

# 11 TIPS FOR CHOOSING A WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER

Most of your wedding day will be a blur — the cake, the flowers, the music, the food and drink — but the photographs will capture those lost or missed moments and live on forever. You owe it to yourself to do everything you can to make them fabulous.

Here's a guide how to not only find your perfect photographer, but how to work with them.

## 1. Ground Work — Start Early

About a year before your wedding date, start your search by looking for photographers in the area of your wedding venue. Search on-line or ask for referrals from your wedding venue. Make phone calls to the ones you find to see if they are available for your date and are within your budget. Ask for their website to view galleries of weddings they have done so you can get a sense of their quality and style.

## 2. What Do You Want

As you review photographers and their photos, make note of key moments you want captured at your own wedding: Did this Photographer get great images that you like?

Look for creative compositions and that the images and people are in focus with nicely blurred backgrounds. Make sure people look relaxed, and not startled by the camera or photographer.

## 3. Meet Your Photographer

You can't pick a photographer based on just their sample photos or the price, you have to meet them. Once you have found some photographers whose work you like, try to set up an in-person meeting. You need to feel comfortable with your photographer because they'll be capturing your every move on your wedding day. You need to like your photographer's personality in order for them to do their best job.

## 4. Compare Photographer Packages

Packages should be spelled out exactly to what the photographer is offering, plus any additional fees that could be added. Consider: how many hours of shooting are included? What exactly do I get? Albums, Books, Photo CD's? Most packages include about four to eight hours and include everything from pre-ceremony getting ready to the live event, to cake and toast, to

garter and bouquet, to first dance and finally until the end of the reception and party. It's better to err with a package that allows more time than you think you need. Pay for more coverage, especially if you're planning a big send off exit.

## 5. Book your Photographer

Since every professional photographer has a different style, technique and personality, you need to make sure the photographer you interviewed and "got on good with" will be the same one who photographs your wedding. The really good photographers book

weddings eight to twelve months in advance. Popular spring and summer dates fill up quickly. Book your pho-

tographer as soon as you have chosen one. Booking usually requires a non refundable deposit to guarantee your date. The rest of the payment is usually required on or before the actual shoot day.

## 6. Ask For and Check References

Online reviews are great, and that should be part of your research, but once you've narrowed it down to a few photographers, ask to speak to a previous client or two. If you are able to speak with other previous clients, be sure to ask what they thought of the experience — from beginning to end. Ask if they were happy with the results of the photographs and any other products supplied.

## 7. Get It In Writing

Once you've chosen your photographer, get in writing everything included — from the date of the wedding and the times they'll cover, to postproduction work and how and when you'll receive the final products.

## 8. Schedule an Engagement Shoot

Once you hire a photographer, schedule an engagement shoot. This is an opportunity to get comfortable with your photographer while having your picture taken. This photo can be used for "Save the Date" announcements or invitations. It can be used on-line for social media. It can be enlarged and printed and matted for guests to sign the mat at the reception. It gives both

you and the photographer a chance to interact and give each other feedback.

## 9. Allow Extra Time in Schedule

On your special day, everything will take longer than you think. Figure out a timeline and then allow 15 extra minutes than you figured! Do this for things like getting your hair done, getting dressed, the toast and cake cutting, the garter and bouquet toss and the group photos.

Allowing for more time will alleviate any mishaps that might happen. From misplaced wedding rings to grandma hasn't arrived yet all take extra time. Make a schedule that leaves extra time to deal with mishaps. This will allow you to choose a package that has enough time for you and the photographer.

## 10. Plan Your "First Look"

Plan your "First Look" shoot before the ceremony. Be sure to plan on at

least a few shots of the two of you together. This is the time when your hair and makeup are perfect. Your clothing is fresh and clean. Fewer guests have arrived. It's a perfect time for photos.

## 11. Be Aware of the Photographer

Look at the camera, be aware where it is. Smile, Smile, Smile.

Look into each others eyes while reading vows. Don't hide your emotions. Laugh, enjoy and be happy.

Don't sweat the small stuff, like a reschedule of your engagement shoot because of rain or your bridesmaid melting down during the toast, or family members playing hard to get during the group shots.

Allow your photographer to help keep you on schedule and to corral your family members.

Allow them to pick the locations, frame the shots and to know what will look best. That's why you hired them.

— Submitted by Curt Peters of Digital Dunes Photography

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