

Plan a Day That *Feels Like You*

A step-by-step guide from engagement to send-off, with everything I wish every couple knew.

A note from me

Congratulations! Planning a wedding is exciting, and it can also feel like a lot. This guide breaks it into manageable steps, from the first big decisions to the morning of.

I've photographed a lot of weddings, and the happiest couples have one thing in common: they planned a day around what matters to them, not around Pinterest, other people's expectations or even their photographer.

Use this as a roadmap. Keep what helps and skip what doesn't fit.

Start with three questions

1. What three words should describe how your day feels?
2. What two or three things matter most to you both?
3. What would you happily skip or keep simple?

Write your answers down together. Come back to them whenever a decision feels hard, and let them break the tie.

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The one
rule

YOUR WEDDING DAY SHOULD REFLECT YOU AND YOUR VALUES. IT SHOULDN'T BE BUILT AROUND PHOTOS OR ANYONE ELSE. THE PHOTOS SHOULD BE BUILT AROUND YOUR DAY.

What to Do, and When

Based on a 12–18 month engagement. Shorter engagement? Follow the same order, just faster.

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- 12+ MONTHS**
- Set your budget and priorities
 - Draft a rough guest list
 - Pick a season or date range
 - Book your venue

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- 10–12 MONTHS**
- Book your photographer and planner (they book up early)
 - Choose your wedding party
 - Start your wedding website

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- 8–10 MONTHS**
- Book caterer, florist, band or DJ, and videographer
 - Start shopping for attire
 - Send save-the-dates

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- 6–8 MONTHS**
- Book hair + makeup, officiant and rentals
 - Reserve hotel room blocks
 - Schedule engagement photos
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- 4–6 MONTHS**
- Order invitations
 - Plan the rehearsal dinner
 - Book transportation
 - Schedule tastings

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- 2–3 MONTHS**
- Mail invitations 6–8 weeks out
 - Start attire fittings
 - Build your day-of timeline with your photographer + planner
 - Check your marriage license rules

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- 1 MONTH**
- Confirm details with every vendor
 - Finalize your family photo list
 - Hair + makeup trial

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- WEEK OF**
- Send the final timeline to vendors + wedding party
 - Pack an emergency kit
 - Rest, hydrate, hand things off
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A few tips from me

- Book the vendors you care about most first.
- Keep one shared planning doc so you both know what's next.
- Check your state's marriage license rules early. They vary.
- Plan a planning-free date night every month.

Spend on What Matters to You

Your budget is a tool for protecting your priorities, not a limit on your fun.

Building your budget

1. Agree on a total you're comfortable with before you talk to vendors.
2. Rank your priorities. Spend more on your top three and keep the rest simple.
3. Set aside 5–10% for surprises like overtime, tips and last-minute fixes.
4. Track every deposit, payment and due date in one place.

What to book first

Vendors who can only be in one place on your date book up fastest:

1. Venue
2. Photographer + planner
3. Caterer, band or DJ, videographer
4. Florist, hair + makeup, officiant
5. Rentals, cake, stationery, transportation

Questions to ask your photographer

- Have you shot at our venue, or one like it?
- Can we see full galleries, not just highlights?
- What's included, and how many hours will we need?
- Do you work with a second shooter?
- How long until we receive our gallery?
- Will you help us build our day-of timeline?

A note from me

Hire people whose work you love and whose company you'd enjoy. Your photographer is with you nearly all day, through the happy tears and the quiet in-between moments. You should feel like yourselves around them.

A Day That Flows, *Photos That Fit In*

How to plan a timeline that feels relaxed and still gives you the photos you'll want to keep.

Timeline basics

- Look up sunset for your date first. The hour before it gives the softest light.
- Consider a first look. It frees you up to enjoy cocktail hour.
- Plan about 45–60 minutes of hair + makeup per person.
- Add 15–30 minutes of buffer before the ceremony. Mornings run late.
- Keep family photos to 20–30 minutes with a written list.

Photo tips

- Get ready in a room with big windows and little clutter.
- Gather details in one box: rings, invitation, shoes, perfume, heirlooms.
- Consider an unplugged ceremony so guests are present (and out of the aisle).
- Ask one organized friend or relative to round up family.
- Step away for 10–15 minutes at sunset. You'll be glad you did.

Your family photo list

Write it out with names and share it with your photographer a week before. Start with the biggest groups so extended family can get back to cocktail hour.

1. Couple + extended family, each side
2. Couple + immediate family, each side
3. Couple + both sets of parents
4. Couple + grandparents
5. Any special pairings (siblings, a favorite aunt)

Want an
example?

Download my free Wedding Day Timeline for a full day, hour by hour. Then shift every time to fit your ceremony and sunset.

The Final Weeks, *and the Day Itself*

The planning is done. Now it's about handing things off and being present.

Two weeks out

- ☐ Confirm arrival times with every vendor
- ☐ Send the final timeline + family photo list
- ☐ Break in your shoes
- ☐ Prepare final payment and tip envelopes
- ☐ Pick someone to collect gifts + décor at the end

On the day

- ☐ Eat a real breakfast and keep snacks nearby
 - ☐ Hand your phone to someone you trust
 - ☐ Let your planner or coordinator handle problems
 - ☐ Take a quiet moment together after the ceremony
 - ☐ Look around and take it all in
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Pack an emergency kit

- Safety pins + sewing kit
- Stain remover pen
- Pain reliever + bandages
- Tissues + blotting papers
- Phone charger
- Deodorant + mints
- Snacks + water
- Copies of your vows

One last *thing*

Something will go a little off plan. It always does, and nobody will remember it. What you'll remember is how it felt.
I can't wait to celebrate with you. — Emmy