

101

Wedding tips

(That no one thought to tell you)

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I need to thank all the couples who allowed us to be part of their “most important day” so that we could experience the good ideas and the problems.

I also need to thank all those people who gave us their tips and thoughts to pass on to you. All the hints and tips are given in good faith so please do not hold us responsible.

Comments and advice on business practices do not refer to ANY particular business.

I would also like to thank the members of the Association of Professional Wedding Services who publish “The Pink Book” which is full of useful information for people planning a wedding on the Wirral.

Introduction

In 1981, my husband Gary was a photography student with a firm commitment to photograph buildings and objects rather than have to deal with people. That same year, a very dear friend declared that the only person she would trust to take her wedding photographs was Gary.

So we got into the wedding photography business.

He turned out to be a natural - able to combine the skills of technical camera work, with a capacity to build relationships with almost anyone. My role in the business was to accompany Gary to gather people and arrange gowns and generally speed things along. We are now hooked and thoroughly enjoy being part of so many happy wedding days.

Since 1981, we have worked at literally hundreds of weddings. Most went extremely well so we can pass on how they got it right. Some weddings included hiccups, most of which could easily be avoided. We have also seen one or two disasters and they could definitely have been avoided!!

The chances are that you have not needed to plan a wedding before so you are not sure where to start. The aim of this book is to help you to learn quickly so that you do not regret some of the decisions that you make. You will probably read some of the points and think, “that’s obvious, and of course we would have done that”. There will possibly be some other points that you think, “well I never would have thought of that but it is obvious when you think about it”

The only thing better than learning from experience - is learning from someone else's experience.

The bottom line is that we want you to have a smooth running, fabulous day!

General information

- Most of the information in this book is just as applicable to Civil Partnerships.
- Pick your friends brains. Talk to people who have planned a wedding recently and ask their advice.
- Proper planning and preparation prevents poor performance. It's never too early to start the planning process. As soon as your date is set and the ceremony and reception venues are booked you need to throw yourself into organising everything else. Then you can sit back and relax rather than having a last minute crisis.
- Nearer to the day itself, don't put off until tomorrow, anything that could be done today. It's amazing how many last minute jobs crop up so get everything done early if possible.
- Get some guidance on prices before you start to plan and finalise your overall budget. You could go out to buy a new car with £3,000 in your pocket and a clear idea that you will not over spend. Of course, you would be disappointed when you found that it is impossible to get a new car for that price.
- Historically, family members and friends rallied around to help out with the cost of the wedding and with skills that they had to offer. In modern times this can still be a way of presenting a very personal and intimate wedding without spending too much money. Do be aware that the options available to modern brides are much wider than those available in the past so you may not want your wedding to have that olde worlde feel.
- If you do decide to involve someone you know, who is in the wedding business, do approach him or her in the same way that you would approach any other professional. (See below)
- If you have a well meaning relative or friend who offers their services, do check them out in the same way that you would a professional and be ready to say that you do not want them to do whatever it is that they are offering. In the past we have seen absolutely superb gowns made by Mums and Aunts. We have also seen some abominable creations. We have seen fabulous flowers arranged by groups of "Mums Flower Arranging Guild" and we have seen flowers that would have been tidier if they had been left where they were growing. Of course we haven't seen Uncle Harry's photos but we have heard about them.
- The real point about non-professionals is that they don't have the experience behind them and they don't have the professional back up if anything does go wrong. All professionals should have professional indemnity insurance and public liability insurance so that you have some comeback if they do not provide the service that you were expecting. (This is a point worth asking when you are shopping around.) If a friend lets you down you have no course for action at all.
- When you are choosing your services, remember that you will be in their hands for the day. Your minister/registrar, drivers, photographer and reception co-

ordinator are all going to be working on your behalf on the day. When you are choosing your services, you need to be sure that you feel able to trust those professionals and are willing to put yourself into their care for the part of the day that they are involved.

- Remember that professional wedding services have lots of information and knowledge that you can tap into. Do ask them for their advice and consider it seriously but don't let people push you into making choices or doing things their way if it doesn't suit you.
- Don't let some services dictate what other services can or cannot do. All your wedding services should be working together to make sure that you have a wonderful day so they should not be putting restrictions on your choices. Remind them that **YOU** are the customer.
- It's never too early to start delegating. If you are the type of person who has your finger on the button and you are one of the people getting married, it is incredibly difficult to be the only one who can answer everyone's questions on the day when you are busy being the star of the show and enjoying yourself. So, involve other people as early as possible and let everyone know what you have planned and what is happening.
- Do choose your attendants carefully. Your Chief bridesmaid and the Best man need to be the sort of people who can make things happen. It's useful if your other bridesmaids and the ushers are organised too. If you have dear friends who are absolutely scatty, you can still choose them as ushers or bridesmaids if you also choose some organised people alongside them.
- Do communicate with everyone. If you are not the sort of person who has everything timed with military precision, there is possibly someone in your family or friends who would like to be that organised. Don't fight them let them plan it all and then you can graciously stick to the plan.
- Your first priorities for services that need to be chosen are the venues for the ceremony and the reception. As soon as they are finalised you need to think about the services that can only be in one place at one time. They are cars, video, photographer and entertainment. Next, you need to think about services who can only deal with a limited number of weddings on any one day. They include cakes and flowers. Then you can think about services that can deal with lots of weddings on the same day because they are less likely to turn you away. Naturally the better services book up early so you are in competition with other people who are getting married on the same day as yourselves.

- There are 3 main areas that you need to check for each service that you are considering.
 - The people. You do need to meet them and check that they are people that you can trust. (You can't do this very well over the phone)
 - The product. Do go to look at the product and check that it is the style and quality that you require.
 - The price. Do check that you are absolutely clear about what is included in the price and what is extra. (The price is only relevant if you like the people and the product.)
- For each service that you are choosing, a useful system would be to
 1. Phone 3-4 companies to check that they are free for your wedding day. You may get some basic details over the phone but you will not be able to get all the information that you need to make a decision.
 2. Then arrange appointments to go to see them within a couple of days of each other
 3. Make provisional bookings if you like what you see
 4. Make your decision and confirm with the chosen company (and the companies that you have not chosen)
 5. Then you can tick that job off your list and relax
- If you do not live in the area where your wedding will take place, you are probably going to need to take some time off work to shop around. You may not be able to fit everything into weekends so Fridays or Mondays tagged onto the weekend could be time well spent. Many service providers will not be available on a Sunday and some services who are committed on the wedding day itself, will be out on a Saturday so you will not be able to meet them.
- Do make appointments well in advance if you are travelling home to make arrangements. There is nothing more frustrating than travelling miles on a busy Friday evening to find that the people you want to see are unavailable that weekend.
- Make sure that your parents and close families have met each other before the wedding day. We have been to a few weddings where the Bride and Groom wanted to have a relaxed, informal day yet they were introducing their parents to each other in the vestry. It's very difficult to feel relaxed and behave informally in that situation.

Traditions

- Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue and a silver sixpence in her shoe. Many brides chose to follow the old tradition although silver sixpences are now hard to come by. If you are going to gather together these items, do it well ahead of the wedding day rather than panic on your wedding morning. The silver sixpence is best taped to your shoe under your instep so that it is comfortable.
- Many traditions originate from arranged marriages. The bride and Groom not seeing each other the night before the wedding, the groom not seeing the gown, the bride wearing a veil. All are designed to make sure that the happy couple don't back out when they see each other for the first time. Money and power were often the family's motives for ensuring that the couple actually went through with the marriage. For many modern couples the thought of either party not turning up is just a mild passing thought and a subject for humour and leg pulling. If you are confident that your partner will not let you down, and you want to break with some of these traditions, don't worry about the bad luck that the old wives would have you believe is about to befall you.
- In America, most of these old traditions have faded away and been replaced by newer traditions. Do consider any family traditions and cultural norms but only include the ones that suit you.

The ceremony and legalities

- Legally, you can get married or enter into a Civil Partnership any day of the year except Christmas Day. The ceremony must be completed before 6pm. This is part of the old laws connected to arranged marriages in ancient times when it was thought that unscrupulous parents may substitute an ineligible offspring and that no-one would be sure if the light was so low that they couldn't see properly.
- If you are planning a wedding at any season outside the summer, you need to think about the light. A useful guide is the tide table or diaries that include sunset times. In generally good weather, the last usable light is one hour before sunset. If the weather is cloudy the light fades earlier.
- Looking back in history, weddings traditionally took place in the morning followed by the Wedding Breakfast. Literally the family and guests would break the fast that preceded a mass or communion. This is why men wore "morning suits" and still do for many weddings (even when they take place in the afternoon)
- The vast majority of weddings now take place at 12 noon, 1pm or 2pm. Do think about the time of your wedding before you make a firm booking. There are lots of tips on the following pages that will help you with this decision.
- Late afternoon weddings have become popular as the ceremony leads on to an evening dinner reception and possibly dancing.
- Do think carefully about the time of your ceremony. You need to allow enough time in the morning for people to travel and for you to get ready. However, you may not want to leave the ceremony so late that the wedding day itself is very short.
- Do think about the time that you will be eating in relation to the ceremony time. If we take the example of a 12 noon wedding.
 - Most ceremonies take about 45 minutes (longer if it is a mass)
 - Then there will be some time for photographs (your photographer will advise on how much time is needed to take the combinations of groups that you want) let's say 30 minutes
 - Then you need to travel to the reception - we'll guess at 20 minutes
 - If the gardens are beautiful you may have planned for some photos there 25 minutes
 - You may be needed to finalise seating plans and check details with your best man 15 minutes
 - Then you may want to mingle with your guests and get a drink 20 minutes
 - Go to the loo and freshen up 10 minutes
 - Receiving line for 80 guests at 30 seconds per guest 40 minutes
 - Sit down to eat 3.25pm
 - Is this the midday meal or an evening meal??

Please see stationery section for tips about what to put on your invitations so that your guests know what time they can expect to eat.

- If there is limited parking at the ceremony venue, consider hiring a coach to transport all your guests.
- These days, in Britain, you have a variety of choices for the venue of your ceremony. Places of Worship are still the most popular. Register offices are also busy but they have lost out since 1998 as hotels and stately homes became licensed venues for marriage ceremonies and civil partnerships.
- The Government was anxious that ceremonies did not become too flippant so there are some restrictions on where they can be conducted to maintain some sense of occasion. One of the main points is that the venue must have walls and a roof (in other words it must be a building) which precludes the American style garden party weddings. Since we do have to endure the vagaries of the British weather, this is probably a sensible precaution.
- Your local registrar will be able to give you a list of the all the places that hold a licence in your area. If you find somewhere that is not licensed but is perfect, you will need to allow some time for the owners to apply for and be granted a licence before finalising that your wedding will be held there.
- If you have your heart set on a wedding in a setting that cannot be licensed, consider a quiet, private, legal ceremony at the register office followed by the ceremony of your dreams with no legal restrictions and conventions to tie you down. We have attended 3 weddings where the couple planned the whole ceremony. It was so personal that there was not a dry eye in the room.
- Wherever you chose to hold your ceremony, you cannot have too many ushers. Do choose them carefully. They need to be the type of people who are willing to make things happen.
- If your ceremony venue is small and will only just fit the number of guests that you have invited, it is critical that the ushers tell people where to sit. We were recently at a wedding in a small church where the guests (typically) had left a few pews empty just behind the family because they did not want to appear pushy. The result was that the back of the church was totally full so the last minute guests (and the terribly late ones!!) had to walk to the front to get a seat. As you can imagine, this was slightly disruptive and highly embarrassing.
- You need 2 witnesses who are over 18 to sign the register. In most cases the Best Man and Chief Bridesmaid take on these roles but you can chose any one to perform this task.
- The only 2 “lawful impediments” are that you are closely related or are married to someone else. If you both know that neither of these situations exists, you can rest assured that no one in the congregation can stand up and state an objection that the minister or registrar will take seriously.

The Reception

- Marquee weddings can give you more flexibility, as you do not need to fit in with anyone else. However, be warned that there is much more hustle, bustle and consequent stress when you have a marquee at home. 3-4 days prior to the wedding the start of the preparations will begin and will continue until 2-3 days afterwards. During that time the various services will inevitably need someone (usually the ever patient brides parents) to show them where the electricity points are and the taps etc. etc. If you would prefer relative peace, then a wedding reception at a hotel would be a better bet.
- If you do decide on a marquee, try to use a company that you have seen personally or at least one that has been recommended. As with all services, the finished product is one thing but the service that accompanies that product has a bearing on your choice. With some companies, the price you pay for a fantastic marquee may be jagged nerves. Of course experienced and professional marquee companies should smooth the way as much as possible.
- Of course, a marquee at home does give your parents the opportunity to follow the tradition of hosting the guests in their own home and for some families that is exactly what they want to do.
- In many areas of the country, you would have to have a marquee to hold a late afternoon wedding followed by an evening reception. Many hotels will not take bookings for weddings on peak dates if you are not having an afternoon meal followed by a larger evening buffet. They are in business and they cannot afford to turn away someone else's high paying wedding to accommodate your preference, which is inevitably less expensive.
- Don't let me put you off having a marquee. We had our reception in a marquee and my sister also chose a marquee for her wedding. We would not have considered anything else but there are drawbacks and I felt it only fair to point them out to you.
- If you do decide on a hotel or function suite, try to experience a wedding or large function at the venue. You may well have eaten a meal in the restaurant but serving large numbers of people simultaneously is a very different set of skills.
- Second best would be to go by recommendations from friends and professionals whose opinion you trust. If possible visit the venue as they are greeting a wedding party. Check out how well they cope and how they are treating their guests.
- Do be clear about the timings that you want for your wedding and check that they can fit in. If the venue caters for more than one wedding at a time, they may not be able to be as flexible as a venue that only serves one wedding party. Likewise, receptions held in restaurants that need to clear your guests and set up the room for their evening customers may have very strict times that they have to adhere to.

- If you have your heart set on a venue that needs you to be clear by a certain time, you may need to bring the time of your ceremony forward to accommodate all the other time that is needed in the middle. (See ceremony section)
- Do ask all these awkward questions at the first visit so that you don't spend weeks or months planning other services and then find that there are basic flaws in the plan.
- Do ask the advice of your reception staff. They have done this lots of time before and they know what works and what doesn't. However, you should not feel that they are imposing their system on you. Ask their advice, weigh it against other views and make your own decision. It is your wedding, you are paying them money and they should do what you want.
- Don't allow the reception to tell you how long photography will take. Every photographer works at a different pace and the length of photography time will vary depending on how many photographs you have asked him/her to take. Only **your** photographer can guide you on how long **your** photos will take.
- If you are planning to have a formal receiving line for your guests, it is best to allow all your guests to arrive in stages and have the receiving line at the doorway to the dining room as everyone goes in to take their places for dinner. By doing this, you do not need to stand for ages while everyone arrives in dribs and drabs.
- Do plan for the time that it will need to have a receiving line. Your reception staff will be best able to advise you. As a thought, imagine that you spend 30 seconds with each person and you had invited 80 guests. The receiving line would take 40 minutes. You can do the sums to work out the timing for your number of guests.
- Here's a tip that I picked up from a speaker who was often required to stand in formal receiving lines. As you shake hands with the person approaching you, move your hand (and consequently their hand) in the direction that you want them to move. It's a very subtle way of conveying the message that they can't stand for a long time to talk to you. You do need to make sure that all the people in the receiving line are aware of this so that everyone does the same thing, otherwise one person in the line could get caught in a long conversation and cause a log jam.
- Most experienced receptions will do this automatically but it is worth checking. Your table plan, which shows everyone where their seats are at the tables, needs to be placed before the receiving line so that people can be having a look as they wait to greet you. If you place it after the line up, you will find that the people who need to stop to look at it, create a hold up and the receiving line essentially slows down or even stops.

Cars, Carriages and Transport

- Traditionally, the groom arranges transport for his bride. Again this tradition came about to ensure that the bride did turn up.

- Your choices are

Walking

Modern cars

Vintage/Veteran cars

Horse drawn carriage

Unusual vehicles such as fire engines or buses

- Walking can be marvellous if you live close to the church or other venue for your ceremony and if the reception is back at home or very close by. We have seen a few weddings where the reception was in the church hall and the procession of family and bridesmaids had a fabulous atmosphere to it.

- Modern cars, either your own or hired, generally have the advantages of reliability and familiarity. However, they were not designed to accommodate vast expanses of fabric in the form of gowns so they can be rather cramped if your gown is large and has a long train.

- Older cars are reputed to be less reliable (though they are usually owned by car lovers who cherish their specimen and maintain it more thoroughly than a modern car) they definitely have the advantage that they were built to offer you lots of space. If the overall feel of your wedding is of old world charm and nostalgia, an older car is definitely for you.

- Horse drawn carriages hold great attractions for some though there are some points to consider.

- Make sure no one who needs to be near the horses is allergic to them. We saw one bride become very red and swollen after stroking the horse. She quickly recovered but the potential to spoil the rest of her day was obvious.

- The horses can only travel short distances (and it takes longer for them to do that) so you do need to think of your route and the timings carefully

- Many carriages do not have a roof if the weather is inclement

- Unusual vehicles do have novelty value but you do need to consider that they may not be available for one reason or another.

- This is one of the mistakes that we made at our own wedding. Whichever vehicle you chose, do be aware that an open top will almost inevitably mean that you arrive at the reception looking windswept. Even if you are lucky enough to get a still day, you will be experiencing winds of at least 30 mph as the vehicle drives along. You may chose to have the top down for photos and even drive away with it down. You could then stop to put the top up but this does slow you down and probably means that all your guests will then overtake you.

- If it is a sunny day, the photos in the car will look rather washed out or shadowy if there is no roof to give you some shade.

- Hiring a coach or bus can be a useful way to transport large numbers of guests in a number of situations.
 - If there is little parking space at the ceremony venue, it can be useful to organise for all your guests to park and meet at the reception to join the bus.
 - If your guests have travelled some distance and are staying at the reception the night before the wedding, this could also be useful.
 - If a large number of your guests don't drive, this could be essential.
 - If there is a long distance between your ceremony and reception with lots of potential for people to get lost this could also be a great idea.
 - The camaraderie of spending time together on the bus can really break the ice so that everyone enjoys the day even more.
 - You could consider serving drinks and nibbles on the bus to get the party going with even more of a swing.

- Do be absolutely clear about timings as early as possible. Many car hire firms will transport more than one couple on a single day so you need to be sure of the times that **you** need them to be with **you**. Do tell them the time of your ceremony and the duration. Many people forget to mention a Nuptial Mass, which changes all the timings. Also tell them about the amount of photography time that you have agreed with your photographer.

Video

- There are 2 main styles of wedding video. The “controlled, stage managed” video and the “record it as it happens” video.
- If you are full of fun and would enjoy being the star of the show for the day the stage-managed video could be for you. However, you do need to consider that your photographer will probably be directing some of the proceedings on your behalf and you may find your self being directed by two different “directors”.
- If the stage-managed videos are just what puts you off having a video, the fly on the wall type of video may suit you better. Done well, you should be almost unaware of the videographer. This can result in a wonderful record of various aspects of the day that you did not notice yourselves.
- Do choose and book your videographer early. The best people will book up first.

- Chose a photographer who is willing to guide and advise you but does not dictate to you
 - Chose a photographer who is willing to plan your wedding photography with you before the day. Don't think "he will know what to take" and then be disappointed when he has not thought to take the special group that you had your heart set on.
 - See the general advice section for shopping around for all your wedding services. This is particularly relevant to photography.
- Some photographers will offer an engagement sitting to help you both to become more familiar with the process of having photos taken. Seeing some (surprisingly) good photographs of your self will boost your confidence on the wedding day. It is also another opportunity to spend a little time with your photographer to get to know them a bit better before the wedding day itself.
- In the Bridal Wear section you will see a tip about having a full gown rehearsal before the wedding day. In America this has become a tradition and includes a studio portrait session for the bride. Ask your photographer if he or she would be willing to do this for you.
- Having planned your wedding photography prior to the wedding day, here are some ideas to help you to get the most from the photography on the day itself.
 - Do communicate your plans to your family members and your other wedding services. They are much more likely to do what you want when they understand that they are pleasing you rather than pleasing the photographer.
 - Remember that your photographer is working for **you**.
 - Do give your photographer your full attention during the slots in the day that have been designated as photography time. Friends will want to have a chat and you may want to be doing other things. The photography will be completed quicker if you concentrate on having your photographs taken and then you can switch off from photography to give your undivided attention to your friends.
- If you want your photographer to take large groups of people, consider having them taken directly after the ceremony if at all possible. Many people feel that the reception gardens are prettier and that it will be more relaxed to have the photos taken there. In reality, it will take longer to get the groups together and to get the photos taken which can become stressful. This can happen for several reasons
 - Guests may detour to the pub/chemist/cash point machine on the way to the reception and therefore arrive late
 - Guests may get lost en route and therefore arrive late
 - Guests who do arrive on time may disappear to check in to the hotel
 - Guests will disappear to the loo/bar just at the time that they are needed for the photos
- Do use your photographer as a sounding board for your ideas. Because the photographer is actually there on the wedding day he/she sees the real life situations that other service providers do not.

Bridal wear

General

- Before you set foot in a wedding gown shop, you would be well advised to visit a colour and shape consultant. They will be able to guide you towards the colours that will compliment your natural colouring and to the shapes of gowns that will best flatter your body shape. Alternatively, you can buy books, which will cover the same subject.
- Do choose a gown that is suitable for the season. In the winter you will be outside for a little time so you do need to be covered up.
- Beware shop staff who say that everything you put on is fabulous. They should have the skill and confidence to tactfully steer you away from a gown that does not suit you.
- Take a trusted friend or relative to help you to make your decision. However, they should be carefully chosen. Don't ask someone who will agree with everything that you say. Equally don't take someone who will dictate to you.
- If you have looked around extensively and cannot find any gowns that you like, do consider having a gown made for you. This is not an expensive option and you can then have a unique gown made specifically for you.

Underwear

- Every good outfitter will tell you that this is literally your "foundation" so it is important to get it right.
- Flesh coloured underwear is a good idea as it does not show through your gown as much as white underwear.
- Whenever you go for fittings for your gown, wear the actual underwear that you are planning to wear on the day. It's amazing how different bras change the shape of your bust completely.
- If you have an ideal figure, the world is your oyster so you can chose from a whole variety of designs and styles.
- If you normally have difficulty in finding suitable underwear for everyday wear (maybe because you need a bra with a large cup size) you would be well advised to stick to your normal style of underwear and chose a gown that can be worn over it.
- Don't be mislead into thinking that strapless bras and basques will give you the same amount of support as your normal bra.
- Many brides chose stockings and suspenders for their wedding day when they would never normally wear them. You may find this very distracting and it could become an irritation on your wedding day. Comfort is the order of the day.

Shoes

- Think about the height difference between you and your groom/partner before choosing your shoes. If they are much taller than you, you can choose a shoe with a heel but you would be wise to choose a low heeled shoe if you are similar heights or if they are shorter than you.
- Whatever the size of the heel, the main priority is comfort. You will be on your feet for a large proportion of the day so this is really important.
- You do need to decide on your shoes and buy them reasonable early so that you can take them with you whenever you go for a gown fitting so that they can get the length of the gown right.
- If your shoes have smooth soles, take them outside and carefully rub the soles on a stone or the pavement. This will just take the shine off the sole and give you some grip. If you don't do this you risk slipping over - particularly on carpets.
- If your shoes are made from any type of fabric, it is a good idea to buy a can of waterproofer from any good shoe shop and spray them at least a few days before the wedding. I say a few days before because you do need to put a few coats on and because the spray smells horrid when it is fresh.
- Don't be misled into thinking that you won't get your shoes wet. The slightest spot of moisture on the ground, particularly on grass, will soak into your shoes. Two undesirable things then happen. The first is that the tide line of the water shows on your shoes (and your photos) and the second is that you end up with wet feet for the rest of the day, which is most uncomfortable.

Veils and headdresses

- If you asked us what is the most common problem that we have seen from all the hundreds of weddings that we have attended, we would undoubtedly say that the most likely problem is something falling off the bride's head. Brides, Mums and wedding shop staff seem to have an over optimistic and mistaken belief in willpower.
- Please see the section on hairstyles for more information about attaching headdresses and veils.
- Veils are traditional because of the history of arranged marriages. The theory was that if the groom saw the bride before he made his vows he may back out.
- You may decide to ignore the tradition and not have a veil. This is a very practical option, which enables the detail of your gown to be seen more easily. In addition, I do sometimes feel sorry for hairdressers who have put lots of effort into a beautiful hairstyle, only for it to be totally covered up by the veil.
- If you do decide to have a veil here are some things to think about
- The longer and fuller the veil, the less practical it is

- All veils will blow in the breeze
- The lighter the veil the easier it will blow in the breeze (Sophie Rees-Jones)
- If you imagine a line joining your ears over the top of your head, you need to fix your veil behind that line. If you fix it any further forward it will tend to fall forward over your face all day. This will become irritating for you and it also means that your face is not visible from the side. If in doubt, look at yourself in a 45° mirror so that you can see yourself as others will see you all day.
- Your hairstyle may not allow for a means of attaching the veil securely. If this is the case see the section on hair.
- If you chose a hat instead of a veil and headdress, please see the Brides mothers' section for some hints about wearing hats.

Before the wedding day

- Do have a complete practice and time yourself to be clear about how long it takes to get ready.
- Your gown supplier will probably have advised you about the best way to put the gown on. Sometimes it is best being stepped into. Other gowns are best put over your head. Do try it in the shop and ask the staff to allow your mum or your chief bridesmaid to practice in the shop.
- It's a good idea to practice absolutely everything in one go. Your hair, your make-up, all the clothing that you will wear on the day and to keep them on for an hour or so. Do be sure that you are comfortable and that no straps show, nothing itches, everything is comfortable etc.
- Many people want to keep everything pristine and new but this rehearsal does give you the opportunity to change something if it really is a problem.
- This may be an ideal opportunity to have some rehearsal photographs taken to add extra interest to your wedding album.

On the wedding day

- Make sure you are clear about what time you need to be ready. If your photographer is coming to your home and has given you a time that he will arrive, do make sure that you are ready at that time so that he can get on with taking the photos that you want rather than wasting time sitting around waiting for you to be ready.
- If you need to be ready in time to get into the car and leave, be realistic about how long it will take to get into the car in a long gown and how long it will take to get from your home to the ceremony in a car driving at a sedate pace. You may

also need to allow a little extra time for Saturday afternoon traffic if you will need to drive through any crowded town centres.

- Allow extra time to get ready to allow for distractions and emotions on the wedding day. If you think you will be quicker when you are nervous - think again.
- Go to the toilet just before you put your gown on - even if you don't think you need to go.
- When you get to the reception, use the adapted toilet for people with a disability if it is free so that you have got some extra room for your gown and possibly for your Mum or a close friend to come in with you.
- If your gown has a hoop, put the back of the hoop on the toilet cistern to get it out of the way.
- When you are walking in your wedding gown, don't look down. If you look down towards your feet, you make the hemline of the gown drop by about 4-5 inches, which means that you are more likely to stand on it. Instead, keep your chin up and your shoulders back so that you can kick the front of the gown and step forward.
- Whatever the weather, wear your gown for the fun of it. We have seen a few brides who were so worried about protecting their gown from any form of dirt or crease that it really ruined their day. You are never going to wear it again, so be a bit careful and enjoy it. A lady photographer friend of mine tells her brides to wear their gown like their jeans.

Bridesmaids

- Choosing your bridesmaids can be a very political affair. Do be careful not to offend anyone but also don't agree to someone being a bridesmaid if you really don't want her to take on that role.
- Your chief bridesmaid is given the task of organising your hen night so make sure you chose someone with some organisational skills (or organise it yourself.)
- Do remember that the person who signs the register as your witness (usually the chief bridesmaid) needs to be over 18 to be a legal witness. If all your bridesmaids are under 18 a parent or another close adult can take on that task.
- Children under 5 can be a problem as they are a little young to understand what is going on and what they are expected to do. Parents of young bridesmaids (and pages) can have a stressful day trying to keep them happy and tidy so they may appreciate having the spotlight taken off them by not being chosen as bridesmaids.
- Girls approaching and during puberty (about 11 to 16) can be a little self-conscious as their bodies are developing. It may be an idea to ask them if they want to be a bridesmaid with a genuine opportunity to say "no". However, if they say "yes", it may be worth clearly agreeing that they will behave sensibly and be sociable.
- Don't expect your bridesmaids to look after you on the day. They will be wearing an unusually long gown and carrying flowers so they will have their work cut out looking after themselves without thinking about you. Bridesmaids are essentially decorative. In ancient wedding ceremonies, taking on the role of the "bride's maid" was a great opportunity to publicly proclaim your availability.
- Colour consultancy is a useful idea for your bridesmaids. Choosing a colour that suits them all and which you like can be difficult so visiting a colour consultant to try to find something to show off each person to their best advantage can be a great girls day out.
- If your bridesmaids are all staying with you the night before the wedding, do think ahead and plan how long getting ready could take. The more people there are in the house, the longer the queue for the bathroom so do leave plenty of time or consider letting your bridesmaids stay at a local hotel and arrive at your house showered and ready to get dressed.
- See the Brides section above for hints about shoes. They are just as applicable to the bridesmaids
- Also see the Hair section for more information on hairstyles and headdresses.

Brides Mum (and other main guests)

- As for the bride and the bridesmaids, visiting a colour and shape consultant is a good idea.
- Do choose an outfit that feels comfortable and in which you can feel glamorous.
- The convention on accessories is that your hat, bag, shoes and gloves should all match OR your hat and gloves should match and your bag and shoes should match. This allows for items to be made in matching fabrics.
- Weddings are the main event for the purchase of hats but you don't have to wear hats if you really don't want too.
- If the expense of buying a hat is off-putting, consider hiring a hat from one of the many hire shops available.
- The Brides Mother leads the way on hats. If she wears one the guests are expected to follow suit. If she leaves hers on during the meal (which is the good mannered thing to do) then the guests should follow her lead. If the bride's mother takes her hat off for the meal then the guests can follow.
- Milliners say that you wear a hat instead of a hairstyle so choose a simple hairstyle and don't go to too much time and effort to style your hair. Wearing a hat often ruins hairstyles anyway, so this is another reason to keep your hat on throughout the meal.
- Do choose a hat that actually fits. If a hat is too tight it will tend to ride off your head during the day or it will give you a headache. If it is too big it will wobble about and is easier to blow off.
- Don't be fooled into thinking that it won't be windy. There are very few days in Britain when there is no wind at all. It is better to be prepared for wind and be pleasantly surprised if there is only a light breeze.
- If you are wearing your hair in a bun or in some form of tight fixing, you can use hatpins to secure your hat. Hatpins were invented during the Victorian era when everyone wore their hair in some form of fixed dressing.
- If your hair is in any form of loose style, hatpins are absolutely useless. In this situation, you need to ask your hat supplier to fix a thin piece of hat elastic from ear to ear inside the hat. You can then hook the elastic underneath your hair in the nape of your neck. This is a reasonably secure way to prevent the hat from blowing off.
- Any dark coloured hat with a large brim will cast a big shadow over the top half of your face. This is a particular problem on sunny days. (Some people tell us that they are quite happy with this, as they don't like having their photo taken anyway.) However, they don't like the results when they see the photos. If you do choose a

dark coloured hat, select an open weave brim or a smaller brim to avoid this problem.

- Don't try to fit a camera into your tiny decorative handbag, as you will be too busy to use it or you will ruin the bag or you will lose the camera.
- Do get yourself dressed and ready before everyone else. As a Mother, you are probably programmed to sort everyone else out before yourself. However, this means that we have seen lots of mums in their underwear when we have arrived at the bride's home.

Men

- You need to choose your best man with care. He needs to be a good reliable friend who will organise your stag night, get things done before the wedding and on the day itself. He also needs to be comfortable about making a speech.
- Ushers need to be the organised types too. Generally the more the merrier - there are lots of little jobs to do on the day so it is useful to have a few people who can share the load.
- If your ushers are also brothers, they may be needed for the first group photos after the ceremony, so don't give them jobs to do until after they have had their photos taken.
- A basic decision is between lounge suits and morning suits. You do need to think about fashion. Lounge suits can date while morning suits are timeless and will never go out of fashion.
- After deciding on the style of suit, you then need to decide whether to hire or buy. The decision is really made by asking yourself how often you will have the opportunity to wear the suit again in the next couple of years.
- Hiring is also a useful option if you want everyone to wear matching or co-ordinating suits.
- Do pay the small amount extra to hire the braces. In the 80s they were very fashionable but they are no longer in vogue. Hired trousers never fit quite like your own so it is important to use the braces to keep the trousers up. There are no belt loops on hired trousers so that is not an option.
- If you are wondering about hats and gloves they do give you something to do with your hands but you need to resist the temptation to put allsorts of bits and pieces inside the hat.
- Each person should collect his own suit from the shop. Try them on there and then so that any minor problems can be rectified quickly.

Flowers and florists

- You may have friends and relatives who offer to help with flower arranging. Unless you are completely certain that they have the necessary skills, beware!!! They may be able to do table decorations but are unlikely to be able to make bouquets for the bride and the bridesmaids.
- If you are going to use the services of flower guilds at the church, ask to see some of their work and check that you are happy with the quality.
- Most professional florists can only cope with one or two weddings on the same day as they have a finite amount of time to prepare the flowers on the evening before. This means that the best and most popular florists can take bookings well in advance. Do shop round reasonably early and make a booking with the florist of your choice. You can talk about details nearer to the wedding day but you need to have your name in their diary.
- Do make clear arrangements with the florist for the delivery of your flowers. They may be delivering to several different places so you need to be sure that each of your sets of flowers are in the right place at the right time.
- If you are having photos at home, make sure the flowers are delivered at least ten minutes before the photographer is due to arrive.
- Men's buttonholes are worn on the left lapel with the flower pointing up.
- It is almost impossible to fix your own flower on if you are wearing your jacket so it is a good idea to either take your jacket off or get someone else to put your flower on.
- If the buttonhole on the lapel is open, push the stem of the flower through the hole and use the pin behind the lapel to secure the top of the flower. This way the pin does not show and is not in danger of catching on anyone. If the buttonhole is sewn up and you don't want to unstitch it, you can just hold the flower onto the lapel and pin it from behind.
- Ladies corsages are worn on the right with flowers facing down. (If you point them upwards the weight of the flower can pull the fabric of your gown.) They should be fixed using a pin from the back of the gown or jacket as for the men's. If the corsage is particularly large, 2 pins may be needed.
- In recent years, informal weddings have lead to informal bouquets with more and more brides choosing hand tied flowers rather than traditional wired bouquets. There are advantages for both brides and florists.
 1. Hand tied bouquets leave the stems on the flowers so they tend to keep fresh for longer (though we have seen plenty that have wilted)
 2. Florists spend less time arranging hand tied bouquets
 3. Because they take less time they should be cheaper

There are inevitably some disadvantages to hand tied bouquets

1. Because all the stems are left on, the whole bouquet is heavier
2. Rather than a small neat handle, brides need to hold a wide bunch of stems, which can become a bit of a strain as the day wears on.
3. During the day the flowers can move and spoil the arrangement

You need to bear these points in mind and discuss the options in detail with your florist.

- Flowers on the reception tables should either be low (below eye line height) or in a narrow vase or pedestal and high (above eye line height). In other word you don't want them to be at eye height so that everyone has to bob around the sides of the flower arrangement to hold a conversation.

Cake

- Discuss the size of your cake with the experts. They will be able to tell you how large the cake needs to be to feed the number of guests that you have invited.
- Do remember to include people who may not attend the wedding itself that you may wish to send a piece of cake to after the wedding.
- Traditionally, many people saved the top tier of their cake for the christening. If you are not planning to start a family soon this may not be such a good idea, as the cake may not keep indefinitely.
- Some people are allergic to fruit or just prefer sponge cake. Discuss this possibility with your confectioner. There may be some limitations on which style of decorations you can choose for sponge cakes.
- If you are choosing a cake with soft (fondant) icing, the pillars need to be supported by dowels through the cake itself to take the weight. Do check that your confectioner will be doing this, especially if they are not used to icing cakes in this style.

Beautician

- Do consider using a professional makeup artist for your wedding day. The finished result is usually excellent and unlike your own makeup, it lasts for the whole day with out needing too much “touching up”
- Do have a consultation before the wedding day to check that you are happy with the style and colours.
- Once you have decided on your makeup, have a second rehearsal to check timings to help you to plan your preparation time on the day itself. Do be realistic and don't assume that it will be quicker on the day. The opposite is usually true. Getting ready takes longer on the wedding day because emotions get in the way and there are lots of distractions to slow everyone down. This may be a sensible time to co-ordinate a full rehearsal and maybe have some pre-wedding portraits taken. (See section on Photography)
- If the makeup artist is also going to work on your mum and the bridesmaids, plan clearly for the total time that the artist will need. It may be necessary to have more than one artist so that they can work on 2 people at the same time.
- Do plan your preparations back wards from the time that you need to be ready. Many people don't think through all the stages in the process and underestimate the time that it will take.
- Do communicate this timetable clearly to the hairdresser and the beautician so that they know when you want to be finished.
- Do make sure you have your own make-up done first on the wedding day. You will need longer to get dressed and will be needed on almost all of the photos at home – so you are the really important person. (but you already knew that!)

Hair and Headdresses

- This section is applicable for the bride and bridesmaids
- If you asked us to predict the most likely problem on a wedding day it would be hair, veils and headdresses. Of all the weddings that we have attended and photographed, this is the most common problem and is usually caused by unrealistic expectations. Do read the following points in detail and save your self some heartache by learning from other people's mistakes.
- Do think about this aspect early in case you need to grow or cut your hair in preparation for the day
- Find a reliable professional hairdresser who can advise you on styles, which are flattering for your face and body shape.
- You may also need to consider your relative height to your groom/partner's height. If they are shorter than you or about the same height, you need to choose a flattering style, which will not add to your height.
- Do think about your hairstyle before you buy your headdress. Too often, hairdressers are asked to devise a hairstyle to accommodate a headdress when it is impossible to attach the headdress securely.
- Don't make the mistake of thinking (or being convinced by others) that it won't be windy. Hair and veils are light so they only need a small breeze to make them move and there are very few days in Britain when there is no breeze at all.
- If you look at bridal magazines, the models usually have their hair in simple styles without loose pieces of hair around their faces. This is very practical hair for photo shoots and wedding days. Hair that keeps moving will slow down the taking of the photos, as the photographer will need to adjust your hair before each photo is taken. (I do have a vested interest in advising you strongly on this issue) However, more importantly the number of brides that we have seen who have become quite annoyed by their hair and veils on the wedding day, to the point where they really became a distraction, is a really telling reason for passing on this advice so that you do not find yourself in this situation.
- Depending on your chosen style, your hairdresser may advise you to wash you hair the day before the wedding and have it just styled on the day. Sometimes hair can be too fly away when it has just been washed resulting in "bad hair days".
- At least a month before the wedding, have a full practice with the headdress and veil attached. This is essential to check timings and could be part of your full rehearsal (see section on beautician and general advise)
- Ask your hairdresser to blow a hair dryer at you from about 6 feet away to see how your hair and headdress and veil will react in a light wind. If there is even the

smallest problem, think again because a small problem at this stage could be a big problem on the day.

- Do walk around wearing the veil and headdress for at least an hour to check both how comfortable it is and how well it stands up to movement. It's a good idea to get in and out of the car a couple of times and hug a few people because that's what you will do on the big day.
- Here's a little tip from personal experience. When we got married, I had long hair, almost long enough to sit on. In consultation with my hairdresser, we agreed a style, which was soft, yet held my hair up in a tight bun. My hairdresser was trained in the Sixties so she was given all the skills for the "beehive" and she used them to good effect on my bridal hair and I can see that the techniques could be used in various other styles. She took a small piece of hair (about 2 inches in diameter) from the crown of my head and plaited it. She then wound the plait around and clipped it securely to form a solid base to attach other things on to. My soft bun was then clipped to this solid base and my headdress and veil also had a solid place to be clipped.
- I have passed this tip on to several brides, bridesmaids and Mums so that they could secure headdresses and hats. Many brides with long straight hair who wear it down need to use this technique just behind their headdress to have somewhere to attach the veil. Without doing this, the comb just slides down the straight hair.
- Don't be convinced that headdresses and veils can be held with back combed hair and lacquer. It just doesn't work for very long on a wedding day.
- However you have your hair styled, you will need to use some sort of clips or fasteners to hold on the headdress. You will also need to clip the comb that holds your veil on to your hair. Even if you use a strong base as described above, you need to clip the comb onto the base to stop it moving during the day. This is best done by lifting the veil and clipping the comb to the hair from both sides. When you put the veil down, the fabric covers and hides the clips.
- If your headdress is a solid fit and can be well attached to your hair, it would be a good idea to remove the comb and sew your veil onto the headdress for added security.
- If you are going to the hairdressers shop on the morning of your wedding, do travel in several cars. There is nothing more frustrating than sitting in the hairdressers waiting for your bridesmaids and mum to be completed when time is marching on and you are getting stressed out because you could be at home getting your makeup on or getting dressed. The stress levels are even higher if there are any hitches or hold-ups so travel in a couple of cars and then those who are ready can leave and be getting on with something useful.
- Do refer to the Brides section for more information about veils

Stationery and Calligraphy

- There are so many options available that you are almost bound to find something that you like. Do shop around at your local specialist stationers and through the bridal magazines to see the variety of patterns and styles.
- With computer skills and desktop publishing, there are some people who are designing and printing their own stationery. If it really matters that much, this could be a good idea, but you do need to be aware that there is more than enough to do in the run up to a wedding without adding unnecessary stress by “doing it yourself”.
- Our local stationer gives out some very good advice (see below) and yours should be similarly helpful. If you find that they are not being helpful, do go somewhere else. You may find that you can get the designs you want from other outlets.
- If you are inviting 100 guests, you don't need 100 invitations - you probably only need 50 as most people will be invited in couples or families.
- Do use your invitations as a useful communication tool to let people know exactly what is happening. Our local stationer advises approximate timings for your meal as follows

You are invited to the wedding of
Susan Williams
To
Mark Jones
On
24th September 2001 at 2pm
At
St Joseph's Church, Chester
Followed by a reception at
The Manor Hotel
Where we are due to eat at approximately 5.30pm

- This wording allows everyone to make any arrangements that they may need. If they have children, they are particularly anxious to know when the food will be served. If you have diabetic friends or people with other dietary needs, this information could be crucial for their health and well-being. We did photograph one wedding when an elderly diabetic Uncle collapsed because he had missed lunch. Fortunately the Bride and Groom were both doctors and were able to treat him promptly and call for help. However, everyone agreed that these are not the best memories created on the wedding day.
- The advice given above is of particular interest if you are having a 12 noon or 1pm ceremony because people will often make some unrealistic assumptions. Just because they have not been to a wedding for a while, they have little idea about