

BECOME A
WEDDING
PLANNER



Professional
**WEDDING
PLANNING**



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How to Become a **WEDDING PLANNER**

This course is your ultimate guide to becoming a Professional Wedding Planner, Wedding Coordinator, Wedding Consultant or Wedding Stylist- and getting the job of your dreams! We thoroughly hope you enjoy the program and we wish you all the love, happiness and inspiration in the world!

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PART 1

Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to become a wedding planner.

On average, Australian weddings cost around \$15,000 according to wedding insurer Wedding Sure, and brides spend over 200 hours planning the big day. That's a lot of money and effort. With over 110,000 weddings occurring in Australia each year, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there's a growing demand for wedding planners – someone who can step in and take the pressure off the happy couple, leaving them time and energy to anticipate the ceremony and reception,



rather than ending up stressed and drained when the big day arrives.

As a wedding planner, you will take on a range of roles – planner, creator, director, advisor, and coordinator – possibly even counsellor! Your people and organisational skills will be put to good use. And you will find the outcome incredibly rewarding – helping

to create a wedding day that your clients will remember for the rest of their lives.

How to become a wedding planner is here to help you through the process, by providing a step-by-step guide to getting started and becoming successful in your new career. This guide will help you gain the skills, savvy and confidence you need to oversee all the details of a wedding, and to prepare for a magnificent event.



WEDDING PLANNING AS A PROFESSION

Wedding planners have been around as long as there have been weddings. Mostly, however, they've been unpaid for all their hard work. Family members, mothers, sisters,

friends – whoever had a natural aptitude for organising things probably took on the mantle of wedding planner – perhaps you've even taken on that role in the past!

But in this day and age, when time is precious and people are working longer hours and perhaps living far away from their immediate family, hiring a professional wedding planner is becoming more and more common.

Judy from The Bella Hotel tells the story of her first experience with a wedding planner.

“As a functions organiser, I'm familiar with all kinds of weddings. But recently I had the pleasure of helping to organise the reception for a couple that employed the services of a wedding planner. It made everything so much easier for me – and seemingly for the couple as well. I could see that it just took the pressure off them. I met them in the early stages, when they were considering different venues, but from there on in, I dealt with the wedding planner.”

On the day of the wedding, when they arrived after the ceremony, the bride and groom were relaxed and smiling, mingling with the guests, not even remotely stressed. Now I can tell you that is NOT the usual scenario. Even on the day of the wedding, often the bride and groom, or the bride's mother, or the bridesmaids – are still organising things, still trying to direct the venue staff, worrying about the details instead of enjoying the experience. Their wedding planner simply took care of all that for them – quietly, with no fuss. I was impressed – she just took it all in her stride and made things happen.”

THE BENEFITS OF BEING A WEDDING PLANNER

It's rewarding – You get to be involved in one of the most memorable days of a person's life. In fact, you help to create those memories.

Personal satisfaction – Planning a wedding well can be extremely satisfying – and you get to experience the fruits of your endeavours when it all comes together on the day.

It's creative – No two weddings are the same. You get to plan the event from scratch, and see your vision become a reality.

Dealing with people – Your excellent communication and interpersonal skills will help to create a day of joy for all involved.

It's a growing concern – Consumer trend watcher Faith Popcorn said in 2000 that “time is the new money. People would rather spend money than time.” Rather than



doing it themselves, more couples would rather hire a professional to plan their wedding making this a growth industry.

Income – Many wedding planners charge 15-20% of the total cost of a wedding – with an average wedding costing \$30,000 – that's around \$5000 per wedding you're looking at! As the cost of weddings goes up, so does your income. An experienced wedding planner can earn up to \$100,000 per year.

Freedom – Being your own boss has great advantages – you can work when you want, and take time off when you want.

WHO'S WHO IN THE WEDDING PLANNING PROCESS

You may hear a range of terms for people involved in the wedding planning business. Some of them may be fulltime wedding planners who own their own business, others may work for retail outlets, reception centres or venues and they may only plan one aspect of the wedding. Some of the common terms you may come across are as follows:

Bridal consultant – Most bridal consultants are wedding planners who assist with all aspects of the wedding. People who work in bridal shops may also be referred to using this term.

Wedding coordinator – This is another term for 'wedding planner', although some wedding coordinators may be involved only in coordinating the wedding ceremony or reception.

Wedding consultant – This term generally refers to people who run a wedding planning company. They may plan the entire wedding, or simply give advice (consult) to couples that want to plan their own weddings.

Wedding planner – A wedding planner assists in planning and organising all aspects of a wedding ceremony or reception.

Some other terms might include 'wedding specialist' or wedding professional'. However, in this guide we use the term 'wedding planner', unless otherwise specified.



SERVICES PROVIDED BY A WEDDING PLANNER

A wedding planner can offer a range of services – from a complete service to planning just part of the wedding, depending on the client's needs.

A complete wedding planning service

Some couples choose to employ a wedding planner to handle all aspects of the planning and coordination of the wedding. Typical services include:

- Initial consultation with the bride and groom
- Ongoing consultation and advice (i.e. on wedding etiquette) as required
- Preparing a budget
- Preparing a schedule/timeline and checklists
- Assisting with selection and booking of ceremony and reception venues
- Assisting with selecting and booking an officiant (celebrant, priest, minister etc.) for the wedding
- Assisting with selecting a colour scheme, theme and style for the wedding
- Assisting with the design, printing and mailing out of the invitations
- Tracking RSVPs and who will be attending
- Assisting with selection of wedding attire and accessories
- Finding, negotiating with and booking suitable vendors (i.e. caterer, florist, wedding cake maker, photographer, videographer, musicians, transportation etc.)
- Reviewing vendor's contracts and coordinating vendors
- Ceremony planning
- Preparing itineraries and organising guests
- Attending and overseeing the rehearsal (up to two hours)
- Instructing attendants about their duties
- Reception planning
- Coordinating the collection of gifts received on the wedding day
- Wedding day coordination (up to 10 hours)
- Providing a stress-free day for the bride and groom.

Additional services (for which you might charge additional fees) might include:

- Announcing the engagement in the newspaper and/or sending out announcements
- Coordinating an engagement party
- Assisting with booking accommodations for out-of-town guests
- Preparing a unique ceremony and vows
- Assisting with planning the wedding shower and/or get-together for the groomsmen.
- Purchasing gifts for the bridal party
- Planning a rehearsal dinner/party
- Honeymoon planning
- Sending out thank you cards
- Assisting with change of address paperwork

Partial wedding planning services

Some couples may wish to plan and coordinate some parts of their own wedding, and hand over responsibility for other parts to you. You could be asked to undertake

a combination of the tasks listed above. Often couples want help with 'comparison shopping' so that they can compare services and prices for vendors, and they will ask you to do this for them, and give them a short list of recommended vendors.

Rehearsal and wedding day services only

Some couples prefer to plan most aspects of their wedding, but may wish to have an outside professional to direct everyone at the rehearsal, and to oversee and supervise everything on the wedding day to ensure it all runs smoothly.

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Blush & Champagne

INSPIRATION FOR THE BLUSHING BRIDE AND GROOM.



PART 2

Planning a Wedding

STEP 1 – CONSULT WITH THE BRIDE AND GROOM

The first thing you will need to do is talk to the bride and groom about their vision for their wedding day. Getting to know who they are by asking them some questions about how they met, when they got engaged, what their idea of the perfect wedding can be helpful. Getting to know their tastes will also help – ask them if they have been to any weddings they particularly liked or disliked in the past, and what it was about them that appealed (or didn't). Listen closely - really listening *well* is the key to planning their ideal wedding day.

Traditional or non-traditional?

At the initial consultation, you should determine the style of wedding they prefer – traditional or non-traditional.

Traditional weddings are held in a place of worship, such as a church or synagogue, with a priest, minister or rabbi conducting the ceremony. There are usually several bridesmaids and

groomsmen, formal wedding attire and traditional music. **Non-traditional weddings** might be in a park, or on the beach – wherever the couple's imaginations take them. The officiant would be a celebrant, rather than a priest. The couple might have unique vows written themselves, and the music might be performed by a talented friend.



How many guests will attend?

Ask your clients to determine how many people they wish to have in attendance for both the ceremony and the reception. Don't forget to inform them that the more guests they invite, the more expensive the wedding will be, and they should consider this when they are preparing their guest list. They should start by making two separate lists: one for 'definite invites', one for 'possible invites'. Invitations can then go out early to the first group, and later to the second, if guests on the first list are unable to attend.

Setting a date and time

Discuss when the couple would like to get married – have they got their hearts set on a particular date or time? If they have a venue they are keen on, consider alternative dates/times with them, in case the venue is booked. Point out to them

that they should consider the time of year they wish to get married – in terms of daylight hours, temperature and weather conditions, which are all important in planning the 'ideal' wedding. They should also think about the honeymoon destination, at particular times of the year. You don't want to end up in monsoon season when you're on a honeymoon!

Your role

Determine exactly what services the bride and groom want you to handle and discuss your fees (and contract) with them.

Get it in writing

After you have discussed the major points with the bride and groom, you can confirm all the details by asking them to complete a wedding planning registration form (see page 12 for an example).



SAMPLE WEDDING PLANNING CLIENT DETAILS FORM

Bride's full name:

Home phone number:

Mobile number:

Fax:

Mailing address:

Work number:

Email:

Groom's full name:

Home phone number:

Mobile number:

Fax:

Mailing address:

Work number:

Email:

Maid of honour's full name:

Phone number:

Best man's full name:

Phone number:

Number of bridesmaids:

Number of groomsmen:

Style of wedding (traditional, non-traditional), how do you envision your wedding to look:

WEDDING PLANNING SERVICES

Please check off the items you would like our wedding planning company to coordinate for you (or with you). Also, nominate your preferred vendor, if you have one. All of the items below are included in the Complete Wedding Package, unless they are listed under our Extras section (in which case, there will be an extra fee, to be agreed upon).

Service desired

Preferred vendor

- Announcement of engagement in newspaper
- Engagement party
- Design and/or mailing of invitations
- Stationery
- Tracking of guests attending
- Wedding gown and accessories
- Bridesmaids' attire and accessories
- Appointment with hairstylist and/or makeup artist
- Groomsmen's attire
- Musician for ceremony
- Flowers
- Photographer
- Videographer
- Transportation
- Decorations
- Visitor's guest book
- Caterer
- Wedding cake
- Table centrepiece
- Wedding favours
- Rental of marquee, equipment, etc. (if required)
- DJ, band or musicians for reception
- Accommodation for out-of-town guests
- Rehearsal dinner
- Reception seating
- Gift registry
- Collection of gifts
- Information on wedding etiquette
- Announcement of wedding in newspaper
- Thank you cards prepared and sent out
- Gifts for the bridal party/groomsmen and others
- Honeymoon planning
- Information on passports, visas, vaccinations

STEP 2 – PREPARE A BUDGET

Not many of us have an unlimited budget for our weddings, like that of James Packer – one of Australia's richest men – when he married Erica Baxter on the French Riviera in 2008 (the cost is estimated at \$15 million!!). Most of your clients are likely to have a limited budget, which will make it necessary for you to work closely with them on planning how best to allocate the funds.

Find out early on what the total budget is for the wedding. You don't want to find out too late that your happy couple has champagne tastes on a beer budget! You will need to discuss with them the importance of being realistic and setting priorities. For example, is the location more important to them than the number of guests they can invite? Find out what they consider to be essential, and what they can do without.

**Most of the money will go towards the reception –
all that wining and dining of the guests doesn't come cheap
so remind your clients to be aware of how many
people they invite to the reception.**

Here are some helpful websites that provide interactive budget planners online, or you can use our sample wedding budget form on page 16:



<http://www.truebride.com.au/wedding-planning/wedding-budget-planner/>

<http://www.easyweddings.com.au/planning-tools/budget-calculator/>

SAMPLE WEDDING BUDGET FORM

	Estimated cost	Actual cost
Rings		
Bride		
Groom		
Engraving		
Other		
Bridal wear		
Wedding gown/dress		
Alterations		
Headpiece/veil		
Undergarments		
Shoes		
Purse		
Garter		
Jewellery		
Other		
Groom's attire		
Suit/wedding attire		
Shoes		
Other		
Attendant's attire		
Bridesmaid's dresses		
Bridesmaid's shoes		
Grooms men's suits		
Groomsmen's shoes		
Flower girl's dress		
Ring bearer's attire		
Ring bearer's pillow		
Invitations/stationery		
Invitations		
RSVP cards		
Thank you cards		
Postage		
Order of service		
Guest placements		
Announcement in paper		
Flowers		
Bride's bouquet		
Bridesmaid's bouquet		
Flower girl's flowers		
Boutonnieres		
Corsages		

SAMPLE WEDDING BUDGET FORM continued

	Estimated cost	Actual cost
Flowers for church	£	£
Flowers for reception	£	£
Other	£	£
Ceremony, officiant, legalities		
Officiant's fee	£	£
Marriage certificate	£	£
Ceremony venue hire	£	£
Music for ceremony	£	£
Decorations for ceremony	£	£
Photographer, videographer		
Photographer's fee	£	£
Albums	£	£
Gift sets	£	£
Videographer's fee	£	£
Video/DVD copies	£	£
Other	£	£
Reception		
Venue fee	£	£
Catering fee	£	£
Food	£	£
Beverages	£	£
Champagne	£	£
Cake	£	£
Cake knife	£	£
Decorations	£	£
Table centrepieces	£	£
Favours	£	£
Rentals (marquee, tent etc.)	£	£
Music, DJ, entertainment	£	£
Toasting glasses	£	£
Other	£	£
Transportation		
Limousine or bridal car	£	£
Attendant's car	£	£
Guest transportation	£	£
Alternate (e.g., carriage)	£	£
Other	£	£
Beauty		
Hair stylist	£	£
Makeup	£	£
Manicure/pedicure	£	£
Other	£	£

SAMPLE WEDDING BUDGET FORM continued

	Estimated cost	Actual cost
Miscellaneous		
Wedding planner fees	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$
Honeymoon expenses		
Passports	\$	\$
Visas	\$	\$
Vaccinations	\$	\$
Airfare	\$	\$
Transportation (car rental etc.)	\$	\$
Hotel/accommodation	\$	\$
Meals	\$	\$
Entertainment	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$
TOTAL:	\$	\$

STEP 3 – PREPARE A TIMELINE CHECKLIST

Your ability to stay on schedule will make the difference between success and failure when it comes to planning a wedding.

Preparing a timeline, schedule and/or checklist is a great way to ensure nothing gets missed or forgotten. Ideally, you would have a year to plan everything and make sure the venue is available, but it is not essential. Our sample schedule (below) is based on having a year to plan. It can be adapted to other timelines however. You will need to be able to delegate some responsibilities to others – while still keeping an eye on the big picture. The couple themselves might also complete some of the items listed. You can adapt this comprehensive checklist into two lists if you wish – one for yourself, and one for the bride and groom.

Once you have organised the schedule with your clients, you should transfer the information to a calendar, an Excel spread sheet or I-phone – whatever your preferred mode for keeping track of things on a daily basis.



WEDDING TIMELINE, SCHEDULE AND CHECKLIST

12 months before

- Attend consultation with bride and groom
- Have bride and groom complete Wedding Registration Form
- Have bride and groom select bridal party and other attendants and ask them to participate in the wedding
- Provide bride and groom with wedding etiquette information as required
- Have bride and groom finalise wedding date
- Have bride and groom consult with parents – discuss arrangements and their involvement, discuss budgets and if parents will be contributing to wedding costs
- Prepare a budget and review it with bride and groom
- Book ceremony venue and pay deposit
- Book reception venue and pay deposit
- Determine if venues require proof of liability insurance and, if so, arrange same
- Have bride and groom prepare list of guests to attend
- Announce engagement in the newspaper (if requested)
- Send out engagement announcements (if requested)
- Coordinate engagement party (if requested)

10-11 months before

- Determine what customs and/or traditions, personalised vows, readings and/or exchanges the bride and groom would like to include at the ceremony (e.g., lighting of the unity candle, flowers to mothers etc.)
- Have bride and groom select and meet with wedding officiant, along with you
- Book caterer
- Book musicians for the ceremony (e.g., soloist, organist etc.)
- Book musicians for the reception (e.g., band, DJ etc.)
- Book photographer
- Book videographer

8-9 months before

- Book florist
- Book cake designer/baker
- Book transportation for wedding
- Have bride and groom sign up for pre-marital counselling (optional)
- Have bride select and purchase wedding dress, headpiece/veil, shoes, lingerie and accessories
- Have bride select bridesmaids and flower girls' dresses and accessories.

6-7 months before

- Make arrangements to have bridesmaids and flower girl fitted for dresses
- Have mother of the bride and groom select their dresses
- Have bride and groom sign up with a gift registry and select desired gifts



- Book calligrapher
- Book rentals (such as tents, tables, chairs, linens, china, glassware, cake knife, toasting glasses, candelabras etc. as required)
- Have bride and groom send any required deposits to vendors/suppliers
- Remind bride and groom to book their honeymoon (flights, transportation, hotels, entertainment) and update passports, obtain visas and any vaccinations required
- Reserve rooms for out-of-town guests (if requested)
- Review all vendors/suppliers contracts and provide advice to bride and groom

5 months before

- Have bride and groom select invitation design
- Order invitations, RSVP cards, thank-you cards, itineraries etc.
- Select and order all flowers
- Plan reception including finalising theme, decor, etc., and select favours table centrepieces, decorations, candles etc.
- Have bride and groom finalise the music selection or ceremony and reception
- Provide music requests and lists to musicians
- Have bride and groom finalise wedding invitation list



4 months before

- Review budget with bride and groom to ensure it's on track
- Remind bride and groom to select and purchase their wedding rings and arrange for engravings
- Have groom select and get fitted for suit/wedding attire and shoes
- Have groomsmen (and possibly ring-bearer and ushers) fitted for suits and shoes
- Meet with caterer (with bride and groom) for tastings and to find out menu options
- Order wedding cake and groom's cake (if desired)
- Have bride and groom arrange for MC and other speakers (e.g., individuals making toasts) at the reception
- Have bride and groom select flowers for the wedding
- Have bride and groom select and arrange with someone to handle guest book
- Have bride and groom select and arrange someone (or two!) to hand out programs
- Talk to maid of honour and best man about planning a bridal shower/hen's night and bachelor party/buck's night
- Have bride and groom book honeymoon suite for the wedding night
- Have bride book suite to get ready in on the day of the wedding, if applicable
- Have bride and groom make arrangements for the planning of a rehearsal dinner and day-after-wedding brunch.

3 months before

- Have bride make all appointments for hair, make-up and manicure/pedicure

- Plan wedding favours
- Have bride and groom get blood tests and/or have medical examinations, if required
- Provide caterer with food/menu and beverage selections
- Plan additional liquor needs, if required
- Have bride and groom select any readings (and readers) for the ceremony
- Have bride and groom meet with the officiant to review the ceremony and finalise vows
- Determine what customs and/or traditions the bride and groom would like to include at the reception (such as formal cake cutting, toasts etc.)
- Finalise time and location of rehearsal
- Prepare maps, directions, information sheets and hotel recommendations for out-of-town guests
- Prepare wedding program, wedding weekend itinerary and wedding day schedule
- Obtain wedding invitation list from couple
- Provide wedding list to calligrapher
- Meet with printer to have invitations, RSVP cards, thank-you cards, itineraries, programs, menus etc., and any accessories such as napkins printed.

2 months before

- Pick up and mail out wedding invitations (together with RSVP cards etc.)
- Contact booked venues to confirm arrangements and arrange with bride and groom to pay balances owing, as required
- Have bride and bridesmaids attend follow-up wedding attire fittings
- Prepare information and instruction sheets for all members of the bridal party and for all vendors
- Have bride prepare guest list for bridal shower/hen's night and give to maid of honour
- Have groom prepare guest list for bachelor party/buck's night, and give to best man
- Have bride select going away outfit

1 month before

- Track bridal registry and pre-print thank-you cards (if requested)
- Have bride and groom pick up wedding rings and ensure they fit
- Provide photographer with list of photos to be taken
- Provide instructions to videographer
- Confirm music lists and arrangements with musicians
- Confirm transportation arrangements
- Confirm flower order and arrangements with florist
- Confirm rental requirements and drop-off time
- Pick up any ceremony or reception accessories not provided by rental company or caterer (e.g., candles, goblets, ring pillow, guest book, cake knife etc.)

-Have bride and groom purchase gifts for bridal attendants, parents, ushers and each other

3 weeks before

- Follow up with guests who haven't sent in an RSVP
- Prepare seating plan for reception
- Prepare name cards/seating cards
- Have bride go in for trial hair and makeup appointments and confirm wedding day appointments
- Have bride and groom prepare a wedding reception toast/speech
- Remind bride and groom to complete change of name/address paperwork
- Have bride and groom select someone (you?) to return groom's suit/wedding attire and bridal gown at cleaners after wedding

2 weeks before

- Provide wedding day schedule and instructions to all appropriate vendors
- Phone to confirm all arrangements with vendors and suppliers one more time
- Have bride and bridesmaids pick up their gowns/dresses and all accessories (including veil and/or headpiece for bride shoes, jewellery etc.)
- Have couple pick up tickets, itinerary, travellers cheques etc. for honeymoon
- Have bride arrange bridesmaid's luncheon and give gifts to attendees
- Have groom arrange buck's night and give gifts to attendants.
- Remind groom to get haircut

1 week before

- Provide caterer with final numbers for reception
- Confirm rehearsal date and time with all members of the bridal party and all others assisting with the wedding (such as officiant, parents, photographer, videographer, musicians etc.)
- Meet with bride and groom to review all wedding plans
- Find out from bride and groom where wedding gifts that are received on the day of the wedding should be dropped off
- Obtain from the bride and groom the final cheques for vendors' outstanding fees (such as musicians, officiant, caterer, florist, transportation, wedding planner's fees etc.)
- Prepare envelopes addressed to various vendors to pay final fees
- Have bride and groom pack for their honeymoon including clothes, toiletries, tickets, passports, visas, maps, guidebooks, travellers cheques, money etc.
- Have bride and groom pack their going away outfits, wedding night and next day clothes and toiletries.

2 days before wedding

- Have groom and groomsmen pick up suits/wedding attire
- Have bride get manicure/pedicure
- Have bride and groom give gifts to parents and each other
- Pack all items you need to bring to the wedding ceremony (such as guest book

- and pen, marriage license, ceremony programs, candles, emergency kit etc.)
- Drop off all reception favours, table centrepieces, cake knife, toasting goblets, candles etc. at reception venue so they can be set up prior to reception
- Have couple confirm early meeting times with bridal party for the wedding day

Day before wedding/rehearsal

- Attend and direct rehearsal/dinner
- Hand out wedding schedule, itineraries and instructions to all members of the bridal party and any others involved with the wedding
- Provide seating details to ushers
- Bring ring-bearer's pillow and provide to individual responsible for ring-bearer
- Have groom give bride's ring to best man and have bride give groom's ring to the maid of honour (or to you, for safekeeping, if a ring-bearer is involved)
- Oversee the decorating of the ceremony venue and the reception venue

Day of wedding (prior to ceremony)

- Bring your charged mobile phone with you for the day
- Bring your checklists, schedule, list of vendors and contact information including phone numbers
- Have bride get hair/make-up done
- Attend with bride, as required (and make sure she eats)
- Oversee and coordinate with venue manager, musicians, photographer, videographer, officiant, florist, decorator, transportation company (if required) etc.
- Bring guestbook and pen, programs and candles (and set everything up)
- Bring emergency kit (small sewing kit, safety pins, bobby pins, antacid, aspirin, Kleenex, brush, hairspray etc.) in case needed

Day of wedding (ceremony and after)

- Attend and oversee ceremony (including processional, recessional and receiving line after ceremony) and provide supervision, guidance, support, assistance, instructions or whatever may be required to have the ceremony run smoothly
- Provide final payment cheques to all ceremony vendors
- Collect marriage license, candles, guest book and pen, extra programs and anything behind after the ceremony
- Attend photo-taking after ceremony and coordinate the photographer

Day of wedding (reception)

- Oversee and coordinate with venue manager, caterer, musicians, DJ, cake designer, photographer, videographer
- Coordinate and oversee reception receiving line
- Provide final payment cheques to all reception vendors/suppliers, including bar tab
- Coordinate first dance(s), cake cutting, bouquet throwing, garter toss etc. (as requested)
- Collect all wedding gifts and cash received at reception and deliver them to pre-determined location

After the wedding

- Drop off wedding dress at cleaners (if requested)
- Return groom's suits/wedding attire (if requested)
- Arrange for pressing of flowers (if requested)
- Send wedding announcement to the newspaper (if requested)
- Send out thank-you cards for gifts (if requested)
- Send a congratulations and 'thank you for your business' card to the couple

An online checklist you might find helpful:

<http://www.brideonline.com.au/tools/timelinechecklist.htm>

<http://www.easyweddings.com.au/planning-tools/to-do-list/>



STEP 4 – CREATE A WEDDING ORGANISER

Another way to stay organised is to create a wedding organiser for each wedding that you work on. A wedding organiser (sometimes known as wedding binder or wedding planner) is a binder that contains all of the documents that you need for the wedding. It is a great 'carry-all' for all of your paperwork. A three-ring binder with plastic sheets and dividers will do the trick nicely. You can create sections for whatever you need, but it's a good idea to have the following:

- Copy of the contract between your company and your client
- Copies of all the supplier contracts
- Wedding overview
- Event schedules
- Contact list

The wedding overview

From your consultations with your clients, you will create a contract outlining exactly which services your client wants. From this information, you should create a wedding overview, detailing dates, places and times of every event you have agreed to be involved in. A sample wedding overview is shown on page 27.

Event schedules

The wedding overview does not include particulars like attendees, directions or duration. These and any other relevant details will be included in the event schedules (or whatever name you assign). Whatever you call this section, it should at least contain the following elements:

- The name of the bride and groom (e.g., Smith-Jones wedding) and the actual wedding date should appear on each page
- A brief description of each task
- The location
- Person responsible for each task

You should do a separate event schedule for each event you are servicing: e.g., the engagement party, the rehearsal dinner, and the reception.

A sample event schedule is on page 28.

Contact list

Your organiser should contain phone numbers for everyone involved in the wedding, including the vendors supplying goods and service numbers, and their back-up emergency mobile numbers – just in case!



SAMPLE WEDDING OVERVIEW

Client:

Wedding date:

Vendor meetings

Vendor: Address:
Date:
Time: Contact:

Hens Party / Bridal Shower

Venue: Address:
Date:
Time: Contact:

Wedding Rehearsal

Venue: Address:
Date:
Time: Contact:

Wedding Rehearsal Dinner

Venue: Address:
Date:
Time: Contact:

Wedding Ceremony

Venue: Address:
Date:
Time: Contact:

Wedding Reception

Venue: Address:
Date:
Time: Contact:

Gift opening

Venue: Address:
Date:
Time: Contact:



SAMPLE EVENT SCHEDULE

Smith – Jones Wedding 25 September 2016

Rehearsal dinner schedule

When: Friday, 25 September – 6.30-10.00pm

At: Lakeside Restaurant, Smith St, Richmond

Contact: James (03) 4876 4032

Time: 9am Responsible: Anne
Location: Office
Task: Call James with final head count
Notes: Check answering machine and email for last minute RSVPs

Time: 9am Responsible: Anne
Location: Office
Task: Discuss last minute menu changes with restaurant
Notes: Check RSVP list for special dietary concerns.

Time: 3.30pm Responsible: Jill
Location: Blooming Beautiful, 45 Wakefield St
Task: Pick up flowers for table settings
Notes: Ordered large table arrangement
Contact Yolanda.

Time: 4pm Responsible: Jill
Location: Lakeside Restaurant
Task: Deliver flowers for table settings
Notes: Park in back, and ring buzzer. Arrangement for head table.

Time: 6pm Responsible: Jill
Location: Lakeside Restaurant
Task: Check table settings and arrange place cards.
Notes: Seating arrangement attached to Lakeside's contract

Time: 10pm Responsible: Jill
Location: Lakeside Restaurant
Task: Settle bill. Discuss event with James
Notes: Final bill to be paid by George Smith, father of the groom.

STEP 5 – PLANNING THE CEREMONY

While the reception is the celebratory aspect of the day, the ceremony is likely to be the most meaningful – it's when the bride and groom pledge their love and commitment to each other, in front of all of their friends and family.

Once you have had your initial consultation with the bride and groom, and you have completed the wedding registration form with them, you will have gathered all the information you need regarding the ceremony. You will then be in a good position to start your planning. This section will help you finalise some of the details.

If you want to find you more about the history of the wedding ceremony this book by Carley Roney, available at www.amazon.com, will help: *The Knot Guide to Wedding Vows and Traditions: Readings, Rituals, Music, Dances, and Toasts*.

Designing a wedding ceremony

Many people simply overlook the ceremony design in the wedding planning, which is a shame as the wedding ceremony is one of the most important parts of the day! Wouldn't you want it to look simply magical?

We have put together an ebook with a whole lot of different options and things to consider when you are designing a wedding ceremony space! It includes everything from layout to florals, to chair choices, to archways and arbours, and aisle treatments!

You can find this style guide as a part of **Module 3, Lesson 2** (Designing a wedding ceremony) on your student account, and use it to help familiarize yourself with the names of different settings, and also be up to date with the latest trends in ceremony design.

Step 1:

First of all, gain an idea of things that your bride likes... and also make sure you have a wedding inspiration board to work with - so you know the overall theme and style of wedding.

Step 2:

Consider where the ceremony will be held - is it indoors or outdoors? Consider the direction that the ceremony will face, and the backdrop for the photos. Other things to consider are proximity to car parking, and access for the bride.

Step 3:

Choose the type of chair that you will use - is it cross-back chairs, white Americana folding chairs, benches, tiffany chairs, or chairs with chair covers? How many chairs will you need, and how will you place them- i.e what formation will they be in? How

many rows of chairs, and how many in each row? Consider chair treatment - will they have any additional decoration on the backs of the chairs?

Step 4:

Consider signing table and chairs. What tablecloth will you use? Where will the signing table be placed? What decorations will you have on the signing table? Fresh flowers? Remember a pen as well as weights if the ceremony is outside.

Fresh flowers: will there be arrangements down the aisle or on the signing table? Costs, and material costs. Is there a way to get the same feel and theme at a cheaper cost? (Candles are a great solution for adding romance at a cost effective price. The more fresh flowers you have - the more expensive the centrepiece.) Also consider the type of flowers that are in season for the month that the wedding is in.

Step 5:

Consider an arbour, arch or canopy for the altar - where the bride and groom will stand. There are many different styles and designs of 'canopies' that you can create - refer to the style guide.

Step 6:

Consider extra decoration items such as draping fabric, hanging chandeliers, hanging crystal strands, columns with flowers, kissing balls, welcome easels, and hanging bunting or paper lanterns.

Step 7:

Consider aisle treatment. Will there be a runner going down the aisle? What colour? Or maybe petals instead? Will there be anything else running down the aisle - such as shepherds hooks, kissing balls, flowers, arrangements etc, etc.

Step 8:

Consider extra ceremony accessories/items such as petal cones, bubbles, program fans, reserved seating signs.

Step 9:

You may like to consider or suggest music, as well as organize a P.A and microphone (although a lot of celebrants provide this in their package.)

Step 10:

Consider time of day for the ceremony for the best photos! Also consider a wet-weather plan if the ceremony is outside!

Choosing a date

The vast majority of weddings are held on a Saturday in Spring or Summer (September is the most popular month). However, you certainly don't need to stick to this day, month or season. In fact, weddings held on a day other than Saturday will be less expensive and easier to plan. Exceptions to this are weddings held at Christmas time or on Valentine's Day (unsurprisingly, a very popular day to get married!).

Your clients should take into consideration the fact that some venues and officiants can be booked up a year in advance (maybe even more) on a Saturday in spring or summer. So it is helpful to have at least a full year to plan if a popular venue or officiant is desired.

Your clients should also keep in mind the following, when choosing a date:

- Holidays such as Easter and Christmas, school holidays etc. – because travel will be overpriced and it may be difficult for interstate/overseas guests at this time of year, as well as inflating the price of the honeymoon
- Family commitments such as graduations, baptisms, other weddings, birthday celebrations etc.
- Major sporting events, concerts and other special events in the area of the wedding that may make accommodation difficult to find and/or more expensive
- Religious restrictions (if applicable) that may rule out certain wedding days
- What the weather may be like at the desired time of year.

It's important that your clients finalise their wedding date as quickly as possible, so that you can assist them in planning all the other details of their wedding.

Choosing a venue

If the bride and groom are religious, it is highly likely they will want to be married in their regular place of worship. If they are not religious, or they prefer a non-traditional ceremony, they may already have an idea of where they would like to be married, or they may ask you for some ideas.

Here are some suggestions where a ceremony could be held:

- A place that is unique or special to the couple (e.g., the location where they first met, or where they got engaged)
- Art gallery
- Backyard of a parent or friend's house
- Beach
- Boat
- Botanical gardens
- City hall
- Community hall

- Golf course
- Hotel
- Mountain
- Non-denominational church
- Park
- Outdoors in a marquee
- Restaurant
- Private Mansion
- Wedding chapel
- Winery



Once a desired venue has been chosen, before you book it, thoroughly check out the venue (with your clients) and ask the following questions:

- What is the fee for hiring the venue and what does the fee include?
- How much deposit is required and when is the rest of the fee payable?
- How long can the venue be used for at that fee?
- What are the hourly charges if the time allotted is exceeded?
- Is there a security deposit required?
- What is the refund policy?
- Can the venue be used for a rehearsal the day/evening before the wedding (and is this included in the rental fee)?
- What are the insurance requirements, if any?
- Will there be a venue coordinator available, if required? If so, what are the duties of the venue coordinator?
- Are there any officiant options with the venue?
- Are there any requirements regarding an officiant?
- Is pre-marriage counselling required (if in a place of worship)?
- Can couples from mixed faiths be married in the venue (if applicable)?

- What rental equipment is included with the fee (e.g., microphones, candelabras, stereo system, organ etc.) or what is the cost of using these if not included in the fee?
- Is there an organist or pianist available?
- What is the room capacity?
- Is there a change room/waiting room that is included for your use?
- What parking is available?
- Will there be any other weddings held on the desired date?
- How long before the wedding can the florist and decorator come in to set up?
- Are there restrictions with respect to decorating?
- Are there any wedding policies or rules (e.g., regarding picture taking or confetti/petal tossing)?

You can print this list of questions off and take it with you when you inspect the venue.

If our clients decide to proceed with the venue, request that the venue coordinator reserve it for your clients and also request that a rental contract be prepared covering all the items that you have agreed upon. This will help to avoid any misunderstandings or surprises.

Once the contract is prepared, you should review it and ensure everything that should have been included, and then arrange with your clients to sign it, and provide any deposits that are required to keep the booking.

Wedding insurance

It may be necessary to obtain wedding insurance for some venues. For some couples, wedding insurance buys peace of mind. Packaged cover is available for a range of mishaps through many insurers (just do a web search on 'wedding insurance' and take your pick). Premiums start at around \$199 for a standard package, which includes cover if you need to re-shoot photos, cover for damage to the bride's dress and public liability cover — a must if one of your relatives is injured at the wedding.

Selecting your officiant/ Celebrant

If your clients are members of a religious faith, they will likely want to choose a minister or Priest from their place of worship. However they may opt to choose a celebrant from no particular religion to marry them.

Legally in Australia, a marriage ceremony can be performed by an authorised minister of religion or a civil marriage celebrant. Marriage ceremonies can also be performed by registrars at some regional magistrates' courts. For further information contact your regional court or visit the Attorney-General's Department website for authorised state officers: <https://marriage.ag.gov.au/marriagecelebrants/civil>

Celebrants are professionally trained to perform ceremonies. Because they are dedicated to these celebrations, they are able to create a personalised ceremony for the people involved. Celebrants encourage couples to be creative and conduct their wedding a fashion that best represents them. They meet with the couple before the wedding to get to know them both as individuals and as a couple, and will also interview friends and family members to gain more insight and gather personal stories to share with guests.

While celebrants help couples shape the ceremony, they do not coordinate details of a wedding, and they are therefore a complement to (not a replacement for) a wedding planner.

It's important for the bride and groom to select a celebrant they feel comfortable with and like, who will work with them and allow them to have a ceremony that is right for them. The best way to find this out is to set up a meeting between your clients, the officiant and yourself to discuss the Celebrant's services. At this meeting, you will discuss the ceremony, vows, exchanges, readings, prayers, music etc., and get agreement for anything special desired by your clients. It is best to do this before the celebrant is officially hired.

Some questions you may want to ask the Celebrant prior to hiring them:

- What is their fee and when is it payable?
- What is the refund policy if the wedding needs to be postponed?
- How many times will the Celebrant meet with the couple prior to the wedding?
- Is the Celebrant agreeable to coordinating the ceremony with you (the wedding planner) as well as the couple?
- Does the Celebrants fee include the rehearsal (preferably the day or night before the wedding)?
- Are there restrictions with respect to the music, prayers, readings etc.?
- How are interfaith marriages handled (if applicable)?
- Will the officiant perform a marriage in conjunction with another officiant (if applicable)?
- Will the celebrant perform the ceremony at another location (if applicable)?
- Will the celebrant provide a copy of the ceremony script beforehand (if this has not already been obtained)?
- Can changes be made to the script?
- Can personal vows be included within the ceremony?
- Will the celebrant attend the reception?

Celebrants typically charge anywhere from \$400 to \$900 to perform a marriage ceremony. The fees may be higher if the officiant is requested to travel to your clients' preferred location to perform the marriage (instead of having the ceremony performed at the officiant's location i.e., a church).

It's a good idea to book the celebrant as soon as possible, and put a contract in place covering all items agreed upon. After you've reviewed the contract, have your couple sign in it, and pay any deposit required to ensure that the celebrant is reserved for your client's wedding.



Planning the ceremony vows, exchanges and readings

If your clients are religious and are to be married in their place of worship, there will likely be customs, traditions and rituals that need to be included with their ceremony.

Each denomination will have its own rules, requirements and procedures relating to wedding ceremonies. Some allow for variances and personal touches, while others may be quite restrictive. It's important to keep in mind that the ceremony and vows be reflective of your client's feelings and beliefs.

Most wedding ceremonies contain the following elements (though this may vary depending on the religion, officiant or the bride and groom's desires:

- A greeting
- Statement of intentions and wedding vows
- Exchange of rings
- Readings and blessings
- Pronouncement of husband and wife

The most common denominational weddings held in Australia are those of Roman Catholic and Anglican, with other forms of Christian weddings in smaller amounts (Uniting Church, Presbyterian, Eastern Orthodox, Baptist). With such a multicultural society, you might also come across people wanting a Jewish wedding, or Buddhist, Hindu or Islamic weddings.

Sometimes couples from mixed faiths will decide to get married, and have a wedding that includes components of both faiths (this is called an interfaith marriage).

Obviously different religions will have different requirements and guidelines for a wedding ceremony. If you are planning an interfaith marriage, it will be necessary to discuss the different requirements with an officiant from each religion and determine if the two officiants will work together and how that will work.

Carley Roney's book, referred to previously, is a great resource for information on ceremonies from different faiths and cultures: *The Knot Guide to Wedding Vows and Traditions: Readings, Rituals, Music, Dances, and Toasts*.

Personalising the ceremony and vows

Prior to arranging a meeting with the officiant, bride and groom, it would be helpful to request a copy of the officiant's traditional ceremony script, and ask them how much leeway there is to personalise the ceremony and/or vows (if this is important to your couple). If changes can be made, have the bride and groom read the script and note any desired changes on a copy of the script and bring it along to your meeting with the officiant.

If your clients want a civil or non-denominational wedding, officiated by a civil marriage celebrant or registrar, there is likely to be more flexibility with personalising the ceremony and vows.

Writing your own wedding vows

Here are some tips and resources for your bride and groom if they choose to write their own vows:

- Consult your officiate... it's better to know in advance if you can use personalised heartfelt vows, rather than to be told later that you can't use any of them
- Get started early and take your time... don't wait until the last minute to start writing your vows. Sometimes inspiration comes slowly

-Keep it brief... 1-3 minutes is ideal

-Research... read your favourite poetry passages, old love letters and notes to each other, inspirational quotes, bible passages and love stories

-Talk to your partner... decide whether you are going to write your wedding vows together or independently

-Use strong words... they will make your vows come alive

-Practice... read your vows aloud to yourself and your partner to make sure they work effectively

-Memorise your vows... you want to look your partner in the eye when you are saying them... but take a copy with you (just in case)

Speak from the heart

Don't forget to say 'I LOVE YOU'.

**

The following book, available at www.amazon.com, is a great resource to assist your clients with writing their own vows:

The Everything Wedding Vows Book: Anything and Everything You Could Possibly Say at the Altar - And Then Some by Janet Anastasio

Exchanges and rituals

Besides personalising their vows, many couples also like to include special exchanges, blessings and symbolic rituals within their ceremony.

One of the most popular exchanges is the **lighting of the unity candle**. This is symbolic of the joining together of the bride and groom. It often involves three candles: one is lit by the bride (or her parents) and another is lit by the groom (or his parents); together they then bring the two candles together to light a centre candle.

If your clients decide to perform this exchange, they will need to ensure this is acceptable to the officiant and, if so, you will need to arrange to have candles and candle holders available at the ceremony and have it included within the officiant's ceremony script.

Another popular exchange is a **sand ceremony**, where two vessels of sand are blended together into a third. This also works particularly well when there are children involved. Each child can have a role within the ceremony, and be represented as different coloured sand. When the sands are poured together into a

jar, they are joined together and cannot be separated. They represent a family being moulded together.

Any special exchanges, blessings and symbolic rituals will need to be discussed and cleared with the officiant prior to the wedding.

Readings and prayers

Readings and prayers are often included in many wedding ceremonies. If your couple is having a religious ceremony in a place of worship, there are likely to be traditional prayers and readings included in the ceremony. However, there is often leeway to choose your own instead of or in addition to the traditional ones.

If your clients want to choose their own readings for the wedding, you will need to clear this with the officiant first. Your clients will then need to decide on the readings and who will perform them (sometimes the bride and groom will do a reading, but often they choose to select friends or family members to read instead).

Your officiant is likely to be able to direct you to popular readings in the Bible, if you are having a Christian wedding. There are also many resources available on the Internet – just type ‘wedding readings’, ‘wedding poems’ or ‘wedding prayers’ into a search engine and you will be spoilt for choice. Some good websites include:

<http://www.i-do.com.au/wedding-tips/wedding-vows-wedding-readings-poems/well-known-readings-for-weddings/1703/>

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/jennaguillaume/beautiful-and-unique-wedding-readings-from-books#.bbGdG05ZyA>

The following book, available at www.amazon.com, is a resource you can use to assist your clients with selecting the right readings and words:

A Wedding Ceremony to Remember: Perfect Words for the Perfect Wedding
by Marty Younkin

Selecting the music for the ceremony

Music can be a beautiful and moving part of any wedding, and personalised selection of the music can add much in terms of meaning for the couple.

At most wedding ceremonies, music is played at the following times:

- During the prelude (i.e., before the wedding starts), normally commencing about 30 minutes prior to the start of the wedding while guests are arriving.
- During the processional
- Intermittently throughout the ceremony (e.g., when the marriage certificate is being

signed)

- During the recessional
- After the ceremony.

Various types of music and musicians can be selected for the different parts of the ceremony, including:

- A choir
- musical group
- guitar player
- harpist
- pianist
- soloist
- string quartet
- pre-recorded music.

Finding musicians

Before you start looking for musicians, ask your clients if they have any family members who sing or play an instrument that they would like to perform at the wedding ceremony. If you are looking for a pianist, organist or choir to perform at the couple's wedding, ask at the venue if they know of any or check at your local church and see if the organist, pianist or choir would be interested in being hired for the wedding.

Musicians can also be found through local music studios where individuals are taught (you can find these under 'music instructors' in the Yellow Pages. If you get a lead on a good musician, ask them for a demo tape that your clients can listen to. It is important to have contracts in place with any musicians that are hired.

Before plans are finalised, check with the officiant to determine if there are any rules or restrictions regarding music during the ceremony. You should also check with the venue.

Music stores offer compilations CDs of love songs and other beautiful music. It may be helpful for you to have a few of these on hand to help your clients select their music. You can also order wedding compilations and love songs at www.amazon.com.

The following website might also be helpful:

<http://www.i-do.com.au> (and click on 'Tips and advice', and 'Wedding love songs and music')

Obtaining the marriage certificate

To be married in any Australian state or territory, your bride and groom must complete a Notice of Intended Marriage form. The form must be completed and

returned to the marriage celebrant or minister at least one month and a day, and no more than 18 months, before the intended date of marriage.

Notice of Intended Marriage forms are available from the marriage celebrant or minister who will be performing the marriage ceremony, or by downloading the Notice of Intended Marriage form online from the Local Government website for the State that the Marriage will take place.

Your couple will be required to sign three marriage certificates during the ceremony:

- An official certificate which the officiant will send to your state registry of births, deaths and marriages to register the marriage
- A duplicate which the officiant keeps as his/her record of the marriage
- A keepsake certificate which will be given to the couple by the officiant on the day of the marriage.

A certified copy of the official certificate can be purchased from the registry five to 10 working days after the presiding celebrant or minister has lodged the relevant registration information with the registry. This document may be presented to organisations as evidence of the marriage and to facilitate a change of name. Once the marriage is registered, the registry is then able to produce your Standard and Commemorative Marriage Certificates. This document may be presented to organisations as evidence of the marriage and to facilitate a change of name.

Information on a marriage certificate includes: marriage ceremony details, bride and groom details, residential details, parents' details, and celebrant and witness details.

Ceremony rehearsal

A rehearsal can be your chance to iron out any last minute wrinkles before the ceremony proper. Rehearsals are usually held the day before the wedding, but can be held earlier if it suits the parties involved better. You should schedule around two hours for the rehearsal, and it should be held at the ceremony venue.

As the wedding planner, it is highly likely that it will be part of your job to direct the rehearsal, and to instruct all the parties involved along with the officiant. It's a good idea to contact the officiant prior to the rehearsal to discuss your role in the ceremony and the level to which the officiant would like you to be involved.

If a religious ceremony is planned, the officiant will take a larger role in direction than for a civil ceremony or non-denominational ceremony where the couple and you have been more involved in planning a unique ceremony together.

Who should attend

The best plan of action is to ensure that all parties involved with the ceremony are present at the rehearsal, including the bride and groom, the officiant, the father

(and possibly mother) of the bride, all of the bridal attendants including the ring bearer and flower girl, ushers, musicians and anyone who is performing a reading or prayer (if required).

Participants should be asked not to bring along spouses, children or friends and family, as this can be distracting.

Prior to commencing the rehearsal, it's a good idea to:

- Confirm who will be signing the marriage certificate as witnesses
- lay out any ceremonial props (candles for the unity candle ceremony, beakers for the sand ceremony etc.)
- determine the best location for the guest book
- handle any other last-minute details.

The rehearsal gives each member of the wedding party and others involved an opportunity to find out what their role is, and to practise it. It's especially important for the bride and groom to practise, so that they feel comfortable with their parts and can relax and enjoy it on the wedding day. They should practise:

- Walking down the aisle (for the bride)
- passing the bouquet (for the bride)
- determining where they will stand
- kneeling (if appropriate)
- signing the marriage certificate
- exchanging vows
- exchanging rings
- any special exchanges or blessings.

After everyone has completed the rehearsal and practised their parts, it's a good idea to do a verbal run through of the ceremony and to repeat all of the instructions. Also, allow each participant to clarify what their duties are, and ask any questions if they are confused or do not understand. It can be helpful to create a wedding itinerary/checklist give to all members of the bridal party (see page 33 for example).

Rehearsal dinner

Some people like to have a dinner or party following the rehearsal. This would normally include all people involved in the wedding ceremony (including the officiant) together with their partners, parents and siblings of the bride and groom, out-of-town guests, and possibly the reception MC and their partner. It's traditional for the groom's parents to host the rehearsal dinner; however, sometimes the bride and groom themselves or other family members get involved with planning and/or hosting it.

SAMPLE WEDDING DAY ITINERARY
(for a 3pm wedding)

In this itinerary, it is assumed the bride lives (or is getting ready) at a location 15 minutes away from the ceremony venue.

Time	Action
10.30am	Bride (and bridesmaids) attend hairdressing appointment (maybe earlier, depending on styles required!)
12.00pm	Bride (and bridesmaids) have makeup done
1.00pm	Bride and bridesmaids have lunch or snack (finger foods)
1.00pm	Flowers are dropped off at venue for wedding ceremony and final decorating is completed
1.15pm	Photographer arrives at bride's location
1.15pm	Bride and bridesmaids get dressed
1.30pm	Flower girl and ring bearer arrive at bride's location
1.45pm	Groom and groomsmen get dressed
2.00pm	Officiant, ushers and musicians arrive at ceremony venue
2.15pm	Prelude music starts and guests begin to arrive
2.20pm	Limousine(s) arrive at bride's location
2.30pm	Groom and groomsmen arrive at ceremony venue
2.30pm	Videographer arrives at ceremony venue and sets up
2.35pm	First cars with mother of the bride, flower girl, ring bearer and bridesmaids depart for ceremony venue
2.40pm	Bride and father of the bride depart in limousine for the ceremony venue
2.50pm	Grandmothers of the bride and groom are escorted down the aisle
2.50pm	Mother of the bride, bridesmaids, flower girl and ring bearer arrive
2.52pm	Mother of the groom is escorted down the aisle
2.55pm	Bride and father of the bride arrive at venue

2.57pm	Groom and groomsmen line up at the front of venue
2.58pm	Mother of the bride is escorted down the aisle
3.00pm	Processional music begins and processional begins
3.45pm	Ceremony ends and recessional begins
3.50pm	Ceremony receiving line
4.00pm	Caterer arrives at reception location
4.30pm	Photographs taken at chosen location
5.30pm	Cocktails and music commence at reception location
6.00pm	Reception receiving line with bride, groom and parents
6.30pm	Reception musicians arrive and set up
6.40pm	Announcement of bride and groom by MC
6.45pm	Dinner is served
7.30pm	Toasts and speeches begin
7.45pm	Dessert is served
8.00pm	First dance of bride and groom
8.30pm	Cake-cutting ceremony
10.30pm	Bouquet and garter toss
11.00pm	Farewell dance of bride and groom
11.15pm	Departure of bride and groom
12.00am	Musicians end for the evening

The ceremony processional, recessional and receiving line

Often a wedding planner is hired to direct and oversee a wedding rehearsal and ceremony. To be able to effectively do this, you will need to know how a 'typical' ceremony flows and what is involved in the processional, recessional and receiving line.

Different religions have different ceremonial customs, however many wedding ceremonies in Australia and New Zealand include elements of the following:

- Prelude
- Seating of the mothers'
- Processional
- Greeting
- Questions of intent
- Readings and music
- Wedding vows
- Exchange of rings
- Signing of the marriage certificate
- Presentation of the married couple
- Recessional

Processional

An example of a typical Christian or non-denominational ceremony processional is set out below. Depending on the specific religion, the officiant and/or the desires of the bride and groom, this may vary, obviously.

- Immediately before the processional starts, the mother of the bride is escorted to her seat by one of the ushers.
- The room, best man and groomsmen enter through a side door and take their place at the alter or at the front, facing the guests OR the processional music begins, and the groomsmen and best man walk down the aisle (they can either go in single-file or in pairs) followed by the groom.
- The bridesmaids' walk down the aisle (either in single-file or in pairs)
- The maid of honour walks down the aisle
- The flower girl walks down the aisle (sometimes with the ring bearer)
- Wedding March begins, and the guests stand up
- The bride and her father (or other escort) walk down the aisle. The guests sit down at the direction of the officiant

After the bride arrives at the front, she will let go of her father (sometimes there is a 'giving away' of the bride by the father and he might kiss her before sitting down with his wife). The bride will then stand beside the groom and either holds his hand or link her right arm around the groom's left arm.

In a Roman Catholic wedding, the father will escort the bride to the alter where the groom and priest are situated, place her hand in the groom's hand and then lift her veil and kiss her before he sits down with his wife (there is no formal 'giving away' in a Roman Catholic wedding).

Arrangement at front

In most cases, the officiant will be at the front facing the guests and the bride and groom and all other members of the bridal party will be facing the officiant with the bride and her attendants (including the flower girl) on the left and the groom and his attendants (including the ring bearer) on the right.

Normally, the maid of honour, with the flower girl beside her, will stand directly to the left of the bride. The other bridesmaids stand beside the flower girl. The same line-up is used for the groom and his party, with the ring bearer standing beside the best man, who is directly to the right of the groom. The other groomsmen stand beside the ring bearer. Although this is the standard way the bridal party is lined up, there are no rules dictating this arrangement.

TIP: Practise the processional and line-up at the wedding rehearsal. To assist the bridal party, you may want to use a rose petal as a marker for where each person should stand.

Recessional

The recessional occurs after the ceremony ends. A typical Christian or non-denominational ceremony recessional follows this order:

- Recessional music begins (usually upbeat, uplifting music)
- The bride and groom walk arm in arm down the aisle
- The maid of honour and the best man walk arm in arm down the aisle
- The remaining bridesmaids and groomsmen pair off (one bridesmaid with one groomsmen) and walk arm in arm down the aisle
- The officiant walks down the aisle
- The bride's parents walk down the aisle
- The groom's parents walk down the aisle
- The groomsmen return to escort guests out.

Receiving line

As soon as the ceremony is over, the guests will want an opportunity to congratulate the bride and groom. Although it's not always done, it's a nice touch to have a receiving line so that guests can greet the bride and groom together.

As the wedding planner, you may need to round up the bride and groom and their parents and line them up at the front of the venue, because in the excitement of the moment, this could be forgotten.

Again, it's a good idea to discuss the receiving line at the rehearsal before the wedding, so there will be no surprises on the day.

If the couple prefers, you can arrange to have a receiving line at the venue instead.

Carley Roney's book, referred to previously, is a great resource for information on ceremony processions, recessions and receiving lines for other religions: *The Knot Guide to Wedding Vows and Traditions: Readings, Rituals, Music, Dances, and Toasts*.

STEP 6 – PLANNING THE RECEPTION

Important though the wedding ceremony is, the reception is the event that will take the most planning, time and, of course, budget!

There are many different types of receptions, most of them involving a combination of a few key elements: food, drink, dancing speeches, rituals such as bouquet tossing and cake cutting, receiving line or introductions.

There are as many possible variations on receptions as there are brides – some prefer a morning reception with a brunch and speeches, with no alcohol; others (the majority) prefer an afternoon or evening reception.

Because there is no one 'typical' reception, what we will provide here is a general overview of what goes into planning a reception, and you can adapt, add or subtract to suit the vision of your bride and groom.

Venue selection

Choosing an appropriate venue for the reception is vitally important to the success of the event. Some of the things you should take into consideration are as follows:



Capacity	Will the room hold the required number of people?
Cleanliness	Is the venue clean and in good repair?
Suitability	Is it suitable for a catered affair or used mainly for meetings?
Grounds	Is there a view or nicely landscaped grounds for photos?
Dance floor	is the space appropriate for the number of people?
Kitchen appliances	if hiring caterers in a hall – what appliances are available?
Washroom facilities	Are handicapped facilities available? Are they clean?
Audio/visual	Does the venue provide a microphone?
Lighting	Can the lights be dimmed for the dancing or presentations?
Seating	Are the chairs clean and comfortable? Are there extra chairs?
Linens	Does the venue supply linen for the tables?
Stage or platform	Does the venue supply any of these items for DJ and/or MC?
Electrical	Is there enough power points for the DJ/ Band?
Tables	What type of tables do they supply? Round? Rectangle?
Bar	Does it have a refrigerator? Is it stocked with openers & glasses
Clean up	Is there a cleaning fee after the event?
On-site coordination	Does the venue have its own event coordinator?

It is always a great idea to take notes on the above points, to get the overall details of what needs to be planned and organised for using that venue.

The ambiance of the place is also important, and views, entrances, parking and maintenance are important factors.

Always make an appointment with the venue for a site inspection- never just turn up. This way you can speak with the manager of the venue or on-site wedding coordinator to get the full details required for hiring the venue, and facilitating a great event.



Preparing for the reception

Once the venue has been chosen, your role may include negotiating the contract, as well as supervising all arrangements for the reception. Step 7 of this guide on page 56 has more information about working with vendors and contracts. This section is specific to venues.

If your clients decide to hold their reception in a hotel function room or venue such as a private room in a restaurant, country club or other wedding site (like a pavilion), most of the room set-up and catering will be professionally handled by an on-staff event coordinator. You will assist in choosing the menu and program for the evening, but you will act as liaison between the venue coordinator and your client.

In addition to conferring with the site's event coordinator, you might also be introduced to the venue's bar manager and catering manager to assist in planning any food service requirements. These people are the expert in their domain, so it's a good idea to trust their judgement on items pertaining to the space, and allow them to assist in food and wine pairings.





SAMPLE RECEPTION SITE SURVEY SHEET

Venue:

Address:

Website:

Contact name:

Title:

Phone:

Fax:

Email:

Venue information

Seating capacity:

Number of rooms:

Floor plans available: Y/N

Outdoor facilities available: Y/N

Describe outdoor facilities:

Food service

On site catering: Y/N

Staff:

Kitchen:

Bar:

Dining/decorating

Linens:

Table decorations:

Allow candles: Y/N

Describe any available natural/artificial lighting:

Audio/visual (describe):

Parking (describe):

Washrooms (number/condition):

Handicapped facilities (washrooms/parking/ramps):

Cleanliness (overall/clean-up service):

Fees and policies

Gratuities:

Deposit:

Cancellation policy:

Comments:

Unusual wedding venues

The old saying 'where there's a will there's a way' should become every wedding planner's motto.

Catering

If you are hiring a private mansion, hall or function room where there is no onsite catering provided, you will need to hire a professional caterer. Catering companies can provide wait staff, bar tenders and chefs, as well as all the necessary equipment to prepare and serve a meal.

It's important to ask the caterer what items are included in their quote, and if labour is included as well. A lot of catering companies will give you a price per head for the food, but it doesn't include any cutlery or napkins, or salt and pepper, or wait staff- which are all important factors. You will also have to check the start and finish times of the wait staff, and make perhaps have staff stay on for an extended period of time, to serve the wedding cake. Some caterers will charge extra for cutting of the wedding cake, and some will charge a 'cakeage' fee to serve the cake on a plate with cream and raspberry coulis. It's always important to check.

Reviewing the contract

Every time you hire a venue, you will have to sign a contract or terms and conditions for each venue. It's important that your client knows the terms and conditions of the venue as well as yourself, so everybody is on the same page. You will need to check over the individual details on the contract, and make sure your client signs the terms and conditions.

Things to consider and double check in the terms and conditions include:

- What is the closing time of the venue? Is it before midnight?
- What is the access like to the venue prior to the event? Can you set up the wedding the day before?
- How many hours does the rental/hire period include?
- Will there be anyone on site from the venue on the wedding day if you need to ask any questions or seek instructions?
- Are there any noise restrictions? Can you have a live band?
- Are there any smoking restrictions?
- What is the process/ time for cleaning up/ packing up? Does it have to be done on the night after the wedding- or can it be done the next day?
- What is the cancellation policy?

- Is there any bond amount required?
- What is the deposit amount required to secure the venue?

Room layout

Quite often the venue will have several room layout designs that they can show you- that they have trialled and tested before. The venue will know the best layout for the tables and guests to make sure everybody has enough space, and the event floor plan flows nicely.

If there is no floor plan templates provided by the venue, and you have to do the floor plan yourself, you should consider the below points:

- Make sure the room is large enough to accommodate a dance floor and seating for all your guests
- Make sure there is at least 1.5m between each guest table, to allow enough space for guests to sit in their chairs, and wait staff to walk between the tables
- Makes sure there is always a clear path to the exits, bathrooms and bar
- Place a table close to the entry of the room for a guest sign-in book
- Place the cake table in a prominent position, but not in a walkway where it could be bumped. Also consider the backdrop of the cake table- as the cake will be a focus for photos- so don't place the cake table in front of any ugly wall
- Try to make sure that all guest tables will have an unobstructed view of the bridal table/ sweetheart table
- Make sure you have a gift table or wishing well table

Food and beverage selection

Usually the bride and groom and their parents will select the menu choices for the reception meals, and will also select the type of wines to be served from the bar.

It is a great idea to know a little bit about your wines, and different varieties- in case you get asked.

Occasionally the bride and groom may request a custom menu or custom sides to a menu selection, so you may have to communicate between the chef and client to work out a mutual agreement.

Customising a set menu can always be done at the venue, and there is usually flexibility with the chef. Most times though there are additional charges for changing the menu, or customising.

It is also important to note any special dietary requirements that guests may have. It's a great idea to add a line to the RSVP cards in the wedding invitations to ask guests of any special requirements or any allergies. You will need to give the chef or caterer this information well in advance of the wedding.

Another consideration is children's meals. Ask your clients how many children will be attending, and the ages of those children. Most venues have dedicated children's meals, at a lower cost per head.

In regards to food and beverage for the reception, it's a great idea to sit down and ask your clients the below information- before booking a venue or caterer:

- Will the reception be a brunch, lunch or dinner?
- Would they prefer a formal sit down meal or buffet meal?
- How many courses do they prefer?
- Will the wedding cake be used as a dessert- to replace a dessert menu?
- Would they like canapés or hors d'oeuvres to be served before dinner- while they are getting bridal photos?
- Are there any cultural or religious food requirements or restrictions that need to be considered?

Creating A Wedding Theme And Mood Board

A wedding inspiration board is a 'storyboard' or a professional collage of the inspiration behind a wedding. It helps all those involved in the wedding see the vision and common theme for the wedding.

The Wedding Planner or Wedding Stylist usually puts this together for the bride, so that all wedding details will be selected in the same theme and colour palette.

It usually has a common theme or inspiration, and a colour palette of 2-5 colours.

You use the inspiration board to look at on a regular basis, to draw inspiration from, to make choices on the suppliers and theming, and colour decisions of products ordered for the wedding.

The inspiration board will usually involve pictures of several wedding details, including wedding dress inspiration, bridesmaid dresses, cake, invitations, wedding venue, ceremony styling, wedding reception styling, wedding venue, flowers and other small details.

Not every picture on the wedding inspiration board will be chosen for the wedding, slight variations are usually made for the final product. The inspiration board is merely just for 'inspiration' and also to help keep the vision of the wedding on track, and to make sure all wedding details have coherence in terms of style, theming, visual appeal and colour...



Step By Step Instructions: How to Put a Wedding Inspiration Board Together For a Client

Step 1:

First of all, gain an idea of things that your bride likes. An easy way to do this is to ask your client to start a Pinterest Board with images that she likes. You can then get a feel for the style of wedding that will be suitable, and a possible theme.

Step 2:

Secondly, get a feel for what your client doesn't like. This is really important, as you want to steer away from what the client really hates or dislikes.

The easiest way is to show your client some different images and get your client to say if they love or hate it. It can be a fun game! Also, you can ask the client if they have been to any wedding that they haven't liked before, or if there are any details about the wedding they don't want.

Step 3:

Ask your client if there is anything special to the Bride and Groom - do they have any activities that they like to do together? (like sailing, or walking along the beach?) Have they travelled anywhere special together, like overseas or a city or town they adore? (France?) Are they going anywhere special for their honeymoon? Is there a special place they got engaged? (A vineyard?)

All of these answers will give you insight into the couple, and give you some ideas of what you can base your theme around.

For example, if the couple loves going to the beach, maybe a nautical or beach theme would suit. If the couple got engaged in a French Vineyard, maybe a french provincial wedding theme or a garden rustic wedding theme would suit? Get the picture?

Step 4:

Ask the client if there is any colours they love or hate. You can then start putting together a few colour palette ideas.

Step 5:

Select a theme around your client preferences above. Start collecting images that fit into this theme, and start arranging them in a photo collage. There are several photo collage apps from the App store that are free, which will let you collate your images into an inspiration board.

Here are a few apps to help:

www.canva.com

<https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/moodboard-lite/id369796813?mt=8>

Step 6:

Add the colour palette. From the images you have collated, add a colour palette that reflects the images on the page. Use no more than 5 colours, however 2/3 colours are the best.

HOT TIP # 1: You may like to put together a few different mood boards in different themes- to put on your portfolio to show clients. This way you have a few examples of different themes to show your client in your first meeting. It will also make you look really professional!

HOT TIP # 2: Add your company logo to the top of your inspiration boards- to show that your mood board is your own creation, and it also makes it look super professional!

Decorating the Reception Venue

Wedding decorations have come a long way in the last 15 years of the wedding industry, and they perhaps play an even larger part of the wedding reception today than it did 10 years ago. Decorations can really create the atmosphere for the venue and reception, and set a mood for the event.

Whether you have a fussy princess bride or a no-frills bride, decorations cannot be over looked, and need careful consideration.

Decorating a venue is also referred to as 'styling' the venue.

Decorations can do wonders, and completely transform a space. You can cover ugly walls with draping, jazz up an entrance, and also create some really beautiful lighting effects that create a sense of romance.

It's a great idea to come up with a theme for decorating the venue- in which everything will coordinate nicely. Be sure to ask your clients a lot of questions about what they like and dislike. Ask the couple plenty of lifestyle questions when attempting to come up with a unique theme. For instance, if they are avid sailors, a nautical theme may be appropriate.



Centrepieces – The centrepieces that you select for the guest tables should fit into the wedding theme selected, and have a common theme. Centrepieces can include fresh flowers, candles, or other items relating to the overall theme of the wedding. The most innovative weddings are alternating 2 different centrepieces throughout the wedding. Not everything needs to be 'matchy-matchy' just as long as they have a common theme. You also need to consider the type of table the centrepiece will be placed on- will it be round tables or long rectangular tables? Also consider using different heights to create interest.

Chairs – Don't overlook the chairs when decorating tables. Linen rental companies can supply lovely fabric chair covers when you have some not so nice chairs at the venue. You can also rent or hire chairs in for the wedding. Popular chairs for weddings are the tiffany chair, ghost chair, bentwood chair or Americana chair.

Lighting – Lighting can really create a 'wow' factor at a venue- and its something that is quite often overlooked. In addition to candles, coloured led lighting is a popular choice, including 'up-lights' and 'wall washes' in different hues. Fairy lights or twinkle lights are also a popular choice. You can also hire in chandeliers to hang in the venue for that opulent feel. If candles are not permitted, you can use led battery operated candles as well as battery-operated lights on the tables, lighting up the centrepiece.

Archways and Backdrops – Archways and backdrops are a great way to dress up a plain or ugly wall, and hide features you don't like about a room. It also creates a focal point in the room, and is a wonderful backdrop behind a bridal or sweet heart table, or an attention grabbing entrance.

In normal circumstances the venue will be styled or decorated the day of the wedding, and sometimes only a few hours prior to the event starting. For larger setups, there may be some exceptions to this, and it doesn't hurt to ask if you can get access to the room or venue earlier in the day, or even the day before if the room isn't being used.

Pinterest and Instagram as well as Wedding blogs are great sources of inspiration when it comes to Wedding decorating and styling.

Thank you novelties

In years gone by, the standard token of appreciation by the bride and groom to their guests included a very small piece of wedding cake wrapped in a paper doily with a little thank you note attached. These were either handed out to each guest as the couple made the rounds at the reception or left on a table for guests to help themselves.

Over the years, variations on this theme emerged, which included mints wrapped in tulle or small boxes of chocolates. These were set at each place setting and either

taken home or eaten at the dinner. Today the variety of token gifts is limited only by imagination and can include (to name just a few):

- mini flower pots and seeds
- individual tea light candles
- a silk flower at each place
- miniature picture frames complete with a picture of the couple (an engagement photo, perhaps).



Reception activities

Speeches

The Wedding speech is usually made after dinner before the cutting of the cake, but it is possible for the speeches to be staggered throughout the evening, or even done at the start of the night. They can be eloquent formal speeches, heartfelt casual wishes or anything in between. Couples often opt to offer a toast to their wedding party together. Also, they will not only have a close friend or relative offer a toast to the bride, but a person from the groom's side will do the same for him.

Your client should select someone they know to act as a MC (Master of Ceremonies), and offer the toast to the bride (and possibly groom). If the people giving toasts need advice, there are a variety of websites offering wedding speeches and toasts. If they would prefer to purchase a book, here is one, available at www.amazon.com that is filled with great advice:

The Complete Book of Wedding Toasts, by John William McCluskey

If there is no close friend or family member who can act as the MC, you can hire a professional MC for the wedding.

A speech may be supplemented with a video montage or other type of visual or audio presentation and some couples provide a short time during the speeches for their guests to tell little stories, share memories or pass on good wishes during an open microphone opportunity. You should be aware whether your clients wish to do this, so as to be prepared with the appropriate audio/visual equipment and power source. The speeches will take anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour to complete.

Dance

The majority of weddings like to have a section of the night dedicated for dancing. It is tradition for the Bride and Groom to have a 'Bridal Waltz' at the beginning of the dance section of the evening- being their first dance as a married couple.

This usually is followed by dances by father-daughter, mother-son, the wedding party and other relatives then guests. This will vary depending on family dynamics religion and cultural background.

Your job will be to gather together the couple, their bridal party and any other combinations of people they request to the dance floor for the dance to begin, giving the DJ or band enough notice to be ready to cue the music in time.

Cake cutting ceremony

Usually the cake cutting ceremony begins after dinner or after the speeches, but this can vary. The MC will announce the cake cutting, and give guests the opportunity to take photos. It's important that a cake-cutting knife is ready on the table for your couple to cut the cake, prior to the announcement. Also make sure that the cake table is prepared and ready, and out of the road of traffic, and in front of a nice backdrop.

Since the cake cutting ceremony is one of the photo opportunities that occur at the reception, the MC should make the announcement prior to the couple making their way to the cake table, to give guests time to grab their cameras and get into position. It's also a good idea to alert the couple in advance, in case they want to freshen up for the cameras.

Bouquet and garter toss

Another popular tradition is the bouquet and garter toss. Again, advise the DJ or band in advance, so they can cue the correct songs for this event. Also you will need to prepare any back up bouquet in advance if the bride is not throwing her real bouquet. Check with the bride and groom that they are ready for the bouquet and garter toss prior to announcing it, in case they want to freshen up. The formality is that the single wedding guests are called to the dance floor area (Then the bouquet is tossed to the female guests and then the garter, if worn, is tossed to the male guests.) Check with the Bride and Groom if they would like this tradition included at the reception, as not all religions and cultural backgrounds have the same views on this tradition- and in some cultures it may be frowned upon.

Tear down and clean up

While not always the case, you may be asked to supervise teardown or clean up of the facilities. This is especially the case if you have hired a private venue or hall or function room, and there is no other wedding coordinator or event manager on site.

Items that have been hired need to be packed up and put away in the containers they came in for next day pick up, or put into storage for next day drop-off.

All decoration items need to be returned to the hire company in good condition- and you should check the quantities hired to make sure no items have gone missing.



STEP 7 – WORKING WITH VENDORS

Vendors (also known as 'suppliers') are sellers of merchandise or services that may be used before, during or after a wedding. As a wedding planner, you will be likely be working with many types of vendors.

Following is a list of typical vendors involved with a wedding. The list if by no means complete, but it will give you a good idea of how many different individuals and businesses are involved in the successful planning of a wedding.

- Bakers
- Bridal shops
- Stationers
- Caterers
- Ceremony venues
- Confectioners
- Decorators
- DJs
- Florists
- Jewellers
- Limousine rentals
- Linen suppliers
- Musicians
- Party supply rentals
- Photographers
- Printers
- Reception venues
- Travel agents
- Tuxedo rentals
- Videographers

It is not necessary for you to understand every facet of each vendor's particular business because your role will be as a liaison between your client and the vendor. With some exceptions, depending on the type of service or product, your job will be the same with the different vendors and may include any of the following:

- Recommend vendors
- Met with the vendors chosen by your clients
- Review and negotiate vendor contracts
- Prepare a letter of understanding
- Wedding day coordination and supervision
- Follow-up after the wedding

Forming a preferred list of vendors

Many clients will ask you to recommend vendors, so it's a good idea to have a list of 'preferred vendors'. When you start out as a wedding planner, you can ask anyone you know who has been recently married in your area who they used, and would they recommend them. Next, look for vendors that advertise their services in the Yellow Pages – check under 'Wedding suppliers' or 'Wedding services' as well as under the specific headings such as 'Florist' or 'Caterer'. You can also attend bridal fairs and expos or by searching the Internet.

Arrange a meeting

Before you recommend vendors to your clients, you will need to check them out if you can. Meet with them in person. Simply phone and ask to arrange an appointment with the owner or manager. Explain that you are a wedding planner and that you are looking for vendors to recommend to your client. They should only be too pleased to help if they want your business.

Depending on the type of vendor, they may be able to show you photo albums or a portfolio with samples of their work. For example, if you are meeting with a photographer, you can look through albums of his wedding photography and judge the quality of the pictures taken, and if the photos capture the romance of the day. Also, find out if the photographer takes candid photos as well as posed. Often the candid photos are the ones that capture the moment best, and may be the photos that your clients will be most thrilled to have.

Choosing reputable vendors

Always remember, your reputation as a wedding planner rests on the quality of the services offered by your vendors. If the wedding cake doesn't arrive on time, or the limousine, people will remember *your* name, not theirs. So always ask for references before you sign a contract with a vendor. Your professionalism is at stake. Call the references to find out whether the clients' were, at the end of the day, happy customers.

Once you've done a number of weddings, you will know which vendors deliver what they promise, and you will have built a preferred list of vendors that you are happy and confident to recommend.

TIP: Some vendors may offer a 'kickback' for any business you refer to them. For example, if your client spends \$1000 with the vendor, the vendor would pay you \$100. Although most wedding planners pass on any price reduction to the client, some wedding planners keep the kickback. It's not illegal to do so, but recommending a vendor just because they give you a kickback can cost you a lot more in the long run if they don't do a good job for your clients.

Meeting with the chosen vendor

Once you've built a list of preferred vendors, you will help your clients choose a vendor that suits their budget and preferences. Of course, the client may decide to

use a vendor that a friend or relative has recommended and this should not pose a problem for you. In fact, it could be a good opportunity for you to get to know the service and reliability of another vendor. If you have dealt with the vendor in the past and the service was sub-standard, you should let your clients know – but in the end, allow them to decide.

While some of your clients may be quite comfortable visiting the various vendors along to choose their own wedding supplies (cake, flowers, decorations etc.), you should be prepared for those clients that want you to go with them to assist in making selections. (If you are providing complete wedding planning services, this will be part of the service you provide.

Contract negotiation

Most wedding professionals list their powers of negotiation with vendors (their cost savings potential) as a key reason why a client should consider hiring them. The better negotiator you are, the lower your client's costs will be.

TIP: Most vendors expect you to negotiate, and many will give you a 'corporate rate' to subtract 10% from the price simply because you ask for a discount.

The optimal result of any negotiation is to come away in a win-win situation for everyone. As you become more experienced in the wedding industry, it will become easier for you to negotiate deals with vendors because of the volume of work you will be able to send their way. Until you earn a reputation in the industry however, you will have to be a little more creative to negotiate the best possible prices for your clients. Here are some effective negotiating tips.

Be prepared. A vital part of negotiating is knowledge. Do your homework before you begin negotiating price with a vendor. Find out the industry average so you know whether the price the vendor is asking is fair or not.

Be creative. If a vendor won't budge on the issue of price, try to get them to include something that won't cost them much, but will give the client perceived value. For example, the florist you are negotiating with will not move on the price for a bride's bouquet. You feel the price is unreasonable, but this shop is very popular with brides and has a reputation for quality. Perhaps you could ask them to throw in a bunch of greenery that you could use for decorating an area in the reception venue. The florist gets the greenery for very little, and you were going to buy some anyway, so it's worth a try!

Reviewing the contract

Once you have reached an agreement with the vendor, you should review the vendor contract with your clients to ensure they fully understand what they are signing. There should always be a contract in place and even if it is a very simple one it should be carefully reviewed. Some of the important information to note is:

Cost – Is the vendor charging a fair price for the service, and is the price the same as the one negotiated? Before your client signs, ensure the vendor has not added any unnecessary items or services.

Cancellation policy – This is very important for your clients to know. Of course, they won't think it could happen to them – but couples do have to call the wedding off sometimes. So ensure the cancellation policy is clearly outlined on the contract.

Service provided – Every contract should accurately detail exactly what (and more importantly what will not) be provided. For example, if the vendor is a caterer and the venue is a community hall, it is important to know if the caterer will provide wait staff, linens, dishes, bar and wine glasses, and set-up/clean up staff.

TIP: Make sure the contract is between the vendor and your clients, NOT between the vendor and you. If you enter into a contract with a vendor, you will be held personally liable for payment if the wedding is cancelled or postponed.

Coordination with the Vendor/ Supplier

After the contract has been signed and delivered, you are responsible for contacting the vendor to arrange logistics. It is important to learn about the vendor's timelines and scheduling. You will also need to know whether they deliver and set up, or whether they require you to pick up items from them. Ultimately **you** will be responsible for seeing that all of these items come together on time for the wedding and, in some cases, that they are also returned on time).

Before the wedding

It is a good idea for you to make the initial contact with a vendor once they have been chosen, so the vendor will know immediately that you will be the main contact person.

Let's use the wedding cake as an example. Bella Bride has decided to go with Scrumptious Bakery for her wedding cake after looking through your vendor portfolio or file. Once Bella has met with the bakery representative and picked out the design and type of cake she wants you to take over. You should send a letter to the bakery outlining your understanding of the order, the date of the wedding, the venue for drop off and set-up of the cake and any other pertinent information.

Let the vendor know that you are the clients' representative and all contact should now be made with you on their behalf. You might include a copy of the room layout with the cake table clearly marked, and any decorating or set-up instructions that apply. Indicate that your clients are responsible for payment to the vendor, including deposits and for any loss of damage to loaned or rented equipment (if applicable). If the venue is difficult to find, include a map to get there, and make sure the vendor has your cell phone number.

Send a follow-up letter or reminder notice a couple of weeks before the wedding confirming the address and applicable details, such as the time the cake should arrive and set-up instructions. Then call the day before the wedding to confirm that everything will go according to plan. Be prepared with back-up plans in the event of unforeseen problems, for example, if the bakery were to go out of business a few days before the wedding, you will need to have another bakery you can use.

TIP: In every correspondence with a vendor, state the clients' names and wedding date.





SAMPLE INITIAL VENDOR EMAIL

Re: JONES WEDDING

Dear Candy Baker,

I am writing/ emailing to confirm the arrangements for the wedding of Bessie Bride and Jack Jones, which is to take place on 14 September 2016. As wedding planner for Jack and Bessie, I will be responsible for coordination of your services and will now be the contact person on any matters relating to the wedding cake. My understanding of the arrangements is as follows:

**-Wedding cake will be delivered to:
The Venue Hotel (in the Queen's Banquet Room)
987 Uptown St
Diamond Valley**

-Cake to be delivered and set up by 3.30pm

-Set-up and decoration of cake table as discussed with Jill Smith to include fresh blackberries, pink roses and candles

My clients (Bessie Bride and Jack Jones) are responsible for payment to you for all services rendered including deposits and for any penalties or charges for cancellation of your service. I will be sending a follow-up email to you two weeks before the wedding to ensure everything is in place and on schedule.

Please feel free to contact me when/if the need arises. My contact information is as follows:

Penelope Planner
Wonderful Weddings
Phone: (02) 9876 9876
Mobile: 0410567890
Email: penwed@penwed.com.au

I look forward to working with your company again and I know Bessie and Jack will be delighted with their cake.

Regards,
Penelope Planner
Wonderful Weddings

Coordinating the vendor on the wedding day

Taking our wedding cake example again, here is what you will do to coordinate or liaise with this vendor.

While the bridal party is having their photographs taken (or at another appropriate time) you will connect with the reception venue coordinator or caterer and ensure the cake and other items arrived safely and have been set up according to the plan. You will also do a visual check once you arrive at the reception venue. If the instructions were not followed, fix the situation yourself if you can, or call the contact number and ask the bakery to correct the situation. Make a note of the problem that occurred and another note to remind yourself to follow-up with the vendor.

Again, have a back-up plan in case the cake does not arrive and you cannot reach anyone at the bakery. Is there another bakery nearby that can deliver? Can the venue supply a cake? Can you find an artificial cake to use for photos? Make sure you have your back-up plans in place (for all vendors) well before the wedding day.

If something goes wrong

Mistakes do happen, and while it's all too easy to assign blame, get the facts before you react. Vendors can and have refused to work for wedding planners who have been rude to them, or their employees. Always maintain a level of professionalism, no matter how frustrated you may become – it's your reputation at stake. Besides, until you know for sure, be aware that it may not necessarily be the vendor's fault. Could you have given the limousine driver the wrong address, for example, which caused him to be late to pick up the bride?

Once the wedding is over, you can take the issue up with the vendor/ and or manager. Work with management to find a solution for future events, and send a follow-up letter outlining your understanding of the events and steps being taken to avoid a future mistake. If a similar incident happens again you would be wise to stop using that vendor. This is a great time to remind you to always carry your mobile and a spare battery for those little emergencies that will happen!

Above all, remember this is a joyous occasion. If you are upset or ranting, you will get everyone around you upset. Your reputation is at stake as well and it would be prudent of you to keep your temper under control. Your job is to provide order and calm to what can be a very stressful day.

Follow up

As soon as possible after the wedding, write thank-you notes where appropriate. Thank-you notes should be warmly worded and addressed to the owner/manager. In addition, you should specifically acknowledge any employees who went out of their way to provide excellent services in the letter to the manager and send a thank-you note to the employee as well. Remember, word of mouth is the best advertising tool you can employ and most of these people will either get married or know someone who will.)

SAMPLE THANK-YOU NOTE /EMAIL

Dear Candy Baker,

As wedding planner for the recently married Bella and Jack Jones, I just had to write to thank you and your wonderful staff for the excellent and friendly service. On behalf of the Jones, I want to thank you for not only providing a beautiful wedding cake but for the little extra touches that helped make their wedding day special. The extra roses taped to the candlestick holders made for a stunning table arrangement.

I want to especially thank your assistant, Marie, for the extra care she took handling and setting up the cake. Marie is always pleasant and cool under pressure and a delight to work with.

I look forward to working with your company again soon.

Regards,

Penelope Planner
Wonderful Weddings



Relationship Building

Relationship building is key when building your reputation as a wedding planner.

Suppliers who do their job well make you look good. Furthermore, suppliers who don't do a good job can make you look really bad. Therefore good communication is essential.

In addition to adding to your reputation as a wedding planner, suppliers who have a good relationship with you are more likely to refer business to you.

You might like to do a 'shout out' to your suppliers on social media to show your support. Once in a while you may like to meet with your suppliers for a coffee to have a face to face social catch up

PART 3

Develop Your Skills as a Wedding Planner

As a wedding planner you will use a variety of skill sets to do your job well.

All the skills required to be a wedding planner can be taught, but it does help if you have a natural passion for weddings, and a burning desire to work with people.

How many of the below skills do you already have? Circle the points below that are true for you....

- You like to organise parties and social gatherings.
- You are well organised
- You are detail-orientated
- You like to plan things in advance and schedule them. You may even keep track of appointments in a diary or Blackberry.
- You enjoy handling a number of things at once.
- You are a list-maker
- You can keep calm while multi-tasking
- You are artistic or creative
- You are a people person. You enjoy the company of others.
- You are a good communicator
- You are a romantic at heart

DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS AS A WEDDING PLANNER

The most common skills amongst the top wedding planners are:

- Communication skills
- People skills
- Organisational skills
- Attention to detail
- Creativity
- Negotiation skills
- Ability to Problem Solve

Interpersonal skills- Including Communication and People Skills

As a wedding planner, you will be dealing with a range of personality types – so you need to be able to read and communicate effectively with each personality.

You will be communicating on a large scale by phone, email and face to face with the bride and groom, parents and in-laws, family, suppliers, chefs, celebrants- and

many more.... So it's vital that you get along with everybody to ensure that the event will run smoothly, and everyone is happy.

As a wedding planner you will also need to be able to attract clients, communicate effectively with your client, decipher what your clients needs wants and desires are- even when they don't know- and relate well with other suppliers.

One of the most important factors is that you must be able to attract clients. If you can't attract a client you don't have a business to run, and you won't have a wedding to plan.

Many clients book their suppliers- including their wedding planner- based on the person they meet. If they like the person at the front of the business- they will often book the service. You will have to not only be charming, but also show relatedness, understanding and a caring and nurturing side. Clients do like to feel looked after, and also must feel as though they trust you.

One of the best ways to build up rapport with your client and make them feel comfortable with you is to show genuine interest in them.

Developing a good relationship with your suppliers can be as easy as calling them personally on the phone to say thankyou- for a job well done- or tagging them in a social media post- giving them praise. It's important that there is two-way communication at all times, and there is trust.

In order to plan a 'Dream Wedding' for your clients, you need to understand what your client wants. This can be more difficult than it sounds- as sometimes your client doesn't know what they want- and it's up to you to figure out and come up with a suitable solution. You will need to be able to develop the skill of asking the right questions, which will draw out what your client preferences are.

You will need to be a really great listener in order to understand their desires to be able to put together the vision for your client.

A great way to improve your listening skills is by practicing to focus on someone when they are speaking, ask clarifying questions if you don't understand, and paraphrasing- (repeating back to them what you thought you heard).

The ability to read body language is another really helpful skill to have as a wedding planner. As an example- you should read your clients body language during your meetings to get non-verbal ideas on how they are responding to different suggestions within the meeting. As an example, did the bride fold her arms or look another way when you made a particular suggestion? If so, she may be communicating that she doesn't agree, or she feels uncomfortable about the suggestion, even though she didn't actually say so.

Although body language can't tell you precisely what someone is thinking, it can give you clues so you can ask follow-up questions, even as basic as "How do you feel about that?"

Negotiation

Negotiation skills are important as a wedding planner, and there are several situations in which you will have to use your negotiation skills.

As soon as clients or potential employers decide they would like to work with you, you will be faced with the issue of how much you will get paid. You will find information about standard fees for wedding planners later in this guide. However, no matter what fees are standard, you may be able to get paid more through effective negotiation skills.

Also, being a good negotiator can help you save money on vendor's products or services such as flowers, photographs, venue rentals etc. The money that you save can either be passed on to your clients or could be part of the additional income that you receive as a wedding planner, depending on your arrangement.

While vendors that you work with frequently might offer discounts to you, there may be occasions when you need to work with a vendor chosen by your clients, and the vendor may not be used to giving discounts to wedding planners they have not worked with in the past. In these cases, being a good negotiator may help you and your clients save money.

Organisational skills

Organisational skills are a key component to being a successful wedding planner. There will be many times you will have to multitask and deal with several tasks and people at once. It's imperative that details are managed in a timely manner so that the event runs smoothly.

Below are some suggestions for keeping your event details organised:

Tip 1: Plan ahead – Sounds straightforward, but the further in advance you plan, the better off you'll be. You will always have to confirm finer details closer to the event, but planning ahead will ensure that you get the supplier that you want for the desired wedding day, and any unforeseen problems or issues to come to light earlier rather than later.

Tip 2: File regularly – An effective filing system is essential to keep all correspondence in order, and easy to refer back to. Wedding details can change multiple times during the course of planning a wedding, so you will need to file and keep every bit of communication. Always write notes when talking with your client, and date the notes- so you can refer back to any changes. It's a good idea to print out any emails that you receive, and also keep an electronic copy as well. This way if one

copy gets lost or an email system crashes- you still have a copy of your clients wedding details.

Tip 3: Use binders and Manilla Folders – Create a new Manilla Folder for every client that you have, and organise the contents of the folder clearly.

Tip 4: Keep an ideas folder or Pinterest account: As you attend weddings yourself, or read magazines, or watch movies, you'll begin to collect ideas for themes, favours, decorations, toasts etc. Jot down your ideas, tear out pages, and stick things in the book. It'll be a great resource for you.

Creativity

Whilst it's not essential that you are creative as a wedding planner, it is essential that you are up to date with the latest trends in the wedding industry. Creativity does help as a wedding planner, as you will be able to come up with unique ideas for each wedding to make it special for the bride and groom. After-all, the memories of the wedding day will last a lifetime.

Many people believe that creativity is something you are born with – you're either creative or you're not. But many experts disagree. They say creativity can be taught – and more importantly, learned. Here are a few tips below to develop your creative skills;

Get Inspired- The best way to get creative is to be inspired. Surround yourself with beautiful images of wedding details, and browse the web for inspiration. Pinterest, Instagram and wedding blogs are great sources of inspiration, and a great place to get ideas.

Brainstorm – Sit down with others involved with your wedding business and try to come up with as many new wedding ideas as you can. To brainstorm effectively, make sure that there is a continuous flowing of ideas without any judgement, and that the ideas are not discussed until all of the ideas have been written down. (Ideally, someone should be writing all of the ideas down.) When ideas are not censored and are really allowed to flow, the most amazing, creative ideas can start to come out. After you have your list of ideas, you can then discuss them and you will be surprised at how many good ideas come out as you discuss the list.

Flip through magazines – Wedding magazines can be a great source of inspiration to get creative- and you can try some international wedding magazines as well. In addition, try fashion magazines and interior design magazines to get ideas on colours and interiors. You can find inspiration anywhere, and your creative gene may strike you when you least expect.



Get Your Craft On – A great way to develop your creative skills is to take on a craft project! There are many DIY projects that you can do for different wedding details- so get crafting!

Problem solving

Besides using your creativity to come up with unique ideas for themed weddings or to decorate a reception venue beautifully or to create wonderful table centrepieces or favours etc., you will also need to use your creativity when problems or delays arise.

For example, one of our wedding planners had to find a new wedding venue the day before the wedding. It had been raining all week, and the wedding ceremony was due to be held in a park, on a permanent platform next to a pond. The problem was, the pond had turned into a lake due to the torrential rains and the permanent platform was under water! Our wedding planner got on the phone and managed to find an art gallery owner who agreed to allow her to run the ceremony there, and she quickly contacted everyone involved and alerted them to the change. Disaster averted.

TEACHING YOURSELF WEDDING PLANNING

You can learn how to be a wedding planner without going to college or getting a degree. In this section, you will learn how to teach yourself wedding planning simply by observing, enquiring, listening, reading and then making it happen.

Places to go to learn

Weddings

The most logical place to begin learning about planning weddings is to observe weddings themselves. It may sound obvious – but it's the most critically important way to learn. So how do you find weddings to observe?

If you come from a large family, it should be easy, as you will be invited to attend a number of weddings anyway. Same goes if you have a large circle of friends. If this is not the case for you, ask everyone you know if it would be okay for you to tag along to any weddings they are going to, or if you can be their guest. Now is not the time to be shy!

If you even slightly know the bride and groom, ask if they would allow you to sit in on the ceremony only. This will not cost them anything, and in fact, they may feel flattered.

Bridal fairs and expos

One of the first events the newly engaged bride-to-be and her friends or bridal party

will want to attend is a local bridal fair or expo. They are essentially a trade show for the bridal industry. Products and services showcased will include: wedding and attendant fashions (often exhibited via a fashion show) wedding planners, lingerie designers and retailers, beauty consultants, travel agents, florists, cake bakers, decorators, limousine rental companies, caterers and venue operators.

When you attend a bridal fair or expo, observe what booths, services or fashions generate the most excitement. Is one venue more popular than others? What honeymoon locale are travel agents booking most frequently this year? What baker, florist or designer is hot or in the news? Ask questions at every booth and keep as many notes as possible. Remember, you are teaching yourself and at the end of the day you will not receive notes to take home unless you create them.

When you come across a competitor's booth (another wedding planner), at the very least, take a business card and brochure. If a website is not posted on the card, ask if they have one and note it on the business card. Jot down any great marketing ideas you observe and information on fees and services provided. Keep them together with the business cards in a file on your competitors.

People to speak with

As you prepare for your new career, look for opportunities to speak with and learn from brides-to-be and other groups involved in the planning and execution of a wedding. Here are some tips on speaking to different groups at bridal fairs and expos,

Competitors

Use the bridal fair or expo as an opportunity to speak with as many wedding planners as possible. If you have not set up your business yet and are still in fact-gathering mode, you might act as if you are interested in possibly hiring a planner, and ask a few interview questions as you would if you were really planning on hiring one.

Vendors

One of the best ways to learn about the business is to speak with vendors. After all, they are the experts in their field. For example, a florist could give you detailed information about all the flowers that are needed for a typical wedding (bouquets, corsages, boutonnieres, flower arrangements for the ceremony and reception etc.), approximate costs, how far ahead to order, what is most popular with brides, and anything else you would need to know about wedding flowers.

Brides

One of the most efficient ways to meet as many brides-to-be as possible, one at a time is to visit bridal fairs and expos. Speaking with them can give you some insights into what brides are looking for, what they are experiencing as they plan their weddings and why they are (or are not) using a wedding planner.

Talking to brides who have just been married is also helpful. When you hear of someone recently married, ask if you can have a chat with them about the experience. Ask them what went right and what went wrong, what they would change if they could, and what they wish their wedding planner had done for them.

If they didn't have a wedding planner, find out why. You will be asked why someone should use your services many times during initial consultations – this question can help you prepare. Ask them if/how using a wedding planner might have helped.

Celebrants, ministers, priests

If you can arrange meetings with a range of celebrants and members of the clergy, you will learn more about ceremonies than you ever could from a book. These people have seen it all – the good, the bad and the ugly. So ask them questions and soak up their experience.

Things to do

We've all heard the conundrum – no one will hire me without experience but I can't get experience without first getting a job. Fortunately, you can get wedding experience before someone hires you to plan their wedding. Here are some possibilities.

Plan weddings for friends and family

Once you've attended a few weddings and followed the excellent advice you've learnt in this guide, you should be ready to start planning a wedding. Almost all of us have family, friends or acquaintances that are in the middle of planning a wedding right now. This presents you with a great opportunity to get your first 'client'. Even if you can't secure a paid arrangement, at least assist for free – the experience will be invaluable, and if you do it well, will provide you with your first reference, which will help you secure your *next* client.

So how do convince family and friends to let you assist in planning their wedding? This is where your ability to market yourself comes in. If you have done your homework – research, setting up systems getting to know all of the aspects of your role as wedding planner – you will be more confident when it comes to persuading them of your professionalism and commitment. When you meet with them, explain the benefits of having a wedding planner, and how you can help them save time and money. Be prepared for any questions that might arise and be ready to share some ideas with the couple.

If a couple are not so keen to entrust all of the wedding plans to you, remember the smallest service you provide may assist you in getting future wedding planning work.

When you are dealing with people you are close to such as family and friends, it's important to remember to be as professional as possible – even if your future sister-in-law drives you crazy with her 'Bridezilla' behaviour. Remember – this is not your wedding, and if she wants to have a goth-style wedding, it's her prerogative.

You can gently steer her towards something subtler, but in the end, it's her wishes that count. Just don't get into an argument – after all, you don't want to blow your professional cover on your first outing as a wedding planner!

Let the couple know in advance that you will want some photographs of the wedding for your portfolio (a collection of samples to show future clients). After the wedding, you can also ask for a letter of recommendation. See page 82 for more on portfolios and letters of recommendation.

Learn from a pro

If you have the opportunity, spending time with an experienced wedding planner can be a tremendously valuable learning experience. Imagine being present during client consultations and vendor meetings and even more importantly, having the opportunity to attend real weddings to see how it all comes together.

The added bonus is that they might be open to bringing in a partner or hiring additional staff sometime in the future. If you get along well with the person and are able to show what a valuable asset you'd be, you could be a shoo-in for a permanent position.

One way to learn from a pro is to volunteer your services. A busy wedding planner might be able to use help with tasks such as running errands making decorations, staffing a booth at a bridal fair etc. Depending on your schedule and the wedding planner's needs, you could offer your services free of charge for a few months.

Get a part-time job

Another good way to get related experience is by taking a part-time job with a company involved in the wedding industry. Even if the job doesn't focus on wedding planning, it may give you an opportunity to learn more about weddings. For example, you could apply to work at a reception venue, or for a caterer. Part 4 covers the many career opportunities in the wedding industry, and how to apply for a job.

What to read and watch

The public is fascinated by weddings. So it's not surprising that the media (television, newspapers, magazines, movies, books and the internet) provides us with plenty of coverage of weddings – both real and fantasy. Here are some places you can access information and ideas.

Magazines

If you visit your local newsagents, you find a range of bridal magazines. The most popular bridal magazines include: *Bride Magazine*, *Real Weddings*, *Modern Wedding*, *Studio Brides*, *Cosmopolitan Bride*, *Masters of Weddings*, *SHOP Weddings*, *My Perfect Wedding Planner* and *White*. Many cities also have local magazines. Most bridal magazines are jam-packed with helpful how-to articles, ideas and



advertisements. Pick up a selection of magazines from your local magazine store, visit their websites or browse them for free at your local public library.

Movies

Among the film classics that feature a wedding are *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Godfather*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Hello Dolly!*, *High Society*, *Love Story*, *The Sound of Music* and *Steel Magnolias*. More recent wedding flicks include: *Wedding Crashers*, *Monster in Law*, *The Wedding Date*, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, *Runaway Bride*, *The Wedding Planner*, *It Had to Be You*, and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

Internet and Wedding Blogs

The Internet is a great source of information, but it can be overwhelming. Just type 'wedding' into your search engine and literally hundreds of millions of sites come up. Below is a short list of recommended sites. Many have checklists and some offer interactive wedding planners that can be used to keep track of the wedding budget, timelines, guest list, gifts etc.

<http://www.stylemepretty.com>

<http://www.theknot.com>

<http://www.ruffledblog.com>

<http://www.pinterest.com>

Books

Bookstores carry a range of books on weddings, but it can be costly to build a substantial library. For a low-cost alternative, check out your local library. Here are some books worth keeping an eye-out for (and which you can order through www.amazon.com – new or used).

The Knot Guide to Wedding Vows and Traditions: Readings, Rituals, Music, Dances and Toasts, by Carley Roney

The Everything Wedding Vows Book: Anything and Everything You Could Possibly Say at the Altar - And Then Some by Janet Anastasio

The Best of Martha Stewart Living: Weddings, by Martha Stewart and by Colin Cowie

Part 4:

Jobs in The Wedding Industry

Once you have developed your skills and knowledge of wedding planning, it's time to start getting paid for your talents. It's also time to decide if you are going to set up your own business as a wedding planner, or whether you are going to work for someone else. This section of this guide deals with the latter.

TYPES OF EMPLOYERS

Resorts

One of the most fabulous jobs you can have in the wedding industry is working as a wedding coordinator at a luxury resort. A resort is any place that people visit for recreation or relaxation. One of the obvious benefits is of course that you get to live and work in a tropical paradise! And with the tremendous growth in the number of 'destination weddings' over the past few years, there is increased job security and more demand for wedding coordinators.

As a wedding coordinator your job will involve handling arrangements for couples that will be coming to the resort from wherever it is they live. In addition to the usual tasks involved in planning a wedding ceremony and reception, there may be a number of additional tasks such as picking the couple up at the airport, organising pick up and accommodation for their guests, and finding someone to perform the ceremony.

Depending on the facilities available at the resort, your job may also involve arranging recreational activities for the couple and their guests – from spa visits to snorkelling, to a candlelit dinner for the newlyweds.

One way to get hired as a wedding coordinator for a resort is to apply directly to the particular resort you want to work with.

Hotels

A hotel may be the site of many events – from banquets to business meetings. Therefore, many hotels do not hire someone with the specific title of wedding coordinator, because arranging weddings is only part of the job.

If you want to work with a hotel, the department that will give you an opportunity to work with couples planning a wedding reception is likely to be known as 'events', 'sales and catering' or 'conference and banqueting'.

There are usually several levels of position with 'coordinator' being the entry level, then 'representative', 'manager' and finally 'director' – or some similar sort of title. At some larger hotels, there may be several people in each level of position.

Someone who is at the level of 'sales manager' or 'sales and catering manager' may specialise in weddings.

To find a job in the hotel industry, you can start by visiting the websites of hotel chains you are interested in working with. These sites list hotel locations on their websites and you can apply directly to the hotel/s you are interested in working with. You may also find a few job opportunities listed on the website.

Reception venues

Any place a couple might choose to host a wedding is a possible place to apply for a job. For example, you might find work in a function centre, convention centre, country club, golf club or yacht clubs. You might even find work on a boat that specialises in events and weddings.

Retailers

Retail offers many options for those who want to work in the wedding industry, and yet have the security of a steady paycheque. Most job openings are for junior positions, but this gives you the opportunity to learn about this area of the industry from the ground up.

The main focus of a retail job is selling the store's merchandise by helping people choose products for the wedding. While most retail jobs involve working with the bride, you might also find a position that will allow you to assist others involved in the wedding such as the groom, mother of the bride, attendants and guests.

Among the retailers that hire salespeople to work with brides and grooms include bridal shops, formalwear stores, florists, jewellery stores, department stores, other stores with gift registries (see below).

You may be given the title of 'bridal consultant', and you will certainly learn a lot about the wedding industry in such a role in retail. You may choose to stay in such a role, or use it as a stepping stone to another career in the industry. For example, if you stay in retail you may move into a position such as a 'buyer' (someone who decides what merchandise the store will carry) or manager. Or you might use what you learn during your retail experience to help you start your own wedding planning business.

Stores with gift registries

You might find a job as a bridal consultant for a large department store that offers a bridal gift registry. This is a free service offered by many large retailers.

Couples can register a list of gifts they would like to receive, and then the guests invited to the wedding can refer to the list for assistance in choosing suitable

wedding gifts. In some cases, gift-givers can even browse the items the couple has selected online. Not only is gift buying made easier for guests, registering makes it more likely the couple will receive gifts they really want and need.

Traditional gift registry items include china, crystal, linens and silver, but couples may register anything else they want – from coffee machines to art.

Your job would involve assisting couples in registering and selecting gift items, with the aim of increasing sales for the store. Stores offering gift registries include department stores, jewellery stores, home-wares stores and gift stores.

On this link you can find a list of [44 best wedding registry of sites and stores](#).

Wedding planning companies

An excellent way to gain experience as a wedding planner is to join a company that already does wedding planning. These people might refer to themselves as wedding planners, bridal consultants, wedding coordinators or wedding consultants.

While you may be able to find a company that is looking to hire a full time wedding planner, more likely you will find a job as an assistant to a wedding planner (if you see *The Wedding Planner*, you might remember that Jennifer Lopez's character had an assistant).

As an assistant to a wedding planner, you may be involved in all aspects of a company's work. You can learn a tremendous amount about the industry in a role such as this, which you may then be able to put to good use when you set up your own wedding planning business.

Churches

Some churches or chapels, particularly larger churches or those in tourist destinations, may hire someone to assist couples with preparing for the ceremony. This job does not involve helping with the reception, just the ceremony. The job title here is likely to be 'wedding coordinator', and the job itself involves coordinating bookings for the church facilities, liaising with the couple to plan their ceremony, explaining church policies and procedures, advising on all aspects of the ceremony, conducting the rehearsal and supervising on the day of the ceremony.

At some churches, wedding coordinating is done by a full time office administrator or administrative assistant, as part of their job.



FINDING JOB OPENINGS

There are several places that you may see wedding industry jobs advertised. You can search the job ads online at job websites (see below), on gumtree, or on social media accounts of wedding suppliers. Job websites you can search include:

[Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com)

[Glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com)

[Careerbuilder.com](https://www.careerbuilder.com)

Key words you might enter include: wedding coordinator, wedding sales consultant, event planner, events manager, wedding planner, bridal consultant.

You can also search under 'Industry': try Hospitality, Floristry, Retail, Management and Sales.

You can also find wedding planning jobs on social media such as Instagram. More and more companies are advertising positions this way.

Another alternative is to simply identify who you would like to work for, and send them your resume and a cover letter explaining who you are and the kind of work you are looking for. You should follow this up with an email or phone call. If they don't have anything available for you right now, ask them to keep your details on file and let you know when they do.

Also let friends and colleagues know you are looking for a position. Many employers find staff through word of mouth. They will ask around the industry via business associates and their employees to see if they know anyone who might be suitable – so get the word out there. Networking can be the most effective way of finding a job.

Even when there is no job available, if you can show an employer that your value will outweigh the cost to them, you may be able to convince them to take you on.

Here are some 'costs' you will need to consider: your salary, benefits, resources (e.g. computer, supplies) and staff training.

Here are some ways of showing 'value': increasing profits by getting more sales, increasing profits by reducing the company's costs, freeing up your boss's time for more important work, reducing your boss's frustration by taking on tasks they don't like doing themselves.

For example, a busy wedding planner might hire you to be their assistant if you can convince them that, with your help, they could do more of the tasks that they enjoy and fewer of the tasks they don't enjoy, while being able to take on more weddings and earn more money.

Likewise, a company that occasionally provides services for weddings (such as a caterer, florist, party supply company, photographer or resort) might hire you to set up a 'wedding department' if you can convince them that you can increase profits by getting more customers.

PREPARING A RESUME

Even if you've never been paid to plan a wedding, you can still write a powerful resume that can help you to get a job in the wedding industry.

Even if the only weddings you plan are for yourself, friends and family members, you will still have wedding planning experience! The key is to present that experience in a way that is attractive to employers.

Employers want to know you have the specific skills necessary to do the job they are hiring for. A resume containing too much irrelevant information could be rejected before the employer has even finished reading it. Therefore, instead of submitting a traditional resume focusing on each job you have ever held and what you did, create a functional resume focusing on the skills and experience the employer is looking for.

The following types of experience may be helpful for almost any types of jobs in the wedding industry.

- Sales
- Customer service
- Wedding or event coordination.

Other basic principles of preparing an effective resume are the same as for any job. For example, try to keep your resume to a single page unless you have extensive relevant experience. Also, you don't need to go back further than 10 years on your resume, since some employers may judge what you learned before then to be out-dated.

A sample resume is included on page 67.

Cover letter

If you are submitting your resume by mail, fax or email, it is recommended that you include a cover letter. While it's OK to photocopy your resume, your cover letter should be personalised, and explain why you are a good candidate for the job. Here is an example of a cover letter.



SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Helen Hopeful
42 Grapevine Lane
Sunnydale, VIC 3789
M: 0789 789789
E: helenhope@hotmail.com

5 March 2015

Barbara Beck
Manager – Events and conferences
Mirage Hotel and Conference Centre
54 The Causeway
Sandy Beach, QLD 6999

Dear Ms Johnston,

I am writing to apply for the position of Wedding Coordinator, as advertised on www.Seek.com.au this month.

The advertisement stated that the Mirage is looking for someone with strong customer service skills and previous wedding planning experience. As my resume shows, I have worked in retail, where I utilised and developed my skills in customer service and sales. I have also assisted people in planning their wedding ceremony, reception and honeymoon. I work to get repeat business for my employer, and have numerous references from satisfied customers.

It would be an honour to work for such a prestigious hotel and conference centre. I would like to have the opportunity to discuss further how I can be of service to the Mirage, and your guests. My contact number is 0489 7497 89. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Helen Hopeful



SAMPLE RESUME

Helen Hopeful
42 Grapevine Lane
Sunnydale, VIC 3789
M: 0789 789789
E: helenhope@hotmail.com

Objective

A position utilising my wedding planning, customer service and sales skills

Wedding planning

- Consulted with brides and grooms to help them plan all aspects of their wedding
- Booked ceremony and reception sites
- Arranged for and supervised providers of flowers, music, catering, photography, video, limousines and wedding stationery
- Decorated ceremony and reception sites (photos available upon request)
- Assisted brides by addressing envelopes, arranging honeymoon travel, and running errands
- Served as wedding coordinator the day of the wedding

Customer service and sales representative

- Used effective listening skills to determine customer needs and recommend products
- Kept in touch with customers by phone to ensure satisfaction
- Received thank you letters from satisfied clients (copies available upon request)
- As a sales representative, consistently exceeded sales targets by over 20%

Work and volunteer experience

- Retail sales consultant 2008-2012
- Planned six weddings 2012-2014
- Volunteer for the Cancer Society, organising fundraising events 2014
- Previous experience as an office assistant and salesperson for a women's clothing store.

Education

Successfully completed ' Certificate of Professional Wedding Planning, Styling and Design' at La Mode College 2015

References

Letters of recommendation and references available upon request.

INTERVIEWS

What employers are looking for

Primarily, employers are looking for someone who can do a good job. But they are also looking for someone who has a positive attitude and great interpersonal skills. Here is how some employers have described what they are looking for:

The right person for us will have excellent interpersonal skills; an upbeat attitude and they will get on well with our customers and staff. *Catering company*

A candidate who loves working with people will always do well. *Resort*

We look for good communication skills and a can-do attitude when we are hiring. They must be 'people' people to do well. *Bridal shop*

Employers want to know that you will be able to get on well with their customers, that you will be efficient, courteous, friendly and professional. If you can demonstrate these qualities at an interview, you should do well.

Experts say that we form an impression in the first few seconds of meeting a person, so be aware of the impact you are having right from the start. Your attitude and ability to get along with people are being judged from the first moment you walk into the room.

To make a good impression, you should be well groomed and professionally dressed.

As well as being enthusiastic, be positive. Avoid saying anything negative, especially about former employers. Focus on what value you would bring to the company as an employee, and not on what you want to get from the job. For example, don't discuss how much vacation time you want or bring up salary until the employer does.

Above all, you want the interviewer to think: "What a nice person! It would be great to have someone like that working here."

Questions to expect

Here are some of the standard interview questions you can expect to be asked:

- Why do you want this job?
- Why do you want to work for our company?
- What kind of position are you looking for?
- What did you like most/least about your last job?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What experience do you have with ? (Selling, wedding planning, catering etc.)



-Where do you see yourself in five years?

-What sort of salary are you expecting?

-Do you have any questions?

You should study up before your interview so that you know the background of the company you are being interviewed by. In this way you can prepare yourself for the questions they may ask. Read their website, if they have one. Or stop by the office and pick up any promotional materials they might have, or their annual report (if they are large enough to have one).

Also be prepared for behavioural questions – these questions require you to think on your feet a bit more. For example:

-How would you handle a difficult customer?

You can answer in a hypothetical way by imagining what you would do, but it's always better if you can draw on real life experience – you may have had to deal with a difficult customer in your last job, and you can cite that as an example. The employer wants to know how you resolve difficult situations.

SALARY

A wedding planner's salary can vary depending on the location and type of employer. For example, a job as a wedding planner for a restaurant in a small country town will be a different rate compared to a job as a wedding coordinator for a large well-known hotel in the city.

Some employers may have a base salary plus commission. Good wedding planners can expect anywhere from around \$35,000 to \$80,000 per annum. Some celebrity wedding planners earn close to \$200,000 per annum.

Part 5:

Starting Your Own Business

As a self-employed wedding planner you can enjoy the freedom and the potential for much higher income than you might earn as an employee. If you dream of having your own wedding planning business, the information in this chapter will help you get started and make your business a success. It covers:

- What you need to get started
- How to set up your office
- How much to charge for your services
- Marketing your business
- How to get clients

GETTING STARTED

When you are starting your own business, there are a few practicalities you will need to take care of first, before you get started on the business of wedding planning itself. First, here are some online resources and advice that you might find helpful for getting started.

business.gov.au

Offers all the essential information on planning, starting and running your business, and access to all the government information, transactions and services you need.
www.business.gov.au

Business Victoria

This is a comprehensive online resource designed to help you start, run and grow your business.
www.business.vic.gov.au

Business Development

This website aims to help you to start your small business on the right foot.
www.business.qld.gov.au

My Small Business

All kinds of advice including blogs and discussions on starting a small business.
<http://smallbusiness.smh.com.au>

Small Business Development Corporation

Independent guidance and information for existing and/or intending small business owners.
www.sbdc.com.au

Australian Taxation Office

Tax basics for small business (click on the 'Business' tab).

www.ato.gov.au

Creating a business plan

Writing a business plan is essential to having a successful business. Business planning involves putting on paper all the plans you have for your business including:

- the services you will provide
- who your clients are
- who your competitors are
- where you will find suppliers (vendors)
- what you will charge for your services
- how you will advertise and market your services
- how much money you will need to get started.

If you are seeking financing for your business from a bank or other lender, they will expect to see a business plan that shows you have a viable business idea with an excellent chance of success. Even if you don't need financing, putting your ideas on paper will give you the 'road map' of where you want to go with your business and how you are going to get there.

A business plan can also help you avoid costly surprises. If you are considering whether to leave a secure job to start your own business, a business plan can help you determine the resources you will need to start your business and decide when the timing is best for you to get started.

Outlining your services and identifying your customers

A key component of your business plan will be deciding what services your business will offer and who you will offer them to. When you are starting out, it's tempting to say you will do anything related to weddings that people will pay you to do. And while it's great to have such a can-do attitude, you may find you are able to attract my clients by offering specific services. For example, you could offer any – or all – of the following services.

Full service wedding planning

A full service wedding planner is involved in all aspects of planning and coordinating the ceremony and reception. As outlined in Part 2 of this guide, the tasks you might be responsible for range from scheduling and budgeting to finding and negotiating with vendors. You will be in regular contact with your clients as the wedding approaches. In addition to planning before the wedding, you will be available throughout the entire event to assist with any last minute details that arise.

Wedding day coordination

For couples that wish to plan their own wedding, you could offer your services as a wedding day coordinator. This allows the couple to enjoy their special day without the stress of overseeing all of the vendors and activities. Most wedding day coordinators also coordinate the rehearsal. In fact, wedding coordinators typically start working with a couple about a month before the wedding so they can review what needs to be done, contact vendors, and develop a plan for the rehearsal and wedding day.

Wedding consultations

For couples who want to do everything themselves – but want to know how to do it as easily and cost-effectively as possible – you can offer brief consultations to help them get started. For example, you might offer an hourly consultation (most planners suggest a two-hour minimum) to help them plan a schedule, recommend specific vendors, prepare a preliminary budget, and answer any questions they may have.

Destination weddings

Some wedding planners have built successful businesses by offering destination-wedding services. A 'destination wedding' is a wedding at a location such as a resort that the couple has to travel to. It may involve only the couple (commonly known as eloping) or it may involve guests.

Vendor

Some wedding planners also offer related products and services such as catering, flowers, or wedding invitations. For example, if you have a talent for baking, you might make the wedding cakes for clients yourself rather than recommending another vendor. If you want to offer services beyond wedding planning, you will need to do additional research about starting that type of business.

Choosing a business name

Your business name can instantly communicate a powerful message to potential customers, so it should be memorable and easy to pronounce.

To choose a name for your wedding planning company, start by taking a look in the phone book or on the Internet to see the names that other wedding planners have chosen. Notice which names stand out. Your name might be creative, or you might choose a name that clearly communicates what your business does.

Examples of business names include: 'An Affair of the Heart', 'Engaging Events', 'Weddings by Design', and 'The Wedding Experts'.

To register a business name, go to:

www.asic.com.au

Legal structure of your business

Your business structure affects the cost of starting your business, your taxes and your liability (responsibility) for any debts of the business. There are several different legal structures a business can take.

Sole trader – If you want to run a business yourself, you will be known officially as a 'sole trader'. This is the least expensive way to start your own business. It is also the easiest because it requires less paperwork and you can report your business income on your personal tax return. One drawback to this type of business is that you are personally liable for any debts of the business.

Partnership – If you want to go into business with someone else, the easiest and least expensive way to do this is by forming a partnership. Legally, you would both be responsible for any debts of the company.

Before going into business with a partner, you should spend many hours talking about how you will work together. You should identify:

- what you will each be responsible for
- how you will make decisions on a day-to-day basis
- what percentage of the business each of you will own
- how you see the business developing in the future
- what you expect from each other.

During your discussions you can learn if there are any areas or where you need to compromise. For example, one of you may wish to have a wedding planning business as a fun part-time job, while others may want to work full-time and eventually build a business that will employ other people. You can avoid future misunderstandings by putting the points you have agreed on into a 'partnership agreement' that covers any possibility you can think of (including one of you leaving the business at some point in the future.)

Company – Whether you are working alone or with partners, if you want a more formal legal structure for your business, you can form a company. A company can have limited, personal liability and may make your business appear more professional to come clients. However, it usually costs several hundred dollars and there are many rules and regulations involved with this type of business structure.

It's a good idea to consult with your accountant and/or solicitor before forming a company.

Registering for an ABN

When you register your business name- regardless of the structure, before you commence trading you will need an Australian Business Number (ABN). You can get an ABN number online from the Australian Tax Office Website.

You will need to display your ABN on each invoice and receipt, and give quote your ABN when dealing with suppliers and ordering supplies from your wholesalers.

You can find out more information on ABNs from the Tax Office. Go to: www.ato.gov.au (and click on the 'Businesses' tab).

You can apply for an ABN online via the ASIC. Go to: www.asic.com.au.

Taxation

If you are working in Australia, you will also need a Tax File Number (TFN) which is used when you do your tax return at the end of the financial year. If your business structure is a company, you will need an individual tax file number for your company. If you are a sole trader, you can use your individual tax file number that you have already. If in doubt, you can speak with your accountant.

Goods and Services Tax (GST)

In Australia, you are required to collect GST of 10% from your clients if your income is \$75,000 per annum, or more. You need to register with the Government for GST before you can start to charge GST. For more information on GST, go to: www.ato.gov.au (and click on the 'Businesses' tab, then 'Tax Topics A-Z').

Pay As You Go (PAYG)

PAYG instalment is a system for paying instalments towards your expected tax liability on your business and investment income. PAYG withholding may also apply if you one day have employees, and withhold amounts from their income for the Government. For more information on PAYG, go to: www.ato.gov.au (and click on the 'Businesses' tab, then 'Tax Topics A-Z').

SETTING UP YOUR BUSINESS

The first thing you will need is a place to work. Your choices include working from home or renting a space.

Working from home

Many wedding planners choose to work from home when they start their business, because it saves them on the cost of an office.

There are many benefits to working from home. For example, there's no commuting, you can take breaks whenever you like, you can work whenever you like. Another advantage is that you may be able to claim a percentage of the rent as a tax deduction.

It's a good idea, if you can, to have an entire room dedicated to your business, in order to keep distractions from family members to a minimum. It's also important to decorate it beautifully but professionally as you may have clients dropping by. Remember to make your workspace functional with as large a desk as possible, and a comfortable chair.

For more information on home-based businesses*, go to www.abr.gov.au.

* If you're using your home as a place of business then specific regulations may govern the impact of your business activities on the surrounding area, such as pollution, energy use and parking. You may need special permits relating to zoning, signage, noise levels or health issues. Check with your local council to find out what restrictions and approvals apply to your business.

Renting space

If you find it challenging to stay motivated, or tend to get easily distracted when you're at home, an office may be just what you need to help you focus on business. A separate space can also create a better impression if you plan to have clients or vendors visit you.

Look for a space that's convenient to get to from your home, and that gives you quick access to any services you might need, such as your bank, suppliers of materials, even a good coffee shop! Pick an area that suits your needs, and budget.

Equipment and supplies

Telephones

You'll notice this section is titled in the plural. That's because many wedding planners have more than one phone. For many business owners, the basics are:

- a business landline
- a mobile phone.

It's a good idea to have a separate business landline, if you are working from home. It should be off-limits to the rest of the family, and should always be answered

professionally with the name of your business. Some people do not want to call a mobile number as it costs more, so it's handy to have a landline for this reason.

However, a mobile is also essential in this business. You can expect to be out of the office a lot, visiting clients, venues and other vendors. But you don't want to miss calls while you're out of the office. You should have a mobile with you, and an answering service on your business line. You can also arrange for calls from your business line to be directed to your mobile while you're out of the office; or to be able to check your messages on your land line, from your mobile. Ask your service provider for advice.

Computer or Laptop

If you don't already have a computer or Laptop, you should consider buying or leasing one for your business as soon as you can afford it. A tablet can be difficult to do invoices up on, but may be useful for client meetings to show photos of your work. You will also need:

- a printer
- camera or smart phone so you can take photos of weddings you have planned and upload them to your social media channels or website

Software

Many computers already have the basic software needed to run a business. While Microsoft Office and other programs that came with your computer can be used in your business, the following types of programs can make your work easier (though they are not essential). You can find them online or buy them from your local office supply store.

Bookkeeping – Xero can help you keep track of your income and expenses more efficiently, and its only ne low cost per month.

Database – MS Outlook (which comes with Microsoft Office) can be a useful way to keep track of your customers contact details. Or you could buy a database program such as Aweber.

Wedding planning software – This software can help you keep track of every aspect of the wedding including: guest lists, vendors, budgets, to-do lists, and details of the ceremony, reception, and even the honeymoon. If you do a search on wedding planning software, you'll find many available to purchase from online. Here are just a few:

Wedding Planning Software

<http://www.planningpod.com>

In addition to wedding planning software, there are also a number of professional floor plan software packages available. Although quite costly, you may find one of these programs helpful to your business.

Scanner/printer

You may need to scan documents to send to clients, as well as print out important information about the wedding details. You can also use a scanner app on your smart phone to scan and email documents.

IPhone / Smart Phone

You might consider managing your calendar using this technology. You can also access the Internet and your email this way. The i-Phone combines all of this technology with a mobile phone as well.

Calculator

A calculator can make your job much easier. You will be constantly working out budgets so a calculator is a must. You can use the calculator feature on your phone.

Filing cabinet

You may be able to get away with a desk drawer for a while for holding your files, but if you are successful, you'll be needing a 3-drawer filing cabinet sooner rather than later!

Office supplies

You'll also need all the supplies any business would need – pens, paper, stapler, clips, CDs, labels etc.

Stationery

Your stationery should present the image of your company to the world. It should encapsulate the message of your company, in the same way your company name does. At a glance, it needs to impress – remember, first impressions count.

You will need:

- business cards
- business stationery
- a brochure describing your business and your services

Beautiful stationery can reassure prospective clients that you have a good eye and can make their weddings look beautiful too. If you decide to go all out on creating an impression, you may want to consult a graphic designer. Many printers can also help you with design, as well as printing your stationery.

In the early days, if your start-up finances are limited, you may want to consider business cards from vistaprint.com. They offer colour business cards on heavy paper stock, available in a number of different designs. You can purchase 250 cards for around \$19.99 plus shipping. www.vistaprint.com

INSURING YOUR BUSINESS

Once you have equipped your office, you should protect what you have. However, insurance is one thing many small business owners would rather not worry about. It may seem like something that costs you time and money, but doesn't contribute to your business. But in fact, having insurance could save your business one day.

Types of insurance

Property insurance

Protects the contents of your business (e.g., your computer, office equipment and supplies) in case of fire, theft or other losses. If you have a home office, your business property may not be covered by your homeowner's policy.

Professional indemnity insurance

Protects 'professionals' who give advice or offer services in a specialised field. It covers errors or omissions in advice, design or specifications that causes the insured party's clients or others a financial loss.

Public liability insurance

Protects you against causing personal injury to another person (other than employees) or damage to property owned or controlled by someone else.

Some insurers offer small business insurance packages covering everything from theft and fire to public liability. You can search online (type 'small business insurance' into your search engine) or you can consult an insurance broker (check the Yellow Pages) who will be able to give you advice on what level of insurance you will need.

EMPLOYING PEOPLE

You may be working on your own when you first start your business, but at some point you may need to bring in someone to help you as your business grows. For example, you may hire an assistant, or someone who specialises in marketing to help promote your company.

Whenever you hire someone, you will sign them on as employees or as contractors. So what's the difference?

- Employees are trained by you. Contractors receive their training elsewhere.
- Employees work only for you. Contractors may have their own customers and work for other event planning firms.
- Employees are paid on a regular basis. Contractors are paid per project.
- Employees work for a certain amount of hours. Contractors set their own hours, as long as they get the job done.
- Employees can be fired or quit. Contractors can't be fired in the usual way while



they are working under contract. You may decide to have them stop working on a project, but you will be obliged to pay them according to your contractual agreement.

As a wedding planner, if you hire people to provide services such as music or photography, they will likely be self-employed contractors (who you will find through word of mouth or even the Yellow Pages). However, the other people who work for your company may be either employees or contractors, and there are different tax requirements for both. For more information about employment taxes for small businesses, check with the Australian Taxation Office:

www.ato.gov.au (click on 'Businesses', then under 'Your business situation' click on 'Employing People' and 'Employer essentials'.)

When you employ people you also need to be aware of health and safety issues, workers compensation, minimum wage and unemployment insurance – particularly regarding your particular State or Territory. You can find out about this and more at:

www.business.gov.au (under 'Business topics' click on 'Employing people')

FINANCES

Start-up funding

Depending on how you set up your business, the cost of starting your wedding planning firm might range from almost nothing to thousands of dollars. Obviously your start-up expenses will be much higher if you decide to rent space and buy equipment.

You will also need to consider your 'working capital' requirements. This is the money you will need for the day-to-day operation of your wedding planning company. If you are buying supplies for the wedding, you can ask for a deposit. But there are other expenses that will come out of your pocket before you get your first client – such as business cards, telephone etc.

Many entrepreneurs are optimistic about how much money they will earn from their business, and how quickly they will earn it. While you may be tremendously successful right from the start and exceed your own expectations, it is wise to be prepared for the possibility that it may take longer than expected until your business is earning enough to support you.

A standard rule of thumb is to have six months living expenses set aside beyond your start-up costs. Or you might consider remaining at your current job and working part-time on your wedding planning business until it is established.

If your own personal resources won't cover all the things you would like to do with your business, you will need to look for financing.

Start close to home. Maybe you have a family member willing to invest in your company or give you a start-up loan? To avoid any misunderstanding, it's wise to get any agreements in writing even with family members.

If you decide to approach a bank for a business loan, be prepared. Write a loan proposal that includes detailed information about your business, how much money you want to borrow, what you plan to do with the money, and so on.

You can find out more on getting finance at:

www.business.gov.au (under 'How-to guides' click on 'Starting a business' and read 'How can I find a business loan?' and 'How do I manage my finances?' – see the state government guides for managing your finances.)

Keeping track of your money

There are a variety of resources available to help you keep track of your business income and expenses.

Financial institutions

You will need to open a business banking account. You can shop around to find a financial institution that is supportive of small business, or use the same one that you use for your personal banking.

In addition, you might want to consider talking to your financial institution about the following:

- a business credit card for making purchases for your business
- a merchant account- so you can accept credit card payments from your customers.

Bookkeeping

Your bookkeeping system is a record of your income and expenses. To keep track of your expenses, you will need to keep copies of all your receipts. This can sometimes be a challenge for new business owners who might have a habit of tossing out receipts for small items or not asking for receipts in the first place. However you are likely to have numerous small expenses related to your business, and these can add up over time.

The petrol you put in your car (or mileage you drive) to see a client, the latest issue of a wedding magazine, a book on weddings, the fee for your ticket to a bridal fair – all of these expenses should be accounted for so you can minimise your taxes.

And of course, knowing exactly where your money is going will help you to plan better and cut back on unnecessary expenses. So make it a habit to ask for a receipt.

Xero is a brand new cloud accounting program that makes it easy to manage your business expenses and accounts. Visit: www.xero.com.au

If you are too busy, or you prefer to leave it to the professionals, you can hire a part-time bookkeeper on a contract basis. They could do a few hours a week, or fortnight, depending on how busy you are, and get your books up to date and balanced with your bank statements. You can find a bookkeeper through word of mouth or the Yellow Pages.

Financial experts

An accountant or tax adviser can be worth the expense – they can save you hundreds, maybe thousands of dollars at tax time. To find one, try word of mouth, or the Yellow Pages.

MARKETING YOUR BUSINESS

Doing a fabulous job and having your clients spread the news about what a great wedding planner you are is by far the best way to market your business. Nothing can beat word of mouth; it's simply the most powerful form of advertising that there is. But don't despair if you're just starting out, there are other methods for marketing your business that can also work very well.

In addition to your business card, a promotional tool might include a portfolio, website and brochures.

Portfolio

A portfolio shows examples of your work and may include the following:

- Professional photographs of weddings you have worked on
- Wedding inspiration boards
- Wedding Floor Plans
- Testimonial letters from couples you have planned weddings for
- Anything else that shows your skill as a wedding planner. (Assessment pieces of this course will be helpful!)

Photographs

Remember, a picture paints a thousand words. Try to get a photo from every wedding you have worked on, and if possible, photos of various aspects of the wedding that you helped to organise (table decorations, the cake, the flowers etc.), so that you can show off your creativity and organisational skills.

If it's still early days for your business, and you don't have any or many photos to include, you can show clippings from magazines or vendors brochures to paint a picture of the kind of wedding you can organise. Ask vendors (cake decorators, florists, photographers, venues, invitation engravers etc.) for permission to use their brochures in your portfolio to give the couples an idea of what is possible. If you have a camera, you can take photos yourself – you can even decorate a table and photograph it yourself, in order to show your handiwork. As soon as you have organised a wedding or two, you can replace these with the 'real thing'.

When putting your portfolio together, be selective. Your prospective clients won't want to spend hours wading through hundreds of photographs. Choose just the best to highlight your skills and services.

Testimonial letters/references

The best references or letters of recommendation are those written by couples you have done wedding planning work for. However, you can also include letters of recommendation from past employers if they say good things about your skills in areas that are important to wedding planning, for example, your organisational



ability, or your creative eye. You can also include appropriate thank you notes. Every time you plan a wedding, or part of a wedding, ask for a letter of recommendation.

Some people might find writing a letter of recommendation daunting, so you can offer to write it for them, and just have them sign it. Here's a sample reference letter.

SAMPLE REFERENCE LETTER

Dear Penelope Planner,

Jack and I would like to thank you for the absolutely wonderful job you did on planning our recent wedding day. It couldn't have been more perfect! You really took our vision for our 'big day' and turned it into a reality. Clearly, you are not only a great organiser, but a great listener as well! I also really appreciated the little touches of creativity that you added – such as the decorations on the tables – I never would've thought of that on my own!

It was also a great pleasure to work with you. You were not only pleasant and professional at all times but you managed to keep me calm throughout the day itself – no mean feat! My bridesmaid and mother both commented on what a blessing you were for us all!

Thanks also for helping us to organise our honeymoon. The hotel you recommended was awesome!

I would definitely recommend your services to anyone organising their wedding, and I wish you every success in the future.

Regards,

Belinda Bride.

**

What else to include

Your portfolio should include anything else that could impress someone who is considering hiring you. For example, if your wedding planning business has been mentioned in a newspaper or magazine, you could include a clipping or photocopy of the article. Later in this guide, you will information about how to write an article for publication.

Some wedding planners might also include sample wedding timelines or other planning materials in their portfolios.

Putting it all together

One possibility for displaying your portfolio items is to put everything into a professional looking binder with plastic sheet covers to protect the pages. You can mount your photographs onto thin cardboard. Your local office supply store should have a range of display folders for you to choose from.

Brochures

You can give brochures to prospective clients you meet at networking events and bridal shows, or who phone after seeing an ad and ask to have information mailed to them. Your brochure should have your company name and contact information (including your web address).

It can also include some of the information you have on your website, such as:

- one or more wedding photos
- benefits of hiring a wedding planner
- services you offer
- a photograph of you
- some testimonials.

Your brochure can be 'DL' (a printer's term) – which means envelope sized for easy mailing. But it can be folded in 3 (so standard A4 size when open) and printed on both sides. Or you can simply print a one-page flyer, which can be pinned up on bulletin boards. If you are only printing a few copies of your brochure, you may be able to find some nice paper at your local office supply company, and run it through your printer at home.

If you want to print hundreds of copies of your brochure, you might be faster and cheaper to get a professional printer to do it for you. Officeworks (which has stores nationwide) offer a Print & Copy service, as do some smaller office supply companies. Or you could check the Yellow Pages for your nearest printer.

Once you have your brochures and other promotional tools ready, you will be able to give them to people when you are networking.

Networking

Networking, otherwise known as 'schmoozing'!, can be a little intimidating at first but is a valuable marketing tool and one that gets easier every time you use it. So what exactly is 'networking'? Simply put, it's interacting with people for the purpose of finding new clients. The people you network with could either be prospective clients, or anyone who could refer you to clients.

Bridal fairs are good opportunities to network. You have the opportunity to meet prospective clients (brides-to-be) and to mingle with vendors, who might refer you to clients. You can even have your own booth at a fair – an opportunity to meet even

more brides (see page 88 for more on having your own booth). Here are some other ways to network:

Family and friends

Wedding planners can follow the tried and tested method used by real estate agents who are networking experts. Family and friends are usually targeted first with the hope they will be kind enough to pass on your business card or name at a suitable opportunity.

Vendors

It's important to maintain good relations with vendors, as they are a great source of referrals. If they like what you do, if they like working with you, they are likely to refer prospective clients to you.

Arrange meetings with as many vendors as possible. At your vendor meetings, get to know what products and services they supply, but give them the opportunity to get to know you as well.

Bring your business cards and brochures, and be prepared to sell yourself and your business. Tell the vendor that you would be pleased to bring or send clients to them and that in turn you would appreciate it if they would pass on your name to their prospective clients.

Other organisations

Another excellent way to network is by joining associations, cultural organisations, clubs and churches that prospective clients and vendors may belong to. Pick one that interests you personally, and then get involved. Raise your profile so that members of the club really have the opportunity to get to know you – serve on a committee, write articles for the association newsletter, and do volunteer work. The more involved you are, the more likely you are to connect with prospective clients or people who can connect you with clients.

Advertising

While networking and word of mouth is the ideal way of promoting your business, advertising can also help.

Wedding Magazines

Advertising in magazines can be costly, and unless you advertise regularly, may not generate the results you want to see. (It has been estimated that many people need to see an advertisement three to seven times before they buy.)

Advertising in a wedding magazine can be a great way to gain exposure to a specific market- and quite often if you sign up for a full year of advertising with a publication, they will give you a discounted rate. Advertising in other print magazine

and newspapers can be a waste of money. Make sure your print advertising market is specific to the wedding industry.

Google Adwords

Google adwords are the ads placed in Google at the top of a Google search, and on the right hand side. Many brides search for wedding services by doing a Google search, so ranking in Google can be an effective strategy for getting leads. You can pay for 'clicks' to your website- which can be anywhere from 50c- \$1.00 per click. This can be a more effective advertising method than print ads in a magazine- as print advertising has no guarantee that people who see your ad will visit your website or make an enquiry. Where as for Google adwords- you only pay for the amount of clicks your ad gets, which new clients are visiting your website. To set up a Google adwords account- go to www.adwords.com

Social Media

Social media is a great way to advertise and market your business, and it's free. While you can place paid ads on Facebook, you can also do a lot of marketing for free. Pinterest and Instagram are also great mediums to advertise your business through beautiful images. Set up a business account name- using your business name- with Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram, and start posting inspiring images of weddings that can be used as inspiration, or really great links to useful resources.

Online Wedding Directories

Online wedding directories are another really great medium to advertise your wedding business. There are many wedding directories around, and they directly list wedding suppliers in a particular category for a particular service. It's a great resource for brides, and therefore a great place to advertise and get leads.

Some of the top online directories you can advertise in are:

www.easyweddings.com.au

www.theknot.com.au

www.brideonline.com.au

Free media publicity

When a business gets publicity in a magazine article, newspaper story, radio or television talk show, or well known website, it can result in a tremendous amount of new business. Here are some ways wedding planners can get publicity.

Press releases

A press release is a brief document that you submit to the media with the aim of getting publicity for your business. The ideal press release is a single page (less than

500 words) and is written like a news story. If you write something that sounds like an advertisement, it is unlikely to get published.

You can find numerous online resources to help you write a press release, including:

How to write a great press release: <http://www.publicityinsider.com/release.asp>

Most magazines and newspapers publish contact information for their editors. Newspapers may have dozens of editors, so make sure you send your submission to the appropriate one (for example, the Lifestyle Editor).

Editorial articles

As an alternative to writing a press release, you could find out who the editor is, and either phone or send a brief 'pitch letter' by email, fax or mail to suggest an idea for a story.

In your pitch, remember to focus on something that will be interesting to readers. For example, you might suggest a story on how to save money on weddings, wedding etiquette for dealing with difficult situations, or unique locations to hold wedding ceremonies. Do some brainstorming or consider a story based on the most common kinds of questions customers ask you.

While it's not necessary to submit photos to a newspaper (most have their own photographers) photos might catch an editor's eye. They might also be published in a smaller magazine, newspaper or newsletter that doesn't have a photographer on staff. If you send photos (remember you need the permission of the people in the photos and the photographer), put them in an attractive two-pocket folder with your business card and a cover letter. Then follow up a week later with a phone call.

Bridal fairs and expos

Bridal fairs and expos are held in most major Australian cities every year, lasting two to three days in duration. They draw large numbers of brides and grooms, and their friends and families. Exhibitors include wedding planners, cake bakers and decorators, florists, bridal fashion retailers, travel agents, jewellers, limousine rentals and more.

Exhibitors may have either a draped table with a simple backdrop, or a full-scale booth with wide and back walls and racks for displaying merchandise. A booth for a wedding planner does not need to be more than a banquet sized table to hold your promotional materials.

Most expos charge hundreds of dollars for a booth. The price will vary, depending on whether the show is a large city expo or a small country fair. The size and location of your booth will also affect the price.



The Bride's Diary provides an online listing of fairs and expos around Australia. To find one near you, go to:

www.bridesdiary.com.au

You can also do a search on the Internet. Type in 'bridal fair' or 'bridal expo' and the name of your city.

To book a space as an exhibitor, you will need to know how much space you require and what your needs will be. You will likely be required to sign a contract and pay a certain percentage of the cost up front. Each show will be handled differently and the show's producers should be able to tell you exactly what you need to do to book space. Many bridal shows have their own websites and provide registration information as well as site maps and logistical information.

Setting up your booth

You should bring your business cards (make sure the information is current and that you have a large number of them), your company brochures and portfolio for display at your booth.

If you provide a service that is out of the ordinary for most planners, you should display these items prominently. Bring samples of your best work and be ready to discuss prices and options. You could also run a competition from your booth, and offer a prize to encourage brides to submit their personal details.

When you speak to a prospective client, toss in a few of the ideas you have for creating a spectacular wedding (but don't give too much away for free). To arrange consultations and discuss possible bookings, bring an appointment book or calendar of events you already have on the books. This is very important to know if you are a one-person operation and have already been booked for full-wedding day coordination on the specific day a potential client is interested in.

Creative marketing ideas

Running your own show can be a great way to promote yourself – and you might even earn a profit! But first of all, ask around and gauge the interest from vendors in your area – you don't want to set up a show and have no exhibitors! Businesses you might ask include businesses that pamper the bride (hair salons, beauty parlours, day spas etc.) plus the usual wedding vendors (florists, caterers, venues, cake bakers, photographers etc.).

You could suggest to each exhibitor to offer a prize or give away samples (i.e., free 10 minute massages or facials, free samples of chocolates or cake) – this will help to get the crowds in.

If you can convince enough exhibitors that a small bridal show would be valuable for their business, set up a committee of interested parties and find a venue to hold

the show. You could consider a community centre or a function room of a local venue.

If you keep costs low and charge the exhibitors a small fee, you may be able to have the event free to the public and attract a larger crowd than if you charge people to attend. (There are people who will not attend trade shows that demand a paid admission, as they feel they are paying to shop, which one would normally do free of charge.)

WORKING WITH CLIENTS

Congratulations, a couple is interested in hiring you to plan their wedding ... So let's look at what happens now.

Setting your fees

Before you meet with your new clients, you will need to decide how much you are going to charge for your services. The question is likely to come up at your first meeting, so you will need to be prepared.

Fees for wedding planning are as varied as services offered by the planners themselves. Some prefer to charge a flat rate for their services based on a percentage of the total wedding budget, while others offer individually priced packages according to the type and number of services the client desires.

To help you decide which fee arrangement/s would be best for your business, here are some typical ways wedding planners charge for their services:

- Consultation fee
- Percentage of the wedding budget
- No charge to client (wedding planner earns commission from vendors)
- Hourly fee
- Flat fee

Consultation fee

Many wedding planners give a half-hour to on-hour free initial consultation. In such cases, this first meeting is simply an opportunity to learn more about what the clients need and explain how your services can benefit them.

However, other wedding planners start charging from the first meeting. Some clients may only want to consult with you, rather than have you plan the whole wedding. You can give them advice on choosing vendors, how to set a planning calendar, etiquette issues, budgets etc.

You should charge your hourly fee (see below), based on the number of hours you provide in consultation for the couple.

It's up to you how much you feel comfortable to charge – average rates range anywhere from \$50 to \$200 per hour, depending on where the planner lives (big city rates will obviously be higher than country), and their experience.

Percentage of the wedding budget

This is a common way for wedding planners to charge for their services. A fee of 10-15% is the norm, although some wedding planners charge up to 20% of the budget.

This fee arrangement works well when the guest list is fairly large. You will not want to offer this pricing if the event is small. For example, if there is a total budget of \$5000, your fee will be \$500 no matter how many hours you have put in.

If you decide to price your services this way, determining your budget early on is critical in order to ensure you can provide the service for that amount of money. For a typical traditional wedding costing \$30,000, a 15% fee would earn you \$4500.

Be aware that your clients may expect that if you are charging a percentage of the wedding budget, you will save them at least that amount on the wedding costs.

No charge to the client

Some wedding planners offer their services free of charge to clients. They earn their money from commissions paid by vendors. The percentage commission will depend on how effective a negotiator you are. If you have established a relationship with a vendor, they may offer you a higher percentage for referring business to them.

Some may view this type of 'kick back' or 'finder's fee' as unethical, but in some industries it's a standard practice – for example, travel agents traditionally offer their services free of charge because they are paid a commission by airlines, hotels etc.).

You should also take into consideration the possibility that some potential clients might be put off by this approach – in the belief that 'you get what you pay for'.

One of the best reasons for a couple to hire a wedding planner is to reap the rewards and benefits of the planner's expertise in negotiating the lowest possible prices from vendors. If you are not passing the savings onto your client you run the risk of losing them to a planner who does. If you decide not to charge a fee, be prepared to address these objections by showing that the vendors you have chosen are reputable and reasonably priced.

Hourly fee

If you are going to be providing partial wedding planning services, you might charge an hourly fee. Most wedding planners charge fees ranging from \$50 to \$200 an hour. You don't have to start at the bottom end of the scale, because charging

a higher fee may actually make some clients *want* to work with you, trusting (again) that 'you get what you pay for'.

Flat fee

Some clients want to know upfront what the total cost for your services will be. These clients prefer to pay a 'flat fee' rather than an hourly rate, so they can budget for a particular amount. There is a range of options here.

Flat fee based on time worked – In this situation, you would decide what your time is worth on an hourly, daily and weekly basis and charge according to the amount of time you feel each event will require. For example, if you are planning the rehearsal dinner, one shower and coordinating the day of the wedding, and you have worked out that it will take you 40 hours to plan and coordinate these events, then simply multiply your hourly rate by 40. If it takes you longer, you will not be paid for those extra hours. However, the more experienced you become, the more accurate your flat rate quote will be.

Flat fee for wedding day coordination – In this situation, the bride, groom and their families have planned the wedding, and all they require from you is coordination on the day in order to make their day as perfect as possible. Although the number of hours you spend may vary from one wedding to another, most wedding planners would charge a standard amount for this service, such as \$1500. Services provided under this fee arrangement could include coordinating either until the start of dinner or to the end of the evening.

Flat fee for specific services – You can also charge a flat fee for a particular service, such as organising a vendor. Your clients may want you to find a reception venue for them, for example, but not be involved in organising the catering, or music. In this case, you might charge a fee of \$250. However, make sure you take all your costs into account. For example, if you have to make four trips across town to different venues (for meetings, or to drop things off), you may want to charge more than \$250.

Other fee options

Once you have planned weddings for a while, you may decide to revise your fees, or charge amounts based on different methods. For example, for wedding day coordination, some wedding planners charge both a flat fee and a percentage of vendor costs. Another option is to charge a fee based on the number of guests, with a set minimum. The downside to this type of fee structure is that the number of actual guests may be lower than the initial estimate, so make sure the minimum charged is enough, and do not hope to make more money by unexpected numbers of guests.

With more experience or education you may also want to raise your fees. When deciding how much to charge, consider the services you provide, the size of your community, and what the local competition is charging.

Another factor to consider when designing your fee package is to determine what your overhead and administration costs are and ensure you are including a percentage of your costs into every event. For example, you may hire the services of an assistant for the actual wedding day and you will have to consider charging extra for the additional person or add their fee directly into the overall budget or your package.

Getting paid

Whatever type or combination of packages and service fees you decide is best for your company to offer, make sure you and your client agree to it in writing. Be as specific as possible about what you will do, and what you won't do for the stated fee.

For example, if your clients contract you for wedding day coordination services only, you could run into unnecessary conflict if you do not tell your client that you will not be overseeing the rehearsal. If your fee covers your service up to the dinner only, make sure you clearly indicate to the client that you will not be there to coordinate and troubleshoot during dinner, the cutting of the cake, throwing the bouquet and other events that happen during or after dinner.

Alternatively, if the agreement is for you to coordinate the entire wedding day including the rehearsal, ceremony and reception, you should also include the maximum number of hours you will work on the rehearsal day and wedding day (or quit time) and list the **hourly overtime charge** for any hours worked over and above your quoted maximum. You should also stipulate that meal should be provided for you, and your assistant (if you have one). It is better to state the obvious than to assume the client knows what is included.

A good thing about being a wedding planner is that you don't have to wait until the wedding is over to start getting paid. At the end of your initial consultation, if the client wants to go ahead, you can ask for a **non-refundable deposit** (e.g., \$1000 or more if you are offering full-service wedding planning) with the balance payable on the wedding day, or even a week before the wedding.

CONSULTING WITH CLIENTS

Telephone interview

Unless you meet your prospective clients at a bridal fair or other event, your first contact with them is likely to be through a telephone call. For this reason, it's important that your telephone is always answered with a professional friendly voice, and with your company name. Do not allow family members to answer your phone if you are not available, use your voicemail or answering machine instead.

This first telephone conversation is likely to be about the couple seeking advice on your services, and your pricing. Smart business people try to set up a face-to-face



meeting at this point – after all, it's much easier to hang up the phone than it is to walk out of a meeting!

So how can you keep the person on the phone and convince them to meet with you? By gently taking control of the conversation and keeping your answers concise and focussed on what a valuable service wedding planner's provide to the bride and groom – a stress-free wedding!

Your conversation could go something like this:

Bride: Hello, I'm looking for some information on how much you charge to do a wedding.

You: Hi. Thanks for calling. I'm Penelope Planner. And what's your name?

Bride: Bella Bride.

You: Well Bella, our company offers a range of services, and there's a number of different packages available, depending on services that a couple want us to take care of. We can also design a package specifically for you. What we offer is expertise in handling things negotiating with vendors – that is, venues, caterers and so forth – so that you get the absolute best price. In this way, our fee pays for itself really. Our hourly rate is around \$100, but this depends on what you want done, and how many hours we actually do. We can do one-off services, like organising a vendor for you, or we can handle the entire service planning for the wedding – including wedding day coordination. Have you had a chance to check out our website, or have you seen our brochure?

Bride: No, I just got your number from the Internet. I'm not even sure I know what a wedding planner does.

You: Bella, I'm not sure what another wedding planner would tell you, but I can tell you that we aim to do is create a wedding as unique as you are, while taking the worry, stress and time commitment off you, your fiancé, and both families' shoulders. I offer a free one-hour initial consultation, and I could explain to you exactly what a wedding planner does at that time, and show you our portfolio of services. We can also discuss your needs, and all the options available. I have Tuesday, Thursday and Friday open – which day would be good for you?

There are many ways of delivering information on your packages to clients (email, your website, brochures etc.) but the absolute best way is in a face-to-face meeting.

However, if your client decides they simply want some information posted out to them, send it immediately. Make sure you get the name and address right – repeat it

back on the phone. Spelling mistakes this early in the proceedings can cast doubt on your professionalism. Also ask for her phone number. Send a cover letter thanking her for her interest and letting her know that you will follow up within a few days. Call a few days later to ensure she received the materials and ask if she has any questions.

Initial consultation

The purpose of this meeting is to learn as much as possible about the bride and groom, and what they want, so you can show them how hiring you will help them achieve the wedding of their dreams.

Where to conduct the meeting

If you have an office – at home or elsewhere – and it's well decorated and professional, by all means conduct your meeting there. You will have all your materials at your fingertips in order to demonstrate your services. If you choose to have a meeting at home, ensure you will not be interrupted by noisy children or dogs barking.

If this is not an option, you can conduct the meeting at the bride and/or groom's home, or their parents' home, or at a café or restaurant convenient for you both.

What to bring to the meeting

If the meeting takes place outside your office, be sure to come armed with all your promotional materials. Here are some items you might want to bring to a meeting:

- a list of questions to find out what the couple wants
- a notepad and pen to make notes
- your portfolio
- references from past clients
- business cards
- your brochure (if you have one)
- your portfolio
- price list and sample packages (e.g., full service, wedding day only etc.)
- wedding planner checklists
- brochures from preferred vendors
- a budget estimator (found in most wedding planner software programs) or one you've created yourself with spread sheet software
- a calculator
- a two-year calendar or date book that includes the following year
- a blank contract

Although this is just an initial consultation, you should be prepared to sign a contract on the spot if the clients choose to go ahead, so always bring a blank contract just in case.

What to wear

An initial consultation is a business meeting, so you should always wear appropriate business attire. However, as wedding planners are creative people with a flair for fashion and decoration, expressing this aspect of yourself is OK too – finding a balance is best. You only get one chance to make an impression – so think professional, creative and forward thinking.

Steer clear of too casual – jeans, mini-skirts – and think suits (but not too boring business-y!). Perhaps a coloured suit, or a dress with a smart jacket. No loud prints! Black is always good, but make it interesting with a splash of colour in the form of a scarf or some funky jewellery.

For men, the best choice is casual, but no jeans or cargo pants.

Detail is always important in a wedding planner, so make sure your shoes are spotlessly clean and in good repair.

You will be expected to fit in at any events you attend, so you should be prepared for that also. Don't go overboard – you will not be expected to compete with the bridesmaids. A simple but smart dress or suit will suffice.

Who will attend the initial consultation

Ideally, you, the bride and the groom. But you may find the parent's of either the bride or groom, or both, in attendance also. You may find this more challenging, as everyone will want to put their '2 cents' in. Make sure you involve the bride in every conversation, even if the groom's mother is dominating the proceedings. It's important that you get along with everyone, but that you build a good rapport with the bride in particular; so always ask what she thinks.

What to say

Ask questions about what the clients want, and listen twice as much as you talk! Instead of describing all your services, focus on what the clients want, and offer a few ideas for their wedding. Don't worry about someone stealing your ideas. The fact that you are willing to offer some innovative ideas suggests that there are plenty more where those came from – a good way to promote your business.

The issue of money, and whether your fees and services are worth the cost, is bound to be raised either on the phone or at the meeting. If you followed our script for the telephone call, you have already planted the seed in the bride's head that you will take all the stress and worrying out of the planning process and hopefully you won't have to justify your fee during the conversation.

If you do get involved in this conversation, remember to focus on the benefits of your services, which include:

-You can actually save them money because you can negotiate lower prices with vendors. (This will depend on both your fees and the relationships you have

established with vendors. However you should definitely let them know if – even after paying your fee – the wedding will cost less than if they had organised it themselves.)

-You can save the couple hours of time. Show them the checklists of everything to be done in the organising all the details of the wedding, and ask them if they have time to do this on top of their already busy schedules.

-Let the couple know they can do any of the tasks they want to do, but you are available to take on any of the tasks they *don't* want to do.

-You can come up with lots of options for them, but ultimately it's their day, and they 'call the shots'.

-You have back-up plans for all your vendors, should anything go wrong, so they can rest assured their wedding day will be trouble free.

-With your help, the couple can enjoy a stress-free wedding day.

Remember to focus on the couple. Ask them why they want to hire a wedding planner – in thinking this through and explaining it to you, they may talk themselves into hiring you!

CONCLUSION

We hope that you have thoroughly enjoyed the program and we look forward to seeing your course assignments!

If you need help with any of the assignments- please ask! We are here to help!

On successful completion of your assignments- we can issue you your Certificate of Professional Wedding Planning.

For additional training and resources, please login to our training centre at:

www.theweddingplannerinstitute.com.au/studentlogin

