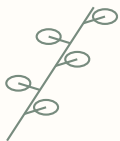




THE WEDDING PLANNING STARTER GUIDE

A practical workbook for making clearer decisions - from guest list and budget to vendors, family pressure, and the wedding week.



Keep the framework. Change what doesn't fit your wedding.

START HERE



Before the checklist: decide what this wedding is for.

The fastest way to create planning chaos is to make decisions before you know what matters most. Use this page as your filter.

Your wedding North Star

Fill this out with your partner before you start comparing venues, guest lists, or Pinterest boards.

We want our wedding to feel...

Choose three words: relaxed, elegant, intimate, joyful, energetic, formal, warm, playful, simple...

The people we most want there are...

Think relationships first, not obligation categories.

We are most willing to spend on...

Pick up to three: food, photography, music, venue, attire, comfort, design, travel, time-saving help...

We are least interested in spending on...

Name the things you would happily simplify or skip.

“A decision is easier when you know what it is protecting.”

OUR ONE-SENTENCE WEDDING RULE

START HERE



Your wedding snapshot

One page for the numbers and decisions that everything else will depend on.

The facts we know today

WEDDING DATE / TARGET SEASON

LOCATION / VENUE AREA

WORKING GUEST-COUNT RANGE

WORKING BUDGET CEILING

WHO MAY BE CONTRIBUTING FINANCIALLY

CEREMONY FORMAT

RECEPTION FORMAT

ANYTHING NON-NEGOTIABLE

Top five priorities

Rank the five things you most want the wedding to do well.

Priority	Why it matters	What we will protect
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

PLANNING MAP



The whole wedding, on one page

Think in four phases instead of one giant to-do list.

1

1. Foundation

Budget ceiling, guest-count range, priorities, date/season, venue needs. Decisions here change almost everything else.

2

2. Book the backbone

Venue, catering, photography, entertainment, planner/coordinator if using one. Book according to your market and priorities - not a universal internet deadline.

3

3. Build the experience

Attire, ceremony, flowers, stationery, rentals, beauty, transportation, guest logistics. This is where inspiration becomes actual choices.

4

4. Close the loops

RSVPs, seating, final payments, vendor confirmations, day-of timeline, handoffs. The goal is clarity, not squeezing in last-minute extras.

Our next 90 days

MUST DECIDE

WAITING ON SOMEONE

CAN DELEGATE

TIMELINE



12-9 months: set the foundation

Use these as planning prompts. If your engagement is shorter, compress the sequence. If your market books early, move priority vendors sooner.

Decide the shape of the wedding

These choices determine the size and structure of the plan.

- ☐ Agree on a working budget ceiling and who may contribute.
- ☐ Estimate a guest-count range before choosing a venue.
- ☐ Choose your top three priorities as a couple.
- ☐ Decide on a date, season, or flexible date range.
- ☐ List accessibility, cultural, religious, travel, or venue requirements.

Research the backbone

Do not collect options without a comparison system.

- ☐ Shortlist venues that actually fit capacity and full-cost needs.
- ☐ Compare what is included before comparing headline prices.
- ☐ Research key vendors according to your priorities.
- ☐ Start attire research if long lead times matter to you.
- ☐ Create one place for quotes, contracts, contacts, and payment dates.

MY NEXT THREE TASKS

TIMELINE



8-5 months: book and build

This phase turns the foundation into real bookings and begins the guest experience.

Book what matters most

Book by importance and local availability, not because a checklist says so.

- ☐ Confirm venue and major vendor contracts after reviewing total cost and terms.
- ☐ Review catering, photography/video, music, florals, rentals, and ceremony needs.
- ☐ Confirm who is responsible for setup, teardown, delivery, and pickup.
- ☐ Order attire with enough time for production and alterations.
- ☐ Research guest accommodation and transportation if relevant.

Start guest-facing decisions

Every guest-facing decision should fit the wedding you actually chose.

- ☐ Send save-the-dates if they are useful for your guest group.
- ☐ Decide invitation method and collect missing addresses.
- ☐ Review registry/gifting choices if using them.
- ☐ Begin ceremony structure and meaningful traditions.
- ☐ Start honeymoon planning if applicable.

MY NEXT THREE TASKS

TIMELINE



4-2 months: turn choices into logistics

Now the questions become more specific: what happens, who does it, where does it go, and when is it due?

Close design and service decisions

This is where small details multiply. Keep them in one system.

- ☐ Finalize menu, dessert, rental, floral, and stationery choices.
- ☐ Confirm attire fittings and wedding-party attire.
- ☐ Review transportation and accommodation logistics.
- ☐ Confirm ceremony readings, music, vows, or cultural elements.
- ☐ Check upcoming payment dates and deliverables.

Prepare for guest and vendor coordination

The goal is fewer decisions left for the final month.

- ☐ Send invitations according to your RSVP plan.
- ☐ Start a seating strategy if assigned seating is needed.
- ☐ Collect dietary, accessibility, and travel information.
- ☐ Create a first draft of the wedding-day timeline.
- ☐ Choose who will answer routine questions on the wedding day.

MY NEXT THREE TASKS

TIMELINE



Final month, final week, wedding day

Close loops, simplify, and protect your attention.

Final month

- ☐ Chase missing RSVPs and confirm final guest information.
- ☐ Finalize seating and meal counts when required.
- ☐ Confirm vendor arrival, setup, pickup, and contact details.
- ☐ Build and circulate one master timeline.
- ☐ Prepare final payments or tips where appropriate.
- ☐ Assign ownership for gifts, decor, cards, attire, personal items, and transport.

Final week

- ☐ Reconfirm only what genuinely needs reconfirming.
- ☐ Pack attire, accessories, documents, medication, chargers, and emergency-kit items.
- ☐ Share final contacts and the master timeline.
- ☐ Stop adding optional projects unless they solve a real problem.

Wedding day

- ☐ Eat and hydrate.
- ☐ Let the point person handle routine vendor questions.
- ☐ Use the timeline as a coordination tool, not a reason to panic over small delays.
- ☐ Pause long enough to notice the people and moments around you.

BUDGET



Decide before you spend

A wedding budget is not an average-cost worksheet. It is a boundary around what you are willing and able to spend.

The four numbers that matter first

ABSOLUTE MAXIMUM WE WILL NOT EXCEED

AMOUNT ALREADY AVAILABLE

EXPECTED OUTSIDE CONTRIBUTIONS WE HAVE ACTUALLY CONFIRMED

CONTINGENCY AMOUNT WE WANT TO KEEP UNCOMMITTED

Splurge / save / skip

Put categories into buckets before the quotes start persuading you.

Category	Splurge	Keep simple	Skip / undecided
Venue / food			
Photography / video			
Music / entertainment			
Flowers / decor			
Attire / beauty			
Stationery / favors			
Guest comfort / transport			

Before increasing the budget: ask whether the problem is actually money. Sometimes the real constraint is guest count, venue capacity, time, energy, or simply that you do not want a larger or more elaborate wedding.

BUDGET



Budget worksheet

Use your own quotes and actual spending. Add or delete categories freely.

Category	Working budget	Quote / estimate	Actual	Notes
Venue / catering				
Photography / video				
Flowers / decor / rentals				
Entertainment				
Attire / alterations				
Stationery				
Beauty / grooming				
Transport / lodging				
Ceremony / legal				
Gifts / favors				
Other				
Contingency				

A smarter savings check

- ☐ Would reducing guest count improve both cost and the experience you want?
- ☐ Are you paying twice for something the venue or another vendor already includes?
- ☐ Could one high-impact design choice replace several smaller decor purchases?
- ☐ Are you buying something because it matters to you - or because it appears on wedding checklists?

GUEST LIST



A decision system for family pressure

Guest-list conflict gets harder when every name is argued one at a time. Decide the rules first.

Step 1 - Set the ceiling

Write the maximum number your venue, budget, and preferred wedding size can actually support.

HARD GUEST CEILING

ALREADY-PROMISED SPOTS

COUPLE'S MUST-INVITE TOTAL

REMAINING FLEXIBLE SPOTS

Step 2 - Use the same questions for every request

- ☐ Do we know this person well enough to recognize them without an introduction?
- ☐ Is there a meaningful relationship with either of us?
- ☐ Was this guest already promised to a parent or family member?
- ☐ Is there a cultural, reciprocity, elder, or family obligation we genuinely want to honor?
- ☐ What does adding this person require us to change elsewhere?

Step 3 - Say the rule, not a new excuse each time

Script: when parents keep adding names

"We have a firm guest limit. If there are people who are especially important to you, tell us which names are the priority and why. We can look at the list together, but we are not increasing the overall total."

VENDORS



Vendor comparison scorecard

Use the same criteria for every option so a beautiful sales call does not become the whole decision.

Criteria	Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C
Total quoted cost			
Exactly what is included			
Communication / responsiveness			
Style / service fit			
Contract clarity			
Backup plan			
Reviews / references			
Travel / setup / extra fees			
Payment schedule			
Overall confidence			

Decision note

What would have to be true for the cheapest option to be the best option? What would have to be true for the most expensive option to be worth it?

VENDORS



Questions to ask before you sign

Bring this page to consultations. For high-value or complicated contracts, independent legal advice may be worth the cost.

Scope

What exactly is included in the quoted price? What is not included?

Cancellation

What happens if we cancel or reschedule?

Availability

Who will actually be present on our wedding day?

Overtime

How is overtime approved and charged?

Backup

What happens if you are sick, equipment fails, or staffing changes?

Travel / setup

Are there delivery, travel, setup, teardown, or access fees?

Payments

What is due when? What is refundable or non-refundable?

Deliverables

What exactly do we receive, and by when?

Changes

How do date, scope, guest count, or service changes affect price?

Insurance / permits

Who is responsible for insurance, licenses, permits, or venue documents?

Questions or clauses to clarify before signing

FAMILY BOUNDARIES



When family money comes with expectations

The best time to discuss strings is before the contribution is accepted.

Before accepting money, clarify four things

- ☐ Is this a gift, a contribution toward specific items, or payment in exchange for decision-making input?
- ☐ Which decisions does the contributor expect to influence?
- ☐ Is the contribution fixed, or can it change later?
- ☐ What happens if you disagree on a decision?

If the answer is "no strings"

"Thank you. I want to make sure we heard you correctly: this is a gift toward the wedding, and the final decisions still belong to us. Is that what you mean?"

If there are specific expectations

"Let's write down which decisions matter to you before we accept. Then we can decide whether that arrangement works for everyone."

If the conditions do not work for you

"We appreciate the offer, but we are going to plan within a budget we can manage without those conditions."

FAMILY BOUNDARIES



Scripts for the conversations people dread

Use the structure, not necessarily the exact words.

Guest-list pressure

"We are keeping the total at [number]. If there are a few people who matter most to you, tell us which names are the priority. We can discuss those names, but not an unlimited list."

Tradition you do not want

"I understand why that tradition matters to you. We have decided not to include it. We are choosing [alternative / our own approach] instead."

Dress criticism

"I know it is not what you pictured. I have chosen the dress I want to wear, so I am not looking for more opinions on that decision."

Repeated advice after a decision

"We have heard your view and made the decision. I am not reopening it, but I am happy to talk about something else."

Family contacting vendors

"Please do not contact our vendors or change arrangements. If you have an idea, send it to us and we will decide whether to follow up."

WEDDING DAY



Build your own wedding-day timeline

Start with fixed times, then work backward. Add buffers for travel, photos, room flips, meals, and people who run late.

Time	What happens	Who owns it	Buffer / notes

Protect the couple from logistics

Choose one point person for routine questions. Vendors should know who can answer practical questions without interrupting the couple.

WEDDING DAY



Who handles what?

A beautiful timeline is not enough if nobody owns the handoffs.

Task / decision	Primary person	Backup	Where / when
Vendor arrival questions			
Final payments / tips			
Cards / gifts			
Personal belongings			
Transport issues			
Emergency kit			
Final venue check			
Decor / rental pickup			

Important contacts

VENUE / COORDINATOR

PHOTOGRAPHER

CATERER

TRANSPORT

OFFICIANT / CEREMONY LEAD

EMERGENCY CONTACT

INSPIRATION



From Pinterest to a real wedding

Use inspiration to identify what you like - not to copy a photograph built for someone else's venue, budget, season, and vendor team.

Translate the image

Instead of saving more pins, explain what you actually like about each one.

Reference / idea	What I like about it	Priority	What must be true for this to work

Reality-check questions

- ☐ What does this require in money, labor, setup time, or venue permission?
- ☐ Is it still important after we compare it with our top three priorities?
- ☐ What is the simpler version that creates the same feeling?
- ☐ Are we choosing this because we love it - or because it appears in wedding content?

WEDDING WEEK



The calm checklist

At this point, the job is not to improve the wedding. It is to remove uncertainty and protect your attention.

Confirm

Final guest count; vendor arrival times; final balances; ceremony and timeline details.

Pack

Attire, rings, documents, accessories, medication, chargers, emergency kit, snacks, water.

Delegate

Vendor questions; transport issues; decor handoffs; cards and gifts; end-of-night belongings.

Stop adding

DIY projects, new purchases, extra decor, last-minute upgrades that do not solve a real problem.

Final five hours before sleep

Write only the things that must happen before you can stop planning for the night.

☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____

WEDDING DAY



Emergency kit - useful, not enormous

Pack what fits your attire, venue, weather, health needs, and wedding party. You do not need to carry a pharmacy or hardware store.

Fashion fixes

Safety pins; fashion tape; mini sewing kit; stain-remover wipes; heel grips; spare tights if relevant.

Beauty / touch-ups

Lip product; powder or blotting paper; bobby pins; hair ties; travel hairspray; small mirror.

Comfort

Water; simple snacks; blister pads; tissues; menstrual products; hand sanitizer; any personal medication you normally use.

Practical

Phone charger; portable battery; vendor contacts; small scissors; umbrella; copies of key addresses or schedules.

Easy-to-forget extras

☐ Rings / ring box

☐ Vows / ceremony copy

☐ Water / snacks

☐ Sunscreen / umbrella

☐ Marriage-license documents

☐ Comfortable shoes

☐ Cash / card if needed

☐ Phone chargers

NEXT STEPS



Your next seven days

Do not leave this guide as another saved PDF. Pick three actions while the decisions are still fresh.

Three actions

1

2

3

One decision I will stop reopening

One conversation we need to have

You do not need a perfect plan. You need a plan you can actually use.

Keep this guide close - and keep your standards realistic.

A useful plan should make decisions clearer, not turn the wedding into a performance review. Adapt the framework, protect what matters, and delete the rest.