left. (With the maid of honor entering after the other female attendants and standing next to the officiants right arm.

*Ring bearer enters with flower girl or ring bearer enters followed by the flower girl

Wedding Rehearsal Order and Checklist

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General Information on Order and Positions.....

*Traditionally a runner is rolled out just before the flower girl enters...so it is fresh and clean and covered with petals for the bride to make her entrance. However, others choose to have the runner rolled out before the entire wedding party.

*Bride is escorted down the aisle. When she is about six steps away from her groom, the groom takes a few steps forward to greet her. Bride hugs her dad, dad and mom, or whoever escorts her. The groom shakes the escorts hand, or hugs him / her, or whatever they feel is appropriate, then the brides escort places her hand in the grooms hand so he can escorts his bride to the alter.

*The bride and groom stand facing each other in front of the officiant, with the groom in front of the officiants left arm and the bride in front of her right arm.

TIP.....Ask your attendants not to read over your officiants shoulder during the ceremony. This is a normal temptation, but is often very visible in pictures and videos!

TIP.....Most (actually almost all) peoples fingers swell when they are nervous and excited. Putting a little dry soap inside of the wedding rings helps them go on easier.

TIP.....Remind the Bride, Groom and wedding party not to carry on long side conversations during the ceremony. This is very obvious and distracting to all and takes away from the grace and beauty of the ceremony.

Wedding Rehearsal Order and Checklist

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1)

Assemble Wedding party, ushers and any involved guests and discuss:

Props; what and where they will be, when they will be set up, who is responsible for bringing them and setting them up and removing them after the ceremony.

Possible Props:

Runner (please see special notes on runners at end)

Candles (3 or 5, plus a small votive candle for unity ceremony)

Hurricane covers for candles (Vital for outside ceremonies, and required at some inside venues)

Flowers

Decorations

Pillars

Chairs

Lighter or matches

Kleenex or a handkerchief for possible tears

Wedding Rings

Side table for Unity Candles or other Unity Traditions

Side Table, table cloth

Nicely decorated table for the signing of the license (Signing can be done as part of the ceremony, or done immediately after the ceremony)

Wedding Rehearsal Order and Checklist

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2)

- Assemble Wedding party at the alter and discuss:
 - Review specifics of (discuss) order of entry, positioning at alter and duties and timing of:
 - Groom before Bride enters (Stands to officiants left)
 - Bride and Groom for ceremony (Stand facing each other in front of officiant)
 - Maid of Honor (Generally accepts the brides bouquet and fluffs her dress, etc)
 - Bridesmaids (Often assists with the above duties)
 - Best Man (Generally holds the wedding rings)
 - Groomsmen (Often double as ushers, or escorts for female attendants)
 - Flower Girl (Proceeds Bride, dropping flower petals, or just looking cute!) You will also want to decide if the flower girl and ring bearer will stand up during the ceremony, or take their seats after entering.
 - Person responsible for flower girl
 - Ring Bearer (Generally has FAKE rings tied to a pillow)
 - Person responsible for the ring bearer
 - Ushers (The proper order is to seat the mother of the groom followed by the mother of the bride)
 - Readers (Make sure they are articulate and read the piece before the wedding)
 - Candle Lighters (Relatives often light the side candles before or during the ceremony)
 - Persons responsible to roll out and unroll the runner (See runner notes)
 - Who will cue the start of the processional music
 - Who will cue the start of the processional

Wedding Rehearsal Order and Checklist

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- Decide who will serve as your two witnesses to sign your marriage license and where they will meet immediately after the ceremony for the signing.
- Decide on any other active participants and their duties

3)

Discuss the order of the wedding party. Have them assemble and stand according to the order in which they will enter. Discuss how far apart people are to stand, where they should keep their hands, which direction they should face, who is to pass Kleenex in case of tears, who straightens the brides dress, takes her bouquet, etc.

4)

Discuss and run through how the bride and groom will meet and take their places at the altar

5)

Review with ushers how to greet and seat the guests.

6)

Have wedding party reassemble at starting positions for processional.

7)

Rehearse how mother of the groom and then mother of the bride will be escorted to their seats by the groom, their spouse, ushers, or groomsmen. (If they are not giving the bride away)

8)

Rehearse the entire processional and recessional at least two times; including ushers, paying attention to how fast or slow the participants are walking, where they are splitting apart at the front and where they should end up once arriving at the altar. Do not have the ushers roll the runner all the way out at the rehearsal...just make sure they know how to unroll it. Runners seem easy, but can be tricky. It is also important to decide where the runner will begin, which is generally at the officiants feet.

9)

Practice all ceremonial gestures that will involve the wedding party moving, including taking and giving back of the bouquet, fluffing the brides train, ring exchange, candle lighting, readings, etc.

10)

Remind your wedding party what time they are expected to be ready on the wedding day, where they are to meet, then encourage and answer any remaining questions.

Now relax and smile, pretty much all of the hard work around your wedding is over! Now it is time to concentrate on the love you share. At your wedding just remember to relax, breath, smile and get lost in the spirit of the day and the eyes of your Darling. The rest will all just fall into place.

Wedding Rehearsal Order and Checklist

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Note on Runners

Runners, as most things in modern wedding are optional. Should you decide to use one, some people choose to have it rolled out for the entire wedding party after the guests have been seated. Others choose the traditional way; to have it rolled out just for the entrance of the flower girl and/or the bride. This is my favorite...as it builds the drama for her entrance and keeps the runner nice and clean for her.

But please note that runners can also be a pain. Believe it or not, runners are tricky. It is very important to have whoever is going to be rolling it out, practice beforehand. Take my word on this one! Starting them takes a bit to figure out. It is also important to place them correctly so they unroll straight down the aisle and not off to one side. The runner is started right at the feet of the officiant and run down the aisle. Some sort of tape, or anchor, or having the officiant put her toes on it as it starts is also helpful.

If you use a runner do not scrimp on the quality. Very thin, inexpensive runners are awful. Sometimes they don't want to lay straight. Thin ones can be tripped on, heels go through them on grass and NEVER use them on hard wood floors unless it has an especially prepared backing, unless you like to see brides falling on their faces! My suggestion is also to pass on a runner if you are entering on grass. There are beautiful alternatives...the aisle can be lined on both sides with flower petals or colorful vases or pillars. Runners just don't work well on grass, the ladies heels go through them and they get dragged around by the dresses. They often just get in the way and end up looking bad.

Note on Seating

Do you want the two families to be on different sides in the seating? As with pretty much everything, this is entirely up to you. This is your big day! But this practice is rather falling by the way side for a few reasons.

- * If there are more family and friends from one side of the family it can cause hurt feelings.
- * It is just more cumbersome in general.
- * If the bride and groom are facing each other in the front during the ceremony and the family members are seated on their "traditional" side, the bride has her back to them during most of the ceremony. The same holds true for the groom.