



A FIELD GUIDE FOR YOUR WEDDING DAY

20 Wedding Tips From Behind the Camera

*Ten years of weddings, distilled into
the things I wish every couple knew*

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Hey — and congratulations.

This is completely free. No strings attached. Whether you ever work with Mountain Of Stone Media or not changes nothing in here — I just want you to have a great wedding and the information to make it happen. That's it.

After ten years and hundreds of wedding days, I've picked up a lot of things I wish every couple knew going in. So here it is: the real tips and tricks, the stuff I'd tell you if we were sitting across from each other. Take what's helpful, ignore the rest.

— *Joseph, Mountain Of Stone Media*

TIP 01

Something will pop up — and that's okay

Here's the truth after ten years: on almost every wedding day, one little thing doesn't go exactly to plan. And it's almost always small. Maybe the cake doesn't get delivered and someone makes a quick run to a grocery store (it happens!). Maybe the bouquet shows up late, or you forget your reception shoes. These are tiny bumps, not disasters — barely a footnote by the time you're watching your film a year later.

The only reason I mention it now is so it can't rattle you later: make the plan, work the plan, and if some little thing wobbles, just let it roll off. Because at the end of the day, you are marrying the person you love, and that's what the whole day is really about. Decide ahead of time that a small hiccup won't touch your joy — and it won't. Don't sweat the small stuff.

TIP 02

Make it your own

You'll have people pulling you in every direction telling you how it "should" be done. The best weddings I've ever filmed were the ones where the couple said, *"This is our wedding, and this is how we want to do it."*

That includes tradition: **tradition is what you make it.** Keep the ones your family holds dear, start your own, or skip the ones that aren't really you. I've filmed a cake split right down the middle — half classic, half Naruto-themed, because the bride said *"it's his cake too"* — and a couple who worked in a dance with their dog on top of all the usual ones. And if that sounds corny or weird to you? That's exactly the point — it wasn't your wedding, it was theirs.

It isn't always playful, either. One couple honored a loved one who had passed by saving them a front-row seat with their photo and a Bible beside it, and during the ceremony each bridesmaid laid a flower there.

The same goes for the big choices: get married in a barn, throw a brunch-style wedding, send yourselves off with bubbles or streamers instead of sparklers — whatever feels like you. Every couple walks down an aisle; what makes a wedding unforgettable is that it's unmistakably *yours*.

TIP 03

All things in moderation

You can go overboard on any one idea — check yourself before you wreck yourself. The clearest example is alcohol: you know the people you're inviting. If you've got an open bar and you know certain guests can't handle it, maybe rethink it. I once watched a guest get so drunk he walked out to his car, came back with a Super Soaker full of beer, and started spraying it into people's mouths — and all over the venue, including the ceilings. Let's just say I doubt that couple ever saw their security deposit again. And I've had more than one wedding where we couldn't capture the grand exit or the last dance at all, because the groom had so much to drink he physically couldn't stand, let alone walk out — those are moments you don't get back. It's your day; protect it. A little restraint in the right places keeps the whole thing classy and smooth.

TIP 04

Spend your money on memories

When the day is over, the flowers wilt, the food is gone, and the dress goes in a box. The one thing you actually get to **keep** is your memories — and those live in your photos and your video. That's where your money is best spent, more than on the venue or the extras. Now, I'm a wedding filmmaker, so yes — I'm clearly biased here. But being biased doesn't make it any less true. It's also worth preserving them in lasting ways: encasing your bouquet in resin, a shadow box for your dress, anything that makes the day last.

And here's how to actually evaluate a videographer, because it's confusing out there. Most hand you a short, highly edited highlight film and call it done. A highlight film is wonderful — it's the piece you'll *share* — but it's a small, stylized slice of the day. What you really want is all three:

- ▲ **All of the unedited footage** — your memories in full, every moment, nothing left behind.
- ▲ **A ceremony cut** — the full ceremony, start to finish, because that's where the actual wedding happened.
- ▲ **The highlight film** — the short, polished, shareable piece.

The catch: videographers call these by all kinds of different names, so it's hard to tell which is which — and sometimes you want a very specific *style*. The key is this: if you have the full unedited footage and the ceremony cut, you can always have it edited later into whatever style you want — even a vintage, old-camera look can be created in post *while still being shot in high quality*. What you can never get back is footage that was never filmed. So prioritize getting it all, not just a pretty three-minute reel. The same goes for your photographer — choose work you'd be glad to look back on for the rest of your life.

TIP 05

Have a timeline

Even a loose timeline keeps your whole day running smoothly. I've filmed plenty of weddings that ran by the seat of their pants, and they simply don't flow as well — there's more waiting, more confusion, more stress. And plan around this: almost every wedding day moves *slowly* until the dress goes on, then everything compresses at once — nerves, letters, first looks, hair and makeup all wrapping up together. Build in more buffer than you think you need, because that stretch always runs later than planned.

One of the biggest things that protects your timeline is keeping your ceremony and reception in the same place — or as close together as you can. Every move between locations quietly eats time you didn't budget for: loading cars, driving, parking, getting everyone re-seated. It's one of the most common places a day falls behind. When it all happens in one spot, there's no scramble between the ceremony and the reception, your guests never have an awkward gap to fill, and your vendors aren't losing an hour tearing down and setting up somewhere else. If a single venue can do both, it's one of the simplest decisions you can make for a calm, smooth day.

TIP 06

Don't have a late ceremony

Your photographer and videographer need **light** — it's that simple. A ceremony held while you still have good daylight gives you better photos and better video, period. If the start gets pushed back, a late ceremony only gets darker from there. I've filmed several weddings at night, including a few where the venue's outdoor lights didn't work at all — thank goodness I always bring my own. Give yourself daylight as a buffer.

TIP 07

Find your bridal-party sweet spot

This one's not a rule, just a helpful thing to think about. A big bridal party can be a huge plus — especially for fun, with more of your favorite people right there with you — but it does get cumbersome: the bigger the group, the longer everything takes and the harder it is to keep everyone on schedule. Hair and makeup alone can stretch for hours. I'd never talk you out of the party you want — just know that in almost every way, a smaller party runs more efficiently. There's a sweet spot for every wedding; the trick is finding your number, rather than feeling like you have to include every single friend. And if you do go big, that's totally fine — just lean on the other tips here to keep the day smooth.

TIP 08

Box up your details

The single best prep tip I give. A few weeks before, grab a shoebox and put **all your details in one place**: the rings, your invitation suite (*the #1 thing couples forget — and it's in almost every detail shot*), perfume, the garter, jewelry, cuff links, your shoes, the veil, anything meaningful. When the photographer and I arrive, the very first thing we ask for is the detail box. One ready box means the morning starts fast and nothing gets hunted down or forgotten at the last minute.

TIP 09

Dress for comfort

A couple of small things that make a big difference, especially down here:

- ▲ **Don't suffer for your shoes.** If you're wearing heels — especially the pointed kind that sink into grass — grab a set of heel protectors so you can actually walk at an outdoor venue. But here's the secret: most of the time, no one even sees your shoes. If you want that Cinderella look, keep a pretty pair to slip on for a few photos and videos, then actually get married in flats. Nobody will know the difference, and your feet will thank you.
- ▲ **A small handheld fan.** Louisiana gets hot and humid, and you'll be in a dress under layers and lights. A little fan during getting-ready and photos is worth its weight in gold.

TIP 10

Be intentional with family

Make sure your family knows you care. Write them letters if you want, spend real time with them, and at the reception go find the grandparents and thank them for coming. Whether you're close with your family or not, they're still your family — a little intention here goes a long way and means more than you'd think.

TIP 11

Spend time with each *other*

You'd be surprised how often the bride and groom spend the reception apart — him with the guys, her with the girls — while the photographer and videographer are both trying to capture the two of you together. That doesn't make for great pictures, and more importantly, you just got married. Be together. Act like you love each other (at least act like it). Those are the moments you'll want to relive.

TIP 12

The first look

A lot of brides hesitate, usually over one fear: *"If he sees me before the aisle, he won't cry when I walk down."* After ten years of watching this, that's not how it works. You know your spouse — if they're a crier, they'll cry at the first look **and** at the aisle, and if they're in the gray zone, they'll be there either way. A first look doesn't *spend* the emotion; it usually doubles it.

What it actually gives you:

- ▲ **It takes the edge off** — the jitters melt the moment you see each other privately, and you walk into the day calmer.
- ▲ **It buys you time you can't get back later** — a first look opens a full photo and video session *before* the ceremony. If you're all at the same venue and your families are already there, you can knock out almost all of your bridal-party and family portraits early, while everyone's fresh. The amount of time that saves is huge — otherwise you're racing through those shots after the ceremony while your guests wait.

And it doesn't have to be with your spouse — it can be a moment with almost anyone: bride with her bridesmaids seeing the dress for the first time (or groom with his groomsmen), bride with her dad, groom with his mom, any combination that means something to you.

And have fun with it. I've seen a bride hide a few beers under her dress, set up a "first look" with the groomsmen, and when they turned around, lift the hem to reveal the stash — icing the whole crew. I've also seen a bride skip the reveal entirely and send the best man, in a cheap wedding dress, to tap the groom on the shoulder instead. A first look is a perfect place to sneak in a laugh.

TIP 13

Write letters

One of the most touching things you can do — and the only time you'll really get to do it like this. Write one to each other, and consider writing to the people who'd be moved to receive one: a parent, a grandparent, your new in-laws. It makes people feel like a true part of the day.

Write them early. Even if you don't think your letter is any good, treat it like starting anything in life — just start it, and make it better later. Most people put it off until the wedding day itself, which is exactly why writing ahead of time helps: it's one less thing on an already-full morning.

Don't be afraid to record them, either. Just because it's recorded doesn't mean it has to be used. Your videographer can film it a few ways — on camera, just your voice over the footage, or with everyone else out of the room for something more private — and whether you read it in your dress or your PJs is up to you; it just depends on your timeline. One tip worth asking for: record the reading three separate times. The first take is usually the most genuine — sometimes the tears on that first read are the best part — the second a little slower, and the third just for insurance. It only takes a few minutes, and it makes sure there's clean audio to use.

And here's the big one: even if you don't want the letters in your highlight film, have them recorded anyway for your FOMO edit. The most valuable thing you keep is your memories — letters and notes can get lost, but on video they're yours forever.

TIP 14

Be thoughtful about your marriage license signatures

You get to choose who signs your marriage license as witnesses — so be intentional about it. A great move: consider your grandparents. Older family members sometimes can't do much on the wedding day to feel involved, and naming them as witnesses is a quiet way to make them part of it. It sounds like a small thing, but to the right person it means the world.

TIP 15

Do fun things at the reception

The receptions that really pop are the ones with something going on. I've seen a host orchestrate the whole reception and it ran twice as well. I've seen the limbo, conga lines, and crowd games like "who's been married the longest" that pull everyone in. Plan a couple of fun, everyone's-invited moments — not because tradition says so, but because they make the night a celebration. And that's exactly what a reception is: a celebration with your friends and family.

TIP 16

Give useful, fun party favors

Party favors come in all shapes and sizes, and the best ones are things people will actually *use*. I've seen couples give out sandals for a beach wedding, koozies and cups, bottle openers — favors that keep getting used long after the day. Spend on something useful and fun; cheap, throwaway favors or a handful of candy just aren't memorable.

TIP 17

Get a QR code

Not everyone carries cash anymore, but almost everyone can pay digitally. Set up a QR code linked to where guests can pay you — use it before the wedding, during the wedding, and especially during the first dances (the money dance). It's a simple thing that ends up putting a lot more in your pocket. And take advantage of the send-off, too — you'd be surprised what a well-placed QR code, or even a little message on the back of the getaway car, can do for your bank account.

TIP 18

Keep a "fake exit" in your back pocket

Most vendors are booked for a set number of hours — usually eight — and anything past that is overtime. But your reception might not wrap until 11 or midnight while your photographer and videographer are only there until 9 or 10. A **fake exit** — a staged send-off earlier in the night, while your vendors are still there — solves it:

- ▲ You get your big send-off on film (sparklers, the getaway, all of it) without paying overtime.
- ▲ After the staged exit, the party keeps going for you, the bridal party, and anyone who wants to stay.
- ▲ It gives older family members a graceful early exit — a school night, church the next morning — so they're part of the send-off instead of slipping out and missing it.

You don't have to use it. Sometimes the right call is the opposite — book the extra hours or have your vendors start later — because the *end* of the reception matters most to you. If you want a true last dance filmed right before the real exit, there's no way to capture that without your vendors staying to the end. Either choice is great; just decide on purpose. Either way, it's a great thing to consider — and a wonderful option to have ready if you end up needing it.

TIP 19

Should you hire a coordinator?

Honest answer: it depends. I've seen incredible coordinators, and I've seen the opposite — ones who did almost *nothing*, barely more than a family member helping set up. Some venues include a coordinator (or a team) who genuinely makes the day run smoother; others, not so much. So there's no blanket yes or no.

Here's the nuance most people don't know: an experienced photographer and videographer already work *a little* like a coordinator. When it's time to cut the cake — and it feels like a whirlwind, you just got married, got announced, did your first dance, and now *how do we even pose?* — we're the ones watching for it. We'll cue the DJ to make the announcement, check in with you on timing, and adjust when the plan changes mid-reception. I've accidentally and inadvertently directed plenty of weddings simply because the day needed it; I'm there for you just as much as a coordinator is.

A small example of how seriously I take that: before the ceremony, I always check in with the DJ and ask him not to look to the coordinator for the cue to start. A coordinator is focused on starting at exactly the right time; I'm focused on making sure my cameras and audio are all rolling and the photographer is ready — because when it's all said and done, what we capture is the only thing you get to take with you. So I have the DJ look for *both* me and the coordinator before cuing the ceremony to begin. I'm always ready before start time, but there's a lot to set up, and I never want the highlight of the entire day to begin before it's being captured in full.

The real case for a good coordinator is simplicity: they're another set of hands and another ear, they hold the timeline, they handle ceremony setup and lineups, and they make the whole day smoother and less stressful for everyone. My best wedding days have had a great coordinator running the show while I focused entirely on capturing it.

So — if you've got a good coordinator, absolutely use them; they can make the day run extremely smooth and far less stressful. If you're not sure, spend the time to find a *good* one rather than just any one. (Side note: some coordinators also plan months ahead and help book all your vendors — flowers, catering, venue, photo booth, photographer, videographer — which can be a huge weight off your shoulders if that's the kind of help you need.)

TIP 20

Choose the right people — it's an investment

More than anything else on this list: who you hire matters. You're not just buying a service — you're investing in a moment you will never get to live again. The right photographer or videographer hands you back a day you can relive forever. The wrong one can hand you something that doesn't look or feel like your wedding at all.

People end up with the wrong fit for all kinds of reasons — and it's rarely on purpose. Sometimes it's budget. Sometimes it's not understanding what you're actually getting, or not knowing what something *should* cost. Sometimes it's being wowed by a flashy two-minute highlight reel without ever seeing a full film, hiring a friend or relative as a favor, or simply booking whoever was available and convenient. Any one of those can leave you with photos or video that just don't match what you pictured.

It cuts both ways, too. I've had a couple book me not really knowing what they'd get, and they were blown away by how much came back. But I've also seen the reverse — back when I offered multiple packages, a bride booked one with a few add-ons and only realized *after* her footage came in that she'd ordered the wrong thing. I was able to help her after the fact, because editing is where a lot of the magic truly happens — but the lesson stuck: knowing what to look for *before* you book is the first step.

So do a little homework. Hop on social media and ask who people would recommend for weddings — anonymously if you can, so you get honest answers — then actually spend time going through the suggestions. It sounds tedious, but a little time here saves you a lot on the back end. And keep this in mind: a low price doesn't mean the work is bad, and it doesn't mean it's good either — and the exact same is true at the high end. Price alone tells you very little. Look at full films, full galleries, and what's truly included.

It's honestly why I keep things to a single package — the ceremony, the highlight, and the FOMO edit — so the whole day gets captured and there's no guessing about what you're getting. Whoever you choose, aim for that same clarity. And let everything else in this guide work for you here, too. Now that you know more about how a wedding day actually unfolds, you'll know the right questions to ask, what to pay attention to, what to look for in someone's work, and what to reasonably expect — and that's exactly what helps you choose the right people with confidence.



One last thing

Your wedding is one day. Your memories are forever. Plan the day so you can actually be in it — and spend your energy on the people and the moments, because that's what you'll carry with you.

Congratulations again, and best of luck. You're going to do great.

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