

Your Wedding Day Photography Timeline and Tips

By Amy Hansen Photo

I know this is a bit long but there is some very important information in here and **reading this all the way through greatly increases the chances of ending up with wedding photos that you will love no matter who your photographer is.**

This is a rundown of a typical wedding day from a photography standpoint. You will find descriptions and explanations as well as what's typical and what other options there are. You will also find tips that will not only help you get everything you want covered, but inform you of things you can do to make it much easier for your photographer to get the shots you want. Remember this is a rundown for the most common wedding day happenings. There are many different types of weddings involving a huge range of traditions or sometimes none at all. Whatever special events you have planned, traditional or unique, this information is sure to be very helpful.

A note about how much time to book: When you're making arrangements for the time your photographer arrives and departs there is a natural tendency to tell your photographer when the wedding will begin and end and to assume that is the length of time you want them to be there. You may think that if you have an 7 hour wedding, that's how long you need the photographer. However when locking down the amount of time you want to book, remember that even if you decide not to have the photographer there for any pre-ceremony shots, they will need at least a half hour prior to your ceremony to check the location and to discuss any last minute requests and get set up and in place for when you enter. Remember that your photographer's time starts from when they arrive, not when the ceremony begins so be sure to book enough time to cover everything you want/need. If you are unsure as to how much time to book your photographer, don't fret. The rest of the information you'll find here will give you the framework you need to make the decision that's right for you.

1. Pre-Ceremony

Description and Options: These are the shots of the bridal party and family members before the ceremony. You can have your photographer arrive at any point during this process. As early as just getting started on hair and makeup or as late as just putting on the finishing touches. Some brides also choose to do the formals and/or bride and groom photos during the pre-ceremony portion of the day.

What's Typical: Most brides choose to have the photographer there for at least part of the hair and makeup as well as slipping into the dress etc.

Pre-Ceremony Tips:

Photography in the dressing room: This is a touchy subject, especially if your wedding photographer is male. If you are self conscious or modest, you may ask your photographer to leave the room whenever you wish. However some of the best images from the entire wedding happen in the dressing room, especially when the dress is going over the bride's head while all the bridesmaids are helping to get it on.



If you have your photographer wait outside when this is happening, you will miss out on one of the most spontaneous photo opportunities of the entire day. Remember, with photography, it's easy to delete things later, but it's impossible to turn back time and do it again.

Under professional photography ethics, a wedding photographer would never show inappropriate photos in his/her portfolio, or on the web. If you are concerned about this issue, be sure to review and discuss the contractual obligation and portfolio usage rights with your photographer. Of course, make a decision you are comfortable with. Every bride is different and your photographer will respect whatever you decide.



Decorating the Bride's dressing room: This step is easy to overlook during the planning and decorating phase. First start by picking a room with enough space; one with lots of natural light. And if possible use light gauzy fabrics over the windows instead of thick curtains or shutters that obstruct illumination.

Don't keep it too neat! Natural is the way to achieve the documentary style look. Decorate appropriately. Cover up any un-presentable objects with curtains or drape cloth. Messes are ok if they are wedding messes. Empty boxes and bags should be placed somewhere outside the dressing room. It looks wonderful to have all the dresses hanging and shoes lying around on the floor, but these fun photo ops can turn out drab if things are still in the boxes or if they have piles of plastic wrappers and cardboard boxes lying next to them. Flowers also look better in a vase instead of the cardboard boxes the florist packed them in.

Estimated Time: This one is completely up to you depending on what you want the photographer there for. Just remember to allow at least 30 minutes prior to the ceremony time for your photographer to prepare for the ceremony.

2. Ceremony

Description and Options: These are the photojournalist style shots of your wedding ceremony. Here the photographer will capture shots to the degree permitted. Many churches have restrictions on photography (i.e. no flash etc.) so it's vital for you to find out what those are before the big day arrives and convey them to your photographer. It's best to ask to the actual person who will be performing the ceremony.

What's Typical: Typically the photographer will move around from side to side and the back of the middle isle. Some photographers will stay in one spot the entire time and some may move around and get a lot closer as well. This also varies depending on what is allowed at your venue.

Ceremony Tips:

Walking Down the Isle: There are some very important tips here that help you photographer immensely in getting some great (rather than run of the mill) shots.

A. Make sure that your wedding party walks at a slow enough pace, with enough distance between each couple for the photographer to discreetly step into the isle in between and get a shot of each person. The distance between each person (or couple) is the most important factor in the photographer's ability to get the shot.

B. When you and your bridal party step into the isle, pause for a brief moment so the photographer can get a good shot of you/them. This is a normal and natural thing to do because you are (hopefully) waiting for the person/couple ahead of you to get far enough down the isle for you to start walking. You can decide if you want to be looking at the camera, looking straight ahead or otherwise. Just make sure that *everyone* walking down the isle knows this plan. It would be a shame to miss a few shots because part of the group walked too closely together or didn't pause long enough to grab a shot.



The Best Way to Put on the Rings: This is one of the most difficult shots to get for a wedding photographer. Most couples are not aware of the fact that they are blocking it either with their hand positions or with their bodies. To turn this moment into a great photo opportunity, all you need to remember is that as you are putting the ring on, position your fingers on the top and bottom instead of on the sides of the ring.

One more tip is to avoid extending your free hand out to grab your partner's wrist so that you can push that ring on there better. If you feel it is necessary to do this, try putting your hand UNDER your partner's hand and grabbing on from below. This approach prevents your wrist from blocking the shot. Practice this couple of times, and you will see that it is possible to put the rings on while keeping your ring visible to your guests and your photographer.



Chairs: Sometimes, during longer ceremonies, the Bride and Groom will be seated in chairs for a portion of the time. If you are planning to do this, there are a couple of ways you can avoid the chairs blocking many of the shots. We have seen the couple place one chair on either side of the aisle right next (almost like an extension of) the front pew. This makes it so you can sit during a portion of the ceremony and then when you stand up, centered in front of your guests the chairs won't be blocking the view. Another option is actually just setting the chairs aside when you're ready to stand. You could have your best man and maid of honor (or any two designated people) just step in when it's time and quickly move them behind the bridal party line up so there is nothing obstructing the view of your guests or your photographer's camera.

Officiant: From a photography standpoint having your officiant stand in between you and your guests is very limiting. It doesn't happen very often but we have seen it enough times to mention it. If your officiant doesn't stand behind you, he will be blocking the view of your guests and your photographer's camera for all the important shots. Discuss this with your officiant if you are unsure what their plans are. It can be worked around but you should know that it will limit the shots your photographer will be able to get.

Estimated Time: This varies greatly from wedding to wedding. We have done ceremonies that last 10 minutes and ceremonies that last up to an hour.

3. Formals

Description and Options: These are the posed, "traditional" shots of family and bridal party. You have several options here from just taking one shot with everyone in it, to a shot of just family and just bridal party, to shots with every combination you can think of. These photos usually take place immediately following the ceremony but often, couples opt to get these out of the way before the ceremony so they can go straight to the reception afterward.

What's Typical: It's typical to at least do one shot with the couple and all family members in attendance as well as shot with the couple and the entire bridal party. It's also very common to do just the bride with the bridesmaids and just the groom with his groomsmen. Other common shots include: bride and groom with their parents separately, parents and grandparents with the couple all in one picture, the whole bride's side of the family, the whole groom's side, siblings, bride/maid of honor, groom/best man etc. It's totally up to you how many or how few of these posed shots you do, keeping in mind that you will have several shots of these loved ones throughout the day from the pre-ceremony through the reception.



Formals Tips:

Plan Ahead and Communicate: There is no tip more important when it comes to these shots than to plan ahead and communicate that plan to every single person that is going to be in these photos. This point cannot be stressed enough. I can't tell you how many weddings end up having to cut these photos short (as well as the bride and groom photos that follow) because of a lack of planning ahead and needing to get over to the reception.

Start here. While you're thinking about photos you want - make a list of who is in each shot. Tell all your relatives (in advance) that they should be there at this certain time. (i.e. immediately following the ceremony.) Create a

wedding day shooting schedule sheet, email it to your party days in advance, and pass it out again at your reception. Leave contingency reserve for potential late comers (yes, you know who they are). Usually the flow goes something like this. The bride and groom exit the isle (trailed by the photographer) followed by the wedding party. The wedding guests are then dismissed and file out. Most of the time the bridal party goes to a private room and waits for the guests to exit. Sometimes there is a receiving line as guests leave.

If you're planning to do the formals at the same location as the ceremony, when the guests are mostly dispersed, everyone that is supposed to be in the formals heads over to where the formals are being taken. It's during this time that a lot of couples run into problems. People have run to the car or the bathroom or to make a phone call and the clock is ticking on your allotted time for pictures. This is why it's so important to make sure that each and every person knows that pictures are at X time on the dot or immediately following the ceremony etc. and that they shouldn't wander off.

Allow Enough Time: Plan enough time for your formals. Even if your wedding photographer is amazing they won't be able to give you wonderful photos in just five minutes. Like I said above we have seen many brides and grooms have to cut this portion of the day (and their "bride and groom" photos following the formals) short because they didn't schedule enough time to get to them all done and get to the reception. If you are planning to travel to another location to take the formals make sure you plan in the extra time it will take for every one to get over there and then get to the reception.

Focus On The Big Picture: Try not to make photography of groups the main focus of your wedding day. A few group photos are great to record the friends and relatives at the wedding. But at the end of the day, a wedding album full of group photos probably isn't something you're going to cherish for years to come.

Estimated Time: The actual snapping of pictures doesn't take much time at all but gathering and posing a large group of people does. The time for this portion of the day will vary depending on how many formal shots you want and how big your group is. A small, quick moving group with just a few pictures could take just 15 minutes. A larger group with a lot of shots could take up to an hour.



4. Bride and Groom Portraits

Description and Options: This is the fun part! This is where the bride and groom go off on their own (with the photographer) and get some photographs of the newlyweds on their special day. These are often the most cherished photos from your wedding day for years to come. These can be posed and formal, fun and silly, artistic and modern or a mixture of whatever you want. It's your wedding day!

What's Typical: Typically these photos are done right after the formals (either before the ceremony or after). Once the group shots are done, everyone else can take off, leaving the bride and groom to do their photos.



Bride and Groom Portrait Tips:

Be Yourself: The best pictures happen when the bride and groom are just being themselves and interacting with each other. Laughing, kissing, hugging etc. While a good photographer will give you some direction when/if you want/need it, feel free to just have fun with it!

Alone Time: During the bridal couple shots, it's essential to take some alone time with your photographer. The really lovely, affectionate photos only tend to happen when you don't have a large group of people looking on.

Don't Worry About Your Guests: During your formals and your bride and groom portraits don't worry about your guests waiting for you. Most – and probably all – of them have been to at least one other wedding and they'll know to expect that you'll be busy with your photos for a while before joining them. As long as they have appetizers and beverages, they'll be perfectly fine! ☺

Estimated Time: This can be as quick or as long as you want. It just depends how many shots you want. Roughly plan on 20 minutes up to an hour depending on how many shots you want.

5. Ride Over to Reception (Or a Few Shots in the Get Away Vehicle)

Description and Options: This is a totally optional but fun idea. You can have your photographer ride over with you to reception in the car/limo and get some fun shots of the couple and/or the wedding party. If you don't opt to do this, you could have the photographer at least get a few shots of you in the car before you head over.

6. Reception

Description and Options: The gathering following the ceremony and pictures. Key moments you may want the photographer to be there for are, the introduction of the wedding party, the first dances, the toasts, the cake cutting, the bouquet/garter tosses and perhaps the departure. And, of course, some photos of your guests having fun, eating and dancing etc. You, of course, don't have to have the photographer there for everything (or anything for that matter). It's totally up to you!

What's Typical: It's typical for the photographer to just keep their eyes open during the reception and capture anything special going on. How long you have your photographer stay at the reception probably depends most upon your budget.

Reception Tips:

Making Your Time Count: Like I mentioned before, the most important things you want your photographer to capture are "the introduction of the wedding party, the first dances, the toasts, the cake cutting, the bouquet/garter tosses and perhaps the departure. And, of course, some photos of your guests having fun, eating and dancing etc."

If you plan ahead, you can probably accomplish these things in two to three hours. If you can't afford to have your photographer stay until the end of the reception you can shorten the time span by scheduling these events more closely together toward the beginning





of the wedding reception. You don't want to slight your family and friends or make yourself frantic by running from place to place to check off the events but a certain amount of organization will make things go smoothly and flow more quickly.

Coordinate The Evening's Layout With Your DJ and Photographer:

If you have a DJ, speak to them about the scheduling of events at the reception. Make sure your photographer knows the schedule as well so they can be sure they are in the right place at the right time before each special moment. Let them know where you're going to stand etc. so they can get into the best spot to capture the photo.

Dinner: Did you know it is customary to feed your photographer? You may not feed some wedding vendors that are only there for a short time, but your photographer won't survive a several hour wedding without something to eat.

Photographers don't normally shoot constantly during mealtime, but they do have the camera close at hand in case anything interesting happens. If you have assigned seating be sure to assign a spot for your photographer and their assistant near the back of the room where they can easily get up and down as needed if there is something interesting to shoot. If you have anything planned while your guests are finishing dinner, make sure to warn your

photographer in advance so they can plan to eat toward the beginning of the dinner service and be finished around the same time you are.

Throwing Flowers: Don't rush through this part... take a minute to play with your crowd. This gives your photographer time to get a shot of you holding the flowers and looking back over your shoulder at all the gang getting lined up. Before you throw, try chasing off all the little kids because they often beat your bridesmaids and friends to the flowers. Now look up and make sure you don't have anything low like lights and ceiling fans that are going to intercept your flowers before they get to the crowd.

When you throw, be ready to call for a do-over if it doesn't go as planned.

Estimated Time: This depends completely on your budget, how much you want the photographer to cover and how early on you do the key moments.

Other General Tips:

Don't Be Afraid to Make Suggestions: If you have a great idea for a shot suggest it. These are your wedding photos and your photographer can't read your mind. Speak up if there's something in particular you'd like to do.

Be Yourself...But Your Smiling Self: Of course you want natural looking photographs. You don't want to look fake but at the same time you don't want an album full of photos where you're making silly faces because you weren't aware of the camera being there. One of the benefits of the photojournalistic style that is very popular right now is that the photographer can kind of blend into the background and grab candid shots of you and your loved ones interacting. The drawback though, is that sometimes you forget that a camera is focused on you all day. A mother of one of our brides playfully put it to her daughter best, "Slap a smile on your face and leave it there the whole day." Sure enough, she had some great photos!





Videographers: Videographers and photographers can sometimes be like cats and dogs; we often don't play well together, and we fight for our spots. Some inexperienced videographers will occasionally get right up in the middle of the altar area during the ceremony. If you don't want their backside to show up in all your pictures, please tell them to stay at least 15 feet away during the ceremony. We've actually seen one videographer stand right between the bride and groom during the whole ceremony with a wide angle lens. They could get the same shot from 15 feet if they used a telephoto lens.

We've also seen videographers that would watch to see what we were shooting. If they liked it, they would step in front of us to get their own shot. Make sure to tell them to watch for where the wedding photographers are so we don't get in each other's way. It's probably also best to specify very clearly as to which one of us has the highest priority for you. Yes I'm partial to photography but I had a videographer and photographer at my own wedding so I understand wanting both types of coverage. Most Bride's (myself included) do put the priority on the photography because the end result is something you can hang on your wall and make albums from that you will often look at, as opposed to the videography that will sit on your DVD shelf to be viewed only once in a while. Also keep in mind that the photography is more of a direct interaction while videography is meant to look like it's more in the background

without ever interacting directly. It would be in the best interest of your pictures to let the videographer know where your priorities are.

Albums: As far as albums go, if you find a photographer that offers the printing rights to your images on a CD or DVD, you will be able to choose whether you do your own prints and albums, purchase them from your photographer or both. This is very convenient and you won't have to pick and choose which pictures you get to keep based on what you can afford. You can also get the images printed yourself for much cheaper than you can through a professional lab but still with good quality.

However, a word to the wise, the kind of albums that you see photographers offering are not available to the public. You must be a professional photographer to gain access to them. Especially if you're looking for the popular more modern "flush mount" albums where the whole album is printed right on the page, magazine style.



Professional photographer's albums don't come cheap (not even to the photographer) but think of them as your first family heirloom. Today's high quality albums will last a lifetime and you will cherish them forever. Now that's something worth investing in.

CDs vs Prints: Most photographers allow you to view all of the images from your wedding or portrait session. These are called proofs. You will then have to pick and choose which photos and print sizes you can afford to purchase, leaving the rest behind (unless, of course budget isn't a concern). And because your photographer legally maintains the rights to those images, you then must purchase the chosen prints through the photographer at a premium. This is where most inexpensive photographers make their money. To give you an idea, most 4x6 prints are priced from \$4.00-\$8.00 and 8x10s from \$25-\$30 each. Large prints, like a 20x30 go for well over \$100. For a wedding that can get really expensive! It's important to keep this in mind when pricing photographers. It's true that these prints are of the highest quality and will be archival, and therefore last forever. They are worth the price but there are less expensive options out there.

Some photographers either include in their packages or offer (for an extra charge) a CD or DVD of the high resolution, professionally processed photographs. This is not to be confused with a "proof cd" which had low resolution photos, often with logos over the images to prevent reproducing. If your photographer does offer an image CD, you will want to make sure that the images will be processed (i.e. color corrected etc.) and high resolution and that you will have full print rights to those images. If the CD isn't included in the price of your wedding package you can expect to pay anywhere from \$500-\$800 for the CD and full print rights.

The CD is a great option that adds a lot of freedom and will save you a ton of money by being able to get the prints done yourself.

All of our wedding packages include your professionally processed images on a CD and come in a beautiful keepsake tin (pictured above) complete with an image from your wedding day printed on the disc. You will also receive a full print release that will allow you to reproduce or print your photographs at anytime. You can take them to any lab of your choice or we can recommend one to you. You most likely won't even be asked for the print release but it's there in case you need it. If you decide that you would really like some professional quality prints we do offer them at a significantly discounted rate. The CD gives you options! You can let us to all the prints, do them all yourself or some of both.



The Package You Choose: Several factors will go into which package decision, including budget. In the end, it's your wedding; it's your decision.

You may want to consider one other thing. "The bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten." - John Ruskin

Once you have made the decisions about your wedding day photography you can forget the details. Bask in the beauty of the day and the love of friends and family - and, of course, your new spouse.

Remember, happy weddings make great photographs.



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