



Your Handy Guide to...

# Wedding Planning

## Foreword

First of all, congratulations on your engagement! A wedding marks a very special moment in one's life. However large or small your event, you undoubtedly want the day to go smoothly and to plan without any added stress. Having played at numerous weddings over the years, I have asked brides and grooms what they found has worked well and not so well for them in their planning stages. A wedding, as I am sure you are only too aware, is not simply a single day out of the calendar. With the preparation and planning, it involves weeks, months and sometimes years (yes, I have been booked for weddings with 2 years advanced notice before). And with so much to think about - whether it be food arrays, seating plans, wedding invitations, venue hire and more - it can often seem a daunting task to put that pen to paper. Without tips from others, I know I would be struggling too. For definite.

That's why I wrote this document, to act as an informal guide for those planning for that big day. Being split into ten manageable sections, this guide will lead you through various key stages of the planning process, helping you make decisions, prioritise and complete the tasks essential for successfully planning the dream day. You can also check out the ultimate wedding checklist from my site too - [www.music.rajennagar.com](http://www.music.rajennagar.com). In short, I want you to be able to not only enjoy the day of the wedding, but also, believe it or not, the time spent organising it! With this document focusing on event planning and management, other aspects of the day, such as choosing the dress, make-up, hair, gift lists and rings are not featured. With a track record of regretful purchases and a string of fashion faux pas, I really don't think I am the best person to ask with these things!

I hope this guide is helpful for you. It has been great fun to write, and I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did writing it!

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2014, Loughborough  
Event Pianist & Violinist

## One. First Celebrations

The big question has been popped! Of course, you'll want to tell everybody that you are now engaged. You could personally call close family and friends or/and post your exciting update on a social media site, like Facebook for all your friends to see.



News spreads. So not after long will everyone that matters come to realise your engagement. Adding considerably more excitement than a Facebook update, you could even organise an engagement party, dinner or drinks to celebrate the fact that you are getting married. An engagement event need not be overplanned or a burden to organise; it acts as a fun way to gather with your friends and family to toast to your life milestone. Save your energies for the big(ger) day! Most brides and grooms that I spoke to organised their engagement party in their own house, or booked out a restaurant/bar. "As long as there is good food and good drink, everyone is happy", one client commented. I have to say, I completely agree.

To go all out, you could even announce your engagement through the local newspapers!

## Two. Getting Started

So step one - the proposal and first celebrations - has been completed. Great! The thought of organising everything from scratch may seem daunting, and may leave you questioning the point of that fabled white wedding when you could just elope abroad. However, jokes aside, planning doesn't have to be a stressful experience.

The single most common response from clients about reasons for stress was 'lack of organisation' and 'last-minuteness'. This is not to say that you need to be regimented in military fashion for 'Operation Wedding'. But more rather, allow yourself ample time to formulate the solid foundations of the day, such as choice of venue hire, food arrays, guest lists, colour schemes and cash bar vs open bar. Then you will find that everything else will fall into place.



Don't worry too much about the tiny details on the outset, such as the specific flower you want on the table or a particular chocolate that you want to give to your guests as a compliments gift. These small touches are crucially important in making your wedding stand out and giving the day your personal touch. However, it is vital to pre-prioritise your efforts and time from most essential to least essential for the smooth running of the day.

When starting out, clients also commented that it was massively useful to collate any wedding ideas that they see in the form of a virtual scrapbook. We will discuss this later on in the guide.

## Three. Set the Date

When setting the date of your wedding, it is important to consider a few things:

### 1. Season

Do you want to have a gorgeous outdoor summer wedding or that magical winter white wedding?

The weather not only influences the style and location of the wedding, but it may provide a backdrop for a completely different mood to the day. If it's snowing (hurray to the perfect white wedding!) or if it's 30°C, people behave differently. What feel do you want your wedding to have? Which season will fit this best?

Summer	Free-spirited fun, sun-dappled settings, wild and sweaty dancing
Winter	Opulence, snowfall, holiday sparkle
Autumn	Rich colors, nostalgia, mulled apple cider
Spring	Freshness, pastels, a daffodil bouquet



### 2. Symbolism

You could set the wedding on a date that has an important significance for you both. It could be the date your eyes first met or the date that you officially became a couple. Interestingly, there are cultures that employ traditional methods to select an auspicious date for the union of a couple. In Japanese culture, families use an

ancient astrological calendar, called the Koyomi to pick the day, whilst Hindu culture involves factoring in the couple's complex 36-point birth charts and the location of the wedding. Even with the date chosen, there is no guarantee that you can marry on the day that you want. The venue may be booked, or the day may fall on an awkward 'no-no' date (see below). Despite this, couples have said that they have always managed to get a date close to their preference with enough notice. Do tell your guests if there is any significance in timings in the ceremony programs!

### 3. Price

The cost may also affect your choice of date for the wedding. Typically, June, August and September are the most popular times to marry consequently prices are inevitably higher. However the flip side to this is that weddings in January, March and December can be much cheaper as you are not competing for venues with lots of other couples. The day of the week can also factor heavily in the costings. Saturdays carry a far more expensive price tag than mid-week weddings. It may even be possible to get the actual venue free, during the week as the businesses need to get your trade.

### 5. VIP Preferences

You may already have a date/season in mind that you would like to get married. But now you want to check with your close family and friends whether this date also suits them. It is worth considering those that may need to travel far or live with dependants. However, be forewarned here; previous clients have commented that it is best to ask only the most important guests of the 'wouldn't-get-married-without-them' variety in order to avoid unnecessary stress. One client commented, "Out of politeness, I began asking more distant friends and families, and was left with a sea of preferred dates, which was a nightmare to wade through. And then I had to end up choosing a date that worked for me and my closest family/friends only. In the end it's about those that are closest to you to share the day with. It is impossible to please everyone, so I would say don't worry too much about having everyone under the sun at your wedding!" So, keep the process simple and don't budge once the date has been set!

### 6. No-No Days

There are most certainly dates to avoid for a wedding. The weekend before the deadline for tax returns is not the best time to get married, especially if either of you is in the financial business. Whatever your business or career you will know when your busiest time is at work so don't choose to get married then. It is also advisable not to book when it is popular holiday times of the year and don't forget to check local calendars for festival

dates, sporting events and school holidays, these times will also boost the cost. Sometimes your religion may have an impact on dates that you can or cannot choose, don't forget to check this.

#### 4. Holiday

If you have always wanted a themed wedding you would do well to plan your wedding carefully. Can you hold your wedding on St. Patrick's Day if you are Irish? Could you utilise the Easter theme? Maybe you could make the most of having your wedding on a holiday weekend when everyone is in the holiday mood and off work for a few days, this would also aid those attending from out of town. But with holiday weekends you also need to consider that it could be detrimental to your guests as they may have a holiday break booked.



When finalising your date it is important that you leave yourself enough time for organisation and preparation, not to mention time to save for the cost. Once you have chosen the date it gives you a tangible deadline to work to. Setting up like this will help you focus your attention on details and provide you with a clarified timeline. This in turn will allow you to obtain accurate and specific costs from venues, staff and suppliers well in advance you will then have specific rather than hypothetical costings.

## Four. Scrapbook!

In the course of wedding planning don't let it consume you and your time completely. From the outset make sure you are organised. Create a wedding log on your computer, you can put anything in this log, ideas, invoices, costing sheets, guest lists, in fact, everything to do with your wedding.

You can utilise all the free software on the Internet, like dropbox, the cloud or google drive. You will then be able to access your file anywhere from any computer or tablet, you will even be able to letter others participate by giving them access to your files. It may take a little time initially setting it all up but it will save so much time later and make the whole planning process so much easier.



## Five. The Guestlist

The Guest List is the part of a wedding with a great propensity for problems, so it will almost certainly be necessary for you to make some sort of concessions. Be prepared to make compromises, as it is highly unlikely that you will be able to invite everyone. The amount of guests you can invite is governed by many factors, primarily the size of your budget but also the size of the venue, the type of wedding (big, small, formal or intimate) and the amount of family and friends you have.

In an ideal situation the invited guests would be half and half. Fifty percent of the guests would be from the Groom's family and friends and fifty percent would be from the Bride's side. However more often than not it doesn't work out like that. Why not create a wedding folder and in that folder place a spreadsheet consisting of a guest list, which should start with the people who are in the immediate wedding party, Bridesmaids, Ushers, Parents, Siblings and any others with key roles, don't forget to include spouses where appropriate.



Then make a list of:

- The first people you told that you got engaged (aka the VIPs!)
- Guests from the engagement party or drinks
- Close family
- Close friends
- Colleagues
- Friends
- Neighbours
- Relatives

In this spreadsheet it would be advantageous to add two more columns for Ceremony & Meal and Evening Reception. Then mark accordingly, next to each name, which parts of the wedding you would like them to attend.

Initially you are just creating the list, you will not be able to decide on the exact number of guests until you have clarified the capacity of the venue. The tailoring and trimming of the initial list is where you will both need to make compromises. If you find that your list is too large, why not consider firstly not inviting babies or young children, you could also decide not to include workmates or guests' partners who are not really known to you.

It is quite probable that parents may create a fuss about who should or should not be invited. If your parents are this way inclined, why not get them involved from the outset by inviting them to collaborate with you by forming their own guest-lists. You can then make it clear to them that obviously you will not be able to invite everyone on their lists but you will try your best to accommodate them. Involving parents serves two purposes, firstly they will feel involved plus their list may have someone crucial that you didn't want to miss.

## Six. Assign Roles

Weddings are a time when you may want to actively involve friends and family. There are many varied ways you can get them included, the number of roles is up to you but will ultimately be governed by the potential candidates and your budget.



Your main point here will be to assign the right job to the best person. Once you have selected your candidates don't expect them to automatically know what their duties entail. It is easier for you and them if you take the time to discuss exactly what is expected of them, this way when the big day comes no one will feel awkward or under pressure. It makes the whole day easier if everyone knows exactly what is expected beforehand.

### Roles Include:

- Best Man
- Maid of Honour/Chief Bridesmaid
- Father of the Bride (or the person chosen to give the bride away)
- Bridesmaids
- Flower Girls
- Page Boys
- Ushers
- Toastmaster or Master of Ceremonies (somebody charismatic with a loud voice)

## Seven. Budget Setting & Contributions

Realistically no one should even think of starting to plan his or her wedding without formulating a budget or at least having a provisional figure in mind. The traditional idea used to be that the Bride's Father paid for the whole thing, however these days it's normally more of a family affair with the future Bride and Groom contributing the majority.



While setting your budget it is important to find how much everybody is willing or able to contribute towards your big day. It can be very awkward and embarrassing to discuss money this early in the process but it is imperative that you know exactly what you are working with otherwise you may be making plans outside of your price range, it is necessary for you to know exactly what you have to spend.

It is possible you may be one of those couples who decide to go it alone as far as paying for the wedding. This has its benefits. If you pay for everything yourself you will not feel obliged to invite people just because of someone who contributed to your funds. You will also not face potentially awkward moments asking people to contribute.

When you have made the decision to either go it alone or accept help from others you should have a good idea of your budget. It is now time to create another spreadsheet. This will help you compile a list of expenses and you will be able to note down all your financial activities, if you keep this up to date and in order you will be able to see instantly whether or not you are keeping on track with spending. Also at any one time you will know exactly what you have spent and what is left to utilise. Some people may also find it advantageous to open a bank account, purely for the wedding, this may help with saving. You should allocate your budget according to your specific requirements, its your day, pick the elements that are most important to you and your partner. Once you have allocated your budget compare it to the average wedding budget and see if what you are aiming at is realistic.

These ideas are based on averages, it is possible you may have significant differences. You may wish to spend more on transport and entertainment and less on food, rather than just reducing your food outgoings and having less, try to be inventive, could you make the food yourself? The DIY route on weddings is becoming more and more popular and can result in great savings and also add significantly to the more personal and unique atmosphere of your big day.

According to UKWeddingBelles, the average wedding will cost **£16,164** in 2013. Here's a breakdown of where the money goes:

Stationery – £320

Stag and hen nights – £318

Insurance – £122

The service – £520

Wedding rings – £640

Flowers – £680

Reception decor – £500

The bride's outfit – £1,300

Hair and beauty – £195

The groom's outfit – £180

Attendant's outfits – £360

Transport – £290

Photography – £1,080

Videography – £875

Venue, including food and drinks – £4,600

Music & Entertainment – £560

Wedding cake – £290

Gifts – £134

Honeymoon and first night hotel – £3,200

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more and more popular and can result in great savings and also add significantly to the more personal and unique atmosphere of your big day.

## Eight. The Venue

If you choose to get married in a church or require a local registrar, make sure you seek advice from your local Registry Office. When the ceremony and wedding venues have been chosen it should follow that the rest of your day should fall into place. One more important thing to consider is whether or not your venue has hotel facilities. Your first night together as a married couple is special and important, so this should be something to consider when picking your wedding venue. There are some important considerations when choosing a venue, which I have listed below.



### Size of Function Room

It may seem obvious but many forget, make sure the room is large enough to accommodate the number of guests that you have invited. It may look huge when empty, but don't forget once you have added the essentials such as tables, chairs, buffet table, bar, D.J. and a dance floor that space will soon diminish. Add to this the fact that you don't want your guests to feel crowded or in need of elbow room and that huge space starts to get a lot smaller. Don't forget to ask if the room can be decorated to suit your wedding colours or theme, or at the least be neutral.

### A View

Does your venue have a view? Is there a beautiful vista of the rolling countryside, or are the windows facing the dull brick wall of the nextdoor building or the back alley? Photographs online are one thing, but visiting a

venue for yourself may give you the best impression of the venue's true visual impact.

### Designated Areas

Once your guests arrive it should be obvious to them in which areas of your function room they can eat, drink, talk and dance. Try to envisage your wedding in the space do you think it would be able to separate into areas or sections that you require? If not you will probably feel too cramped.

### Privacy

Privacy varies greatly from venue to venue, as does the importance that different couples may put on it. In public venues, such as a park, you will probably lack privacy. If you want to keep an outdoor theme but maintain privacy, think about hiring a lawn on a private estate or golf course. It is also advisable to ask questions on security at your chosen venue to keep away gate-crashers. It is possible there may still be privacy issues if your event is indoors. Many hotels and halls will hold more than one function at a time. If there are other events going on at the same time as yours it may be advisable to ask about the impact this may have on your event. Will there be noise interference? If this bothers you try to reschedule your event when there are no others on. It may also pay to check the venue when there is more than one function on and see the effects for yourself before you make a final decision.

### Lighting

Lighting can make an event or venue. It can greatly affect the mood and space. If you are marrying in the day make sure your venue has plenty of natural light. No one wants to spend half a day in a dark room when the sun is shining outside. If it is an evening affair make sure that the room is not too dim and that the lighting can be controlled for the big entrance, dancing, speeches etc. The most important thing is to check the venue at the same time of day that you will be holding your wedding. That way you will get a true impression of the effect you want to achieve.

### Power Outlets

A little point but important nonetheless. Check your venue has enough power outlets dotted around and where these are located, these are for your guests to plug in mobile phones and cameras etc. There is also the entertainments crew who will need plenty of access to electricity.



### Acoustics

Check whether your venue is susceptible to echo. This could cause some weird sound problems for your entertainments team or make it difficult for your guests to converse. A hard wood or tile floor will resonate sounds whilst a carpet would tend to muffle them.

### Parking

Make sure that there is plenty of parking available in the vicinity of your venue. Almost all your guests will arrive by car and having no parking facilities could make things awkward. If parking is a problem try to look for alternate parking where you can organise a shuttle bus or taxis to take guests to and from the venue.

## Nine. Buy Wedding Insurance

The average UK wedding costs between £15,000 and £20,000. Just think about the cost of wedding rings, a wedding dress, catering and the many other wedding essentials and you will soon see how much they add up to. While it is not very romantic to think about what might go wrong with your wedding, it is best to be prepared. Purchasing wedding insurance from the moment you start spending money on your wedding could really help with peace of mind for both your wedding spend, and honeymoon spend alike.



## Ten. The Photographer & Musician

Throughout your wedding day you will experience so many wonderful moments that you will want to remember forever. By booking a good wedding photographer/videographer you'll be able to look over your favourite moments time and time again and they will be a treasure to keep forever.

Would you like to have live music during your wedding? Would you like it for the entire day, or just during the wedding ceremony. What genres of music do you like most? Classical, jazz or pop? If you are unsure about what kind of music you would think would suit each aspect of the wedding - whether it be the ceremony, drinks reception or dinner - the musician will often have a clear idea of what works well and what doesn't work so well. From experiences and judging the mood, most musicians will be able to select an appropriate playlist of songs to play for the day. Personally, I find that during the ceremony and as guests are arriving, classical music goes down particularly well to create an auspicious and sensitive atmosphere. Some couples want to open the day with a lively tone, so opt for a mix of pop, jazz and classical. However, it is worth noting that some (often religious) venues specify classical music to be played in their halls only.



It is also worth asking yourself whether you want a solo performer or a group of musicians, such as a duo, trio or quartet. Of course, the more people involved to hire, the more expensive it will be.

Another important aspect to the day's music will be the DJ. The DJ holds a great deal of responsibility for the day, not only for selecting and playing appropriate music, but also integrating audio-visuals, sound effects and well delivered timings for the key moments of the wedding day. This includes the speeches, the arrival of the bride and groom during the reception, the first dance. When choosing a DJ, there are three top questions to ask (Source: MyDeeJay).

### 1. Do you offer a written contract?

All of the wedding disc jockeys you interview may not have the same standards of professionalism. A written, legal contract is one of the first indicators of whether a DJ is professional and reliable. Furthermore, a contract establishes the DJ's obligation to the client and outlines what is required for the DJ's success, by outlining his setup requirements and other factors related to his performance. For this reason, a written contract is absolutely essential and any DJ not using a written contract should not, in our opinion, be considered for a wedding reception.

### 2. Will you be the DJ at our wedding?

Often, the person you speak with is not the person who will be your DJ on your wedding day. This is a very common practice among large agencies. It is absolutely paramount that you have an opportunity to interview, in person, the specific DJ that you will be working with and determine whether you feel comfortable with them. You should also expect that the individual DJ's name is specified on your contract – it is the only way you can be guaranteed his or her services at your wedding.

### 3. May we meet with you in person before we sign a contract?

Many wedding DJs attempt to conduct their interviews over the telephone and through email instead of meeting face-to-face with prospective clients. In our experience, there are two reasons a disc jockey would do this – either they don't feel you are worth their time, or they have something to hide. Some deejays are very different in person than on the telephone and what is presented on their website, and you should insist on meeting in face-to-face so you can judge for yourself whether they are a good match for you and your wedding. Your "gut" feeling is very important in selecting the right disc jockey, and it's practically impossible to make this evaluation unless you are together in person.

(Source: MyDeeJay.com).