

Planning your wedding

10 golden rules to organising the perfect wedding

1. Personal recommendations are the best way to find reliable suppliers. Ask friends that have married recently and also family members for recommendations. When choosing a supplier, do not be afraid to ask to speak to previous customers about their experiences.
2. Always confirm everything in writing after agreeing something with a supplier. Provide a copy to them as well, so they can refer to what has been agreed. The same applies when making payments. Always ask for a receipt and keep it safe, even if it was just for a small deposit.
3. Create a wedding folder and keep everything about your wedding in there: pictures from magazines, quotes from suppliers, brochures, business cards and any recommendations you receive. You will soon have an excellent set of contacts and ideas to choose from.
4. Book as early as possible. The best venues are always booked far in advance, so if you have your heart set on one, check for availability as soon as you can. Try to leave as little as possible to the last minute to avoid disappointment.
5. Choose a style or theme for your wedding in the early stages, as this will make choosing everything else much easier.
6. Delegate tasks to friends and family and let them get involved too. It can be a lot of fun and it will ease the workload for you.
7. Avoid family friction at all times. They can be involved and help, but make it clear that it is your day and you and your bride/groom will always have the final say.
8. Plan your budget carefully. Think about the most important aspects of the day for you and your bride/groom and plan bearing those in mind.
9. Go to wedding fairs. You will pick up lots of ideas and it is a much easier and cheaper way to collect contacts than visiting all suppliers individually.
10. Finally, remember the reasons why you are getting married. It is very easy to let the wedding preparations take over your life, so remember to take time out to enjoy life and be together.

The final countdown

Organising a wedding can be a stressful time, but if you follow a simple plan, you should feel confident about it and enjoy the whole process at the same time. Here is a countdown checklist that covers most of the things that need to be planned:

As soon as possible:

- Decide on the style/theme of the wedding.
- Decide on the budget.
- Draw up a guest list.
- Choose the best man, bridesmaids and ushers.
- Arrange to meet both sets of parents to decide who will be financially responsible for which parts of the wedding costs. Bring some estimates along to make the decision-making process easier.

12 months before:

- Announce your forthcoming wedding to friends and family {you can also announce it in the newspapers, if you wish). Many couples choose to send out "Save the date" cards up to six to twelve months before the wedding, to ensure that guests keep that date free.
- Book ceremony, reception venues and caterers.
- Start looking at wedding and bridesmaids' dresses.
- Start researching transport, photographers, florists, etc.
- Book your honeymoon.
- Start making your wedding present list.

6 months before:

- Book transport, photographer/video and entertainment.
- Arrange for the bride and bridesmaids' dresses to be made or hired.
- Arrange hire of formal wear for the groom, best man, ushers and fathers of the bride and groom.
- Order wedding cake.
- Order wedding stationery.
- Check passports are valid for at least 6 months from the date you depart for your honeymoon. :
- Book wedding night hotel, if applicable.

3 months before:

- If you are to be married in a church, visit the priest to arrange when the banns will be called. Also discuss other details such as music, order of service and rehearsal dates.
- Buy wedding rings.
- Order flower decorations, after visiting the florist to confirm final choices.
- Send out wedding invitations, together with a finalised wedding list.
- Finalise honeymoon arrangements {clothes, visas, vaccinations, etc}.
- Confirm wedding music, readings, etc.
- Choose and buy going away outfit.

- Finalise details with photographer/video company.
- Arrange stag and hen parties.

1 Month before:

- Draw up final guest list and prepare seating plans. Inform caterers on final number of guests.
- Try on outfits for alterations.
- Write speeches.
- Buy presents for the best man, bridesmaids, ushers and any others taking part in the service.
- Book hair appointments for the bride and groom shortly before the wedding.
- Confirm cake delivery.

1 Week:

- Hold wedding rehearsal.
- Wear-in wedding shoes.
- Confirm all arrangements (wedding clothes, timings, etc}.
- Pack for honeymoon.
- Order honeymoon money.
- Final hair and make-up practice.

The day before:

- Finish packing.
- Ensure you have adequate amounts of money to pay people who may need payment at the wedding.
- If you are using your own cars, make sure they are topped up with petrol.
- Confirm cake delivery {yes, again!}.
- Relax and look forward to the big day!