

# The What, When & How of Wedding Ceremonies

## A nontraditional primer for the eager and the anxious!

*\*Disclaimer: Weddings vary greatly based on culture, religion, & personal peculiarities of the couple. This is just a stab in the dark with no guarantee to reflect the actual ceremony in which you are now involved.\**

In general, there are two main parts: the walky parts & the talky parts.

### **Walky Parts: Processional & Recessional**

#### **Processional: The First Thing!**

This is a fancy way of saying the wedding party walks down the aisle & takes their places at the front. Who walks & in what order—along with who stands or sits where is up for discussion.

There's usually music.

#### **Recessional: The Last Thing!**

This is a fancy way of saying everyone walks back down the aisle & the party gets started! The couple goes first & once down the aisle, any **attendants** (*bridesmaids, groomsmen, groomsmaids, bridesmen*) pair up & follow.

There's usually music. There's a 85% chance you'll have to take a lot of pictures before you get to party.

### **Talky Parts: Welcome, Talking, Vows, Rings, More Talking, the Kiss!**

The ceremony is usually performed by an **officiant**, who might be a professional officiant, a religious figure, a judge, or a friend who discovered they can get ordained online. Your job? Smile & don't lock your knees!

#### **Welcome or Opening Remarks: "We are gathered here today. . ."**

Welcome, thanks, special acknowledgements. Might include a prayer, communal blessing, reading, or a rousing shout of "So say we all" if the couple in question are *Battlestar Galactica* fans.

#### **Wedding Address or Reflection on Marriage: Honestly, anything could happen here!**

When I officiate, I tell the couple's story & read something meaningful (chosen by the couple) about love & marriage. But it could also include Bible readings, family members standing & talking, more prayers, cleansing of chakras, or pretty much anything that the couple or officiant thinks is important to set the mood for . . .

#### **The Exchange of Vows: "To have & to hold, for better, for worse"**

The couple makes their promises. "Vows" is a fancy word for promises. The couple might answer some questions with "I do!" or read vows they've written.

#### **The Exchange of Rings: "With this ring, I thee wed."**

You probably have this one figured out.

#### **Ritual of Unity**

This is the couple's opportunity to get uber-traditional or try something new & funky: candles, wine, boxes, sand, glass, water, fire, sage, tea, rosaries, flowers, ribbons, and, very likely, more talking may be involved.

#### **Closing, Pronouncement, the Kiss, Presentation: "I pronounce you married! You may kiss!"**

Wrapping things up! Get ready to applaud! The recessional is next! After you exit, hang tight for photos!

#### **Happily Ever After!**

*Katrina S. Baecht, Wedding Officiant @ Spoken Heart Ceremonies  
Customized Wedding Ceremonies & Consulting Services for Friend Officiants*

## 42 absolutely vitally important points of etiquette that you must know or the entire day is ruined & it's all your fault.\*

### WEDDING PARTY & FAMILY

At a minimum this is composed of the officiant & the couple. OR it may include grandparents, parents, 12 attendants on each side along with 2 ring bears & 3 flower girls, one pulled in a wagon with a puppy. Attendants might be groomsmen, bridesmaids, groomsmen, bridesmen.

Wedding party--your main job is to walk down the aisle.

Family--you may be asked to either walk down the aisle OR to simply take your seats on the front row.

### WALKING DOWN THE AISLE

You don't have to stick to the old-fashioned lockstep wedding march, but don't race down the aisle either. You can smile & keep your eyes on your destination or look around for friends & family in a friendly way.

### SOLO

If you are walking solo & have a bouquet, hold it at your belly button with both hands. If you are walking solo & don't have a bouquet, just be natural with your arms---no need to clasp hands as if headed to a funeral.

### PARTNERS or PAIRS

First, if you are walking with a partner, especially if you don't know them, take a minute to introduce yourselves!

There's nothing more uncomfortable than walking down the aisle trying to look natural with a total stranger.

Second, when the two of you get to the front, it's nice to acknowledge each other, with a brief look or smile before you part. If you are walking with a partner & have a bouquet or flower, you still want to hold it at your belly button, you just have one less hand to do so with.

**Traditionally, ladies**, if escorted by a gentleman, take his LEFT arm. This keeps his right sword arm free for fighting off dragons, brigands, & small dogs. If he's left-handed, traditionally, he should have been bludgeoned with a small stick until he gave up left-handedness as a unnatural practice. So that's an oversight on somebody's part---but you'll still be on his left & just have to hope no dragons attack.

**Gentlemen, offer your arm.** Don't make the lady look for it!

YOU ARE NOT LINKING ARMS: A gentleman offers his arm, & a lady gently takes it so she retains her balance if wearing perilously high heels. Don't slide your arm all the way through and link up as if playing Red Rover.

**That said, in a modern wedding:** you might be partnered with someone of the same sex---you can walk arm in arm or simply side-by-side. You'd be surprised at how good walking side-by-side looks when done with confidence.

### BEST MAN or WOMAN

You may be holding the rings. You should hand them over when the officiant asks for them. It's always a good idea to check in with the officiant and ask for your cue.

It's most helpful to have them untied or out of any container they might be in.

### MAID OF HONOR or MAN OF HONOR

You may be asked to hold the bride's bouquet---some brides hand it off when asked to join hands for vows & others hand it off immediately. Discuss it with her, but in general, let HER hand it to you when she's ready. Don't try to wrest it from her when you think it's time. Also be prepared to either return it to her after the kiss or hand it to the officiant to return. As an officiant, I step out of the way of the kiss (so the couple gets a nice photo), take the bouquet from whomever is holding it, and return it to the bride before announcing the couple.

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*\*Nope, I didn't count. Yep, it's a Douglas Adams reference. No, these are not actual points of etiquette. No, you won't actually ruin the entire day. Remember, most people don't know what's supposed to happen. If something goes wrong, fix it quietly or act like it was supposed to happen that way. Chances are no one will notice. ☺*