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How to build a wedding registry



Many once-popular wedding traditions have fallen by the wayside. But one wedding tradition that has withstood the test of time is the wedding registry. Couples about to tie the knot still build a wedding registry so their guests know what to buy them as wedding gifts. This saves guests the trouble of agonizing over what to buy the couple getting hitched and also ensures that couples won't receive two or more of the same item. Building a registry can be fun, as couples can act like kids in a candy store and add items they might otherwise not be able to afford. But there is a method to building a registry that can ensure the process of giving and receiving gifts is comfortable and convenient for everyone involved.

- Choose a national chain. Many stores will allow couples to establish a registry, but it behooves couples to choose a

national chain or chains for their registry. A local boutique store might sell several items you would love to have, but that store may only be accessible to guests who live nearby, and such stores may be more expensive than larger national chains that can afford to charge less for similar products. Choosing a national chain ensures all of your guests will be able to access and purchase a gift from your registry, and make those purchases without breaking the bank.

- Choose a store with an online presence. When choosing a store for your registry, it also helps to choose a store with an online presence that's user-friendly. Ideally, pick an online retailer you have already had positive experiences with. This not only will make it easier for your guests, but also for you should you decide to

return items down the road.

- Choose more than one store. You also want to choose more than one store when building a registry. Some guests will prefer to shop in-store rather than online, so you want to give them some options so they don't have to drive far and wide to find the lone brick and mortar store for your registry.
- Visit the stores and do your homework. Though some stores allow you to develop a registry entirely online, it still helps for couples to visit the store together and build their registries in the more traditional way. Visiting a store as opposed to browsing the store website allows you to touch and feel products, which can give you a more accurate idea of their quality. In addition to seeing the products in person, read online reviews of products before putting them on your registry so you can ensure you're getting quality items.
- Choose items that vary in price. Many couples are sheepish about putting expensive items on their registries. That's not surprising, as the cost of attending a wedding,

especially one that features lots of out-of-town guests, can be substantial. But some guests, such as the bride and groom's parents and siblings, may want to give a more high-end gift, so don't be afraid to include items in a range of prices, from the inexpensive to the more costly, on your registry.

- Don't abandon the registry after your big day. You won't end up getting everything you include on your registry, but that doesn't mean you should just forget about those items that never made their way into your home. Many retailers offer couples significant discounts on items from their registries that were never purchased, and those discounts may extend for as long as a year after the big day. Revisit your registry after the wedding to see if you can find great deals on those items you never received, and continue to do so until the registry expires. Building a registry can be a fun activity for couples about to tie the knot. But there are some guidelines to follow to make the process go smoothly for guests and couples alike.

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Wedding invitation and postage tips



stock, typically weigh more than one ounce. Never purchase postage in advance, as you will not know what the completed invitation costs prior to mailing.

Always weigh the invitation with all inserts included to get an accurate estimate of postage. Then purchase stamps accordingly.

• Get to know your local postal employee.

Many postal employees, especially those who work at the smaller branches, grow accustomed to seeing the same customers over and over. They can be very helpful and good resources when it comes to saving money on postage. Strike up a conversation with the person behind the counter and ask advice on the best way to mail invitations and ensure they arrive looking beautiful. Choose an off-peak time so the postal employee can give you his or her full attention and will not feel rushed by a line forming behind you. The employee may suggest hand-canceling envelopes, which means the invitation will be processed by hand rather than run through machinery to avoid damage.

• Stamp the return envelope. Invitations typically include response cards that guests will send back to confirm if they will be attending the festivities. To facilitate the RSVP process, stamp the response card.

• Prep invitations six to eight weeks in advance. Invitations should be mailed nearly two months prior to the wedding. This allows guests to plan and respond accordingly.

• Double-check envelopes before sending. Ensure that postage is sticking well and that envelopes are well-sealed. In addition, veri-

Whether a couple is planning a lavish wedding or a more low key affair, the wedding invitations are an essential part of keeping guests informed about the big day.

While couples can now share details of their wedding through email or even digital invitations, many still prefer to go the traditional route and send paper invitations. In addition to the cost of the invitations themselves, couples need to factor postage into their wedding budgets. It may not seem like much, but the cost of postage can add up quickly. The following are a few postage pointers for couples about to tie the knot.

• Choose envelopes wisely. The size of your envelopes contributes to the cost of the postage necessary to mail your invitations. Postal services have specific size and shape parameters that govern postage. Envelopes that are oddly shaped or fall outside of these strict measurements are usually susceptible to additional postage charges. That's because the envelope cannot run through standard sorting machinery and must be hand-processed.

• Consider the weight. Mailings that exceed one ounce will require additional postage, even if they are in standard envelopes. Invitations, with their various components and thick card

fy that you have the most current addresses for recipients. If invitations get returned to sender, they can cost you even more time and money to resolve any issues.

• Consider custom postage. The post office should carry several attractive options for wedding invitation stamps. However, you also may be able to go online and purchase custom postage that features a graphic or an uploaded image to make the invitations even more special.

• Do a test run. You may want to send a complete invitation to yourself just to see how it arrives in the mail. This way you can check the level of damage and have an opportunity to make any changes, such as adding

a piece of vellum to prevent ink from smudging or to place bows or adornments in another area.

• Give your mail carrier a heads-up. Let your assigned mail carrier know that response cards will be on the way. They tend to be small and can get lost in among other letters and mail. A small token of gratitude, such as a gift card, for your mail carrier may ensure all of your response cards arrive.

A wedding just isn't the same without the guests. Make sure friends and family are well informed about the wedding by sending out invitations in advance and ensuring the proper postage will get those invites where they need to go.

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Be smart about wedding beauty preparation

All eyes are on the bride and groom on their wedding day. Feeling beautiful and dapper can boost a couple's confidence and ensure they look back on their wedding photographs and videos with pride.

Certain beauty basics and makeup and hair strategies can help any bride look spectacular on her wedding day. The following are some dos and don'ts of wedding day beauty preparations.

DO employ the services of a professional hairstylist and makeup artist. Professionals have the experience and tools of the trade to help you to look your best. From contouring to make your face seem slimmer to enlarging the appearance of small eyes, some tricks of the trade are best left to the pros.

DON'T forget to schedule a trial run. Make this appointment several months before the wedding day so you have ample time to work with your stylists and experiment with colors and hair arrangements to fit your personality and the style of your gown. Take plenty of pictures and notes so you will remember what needs to be on hand for the wedding day.

DO allot enough time for the wedding day beauty appointment. If you will be going to a salon, block out two or more slots instead of one. This way the stylist does not overbook and will not feel rushed. Many brides opt to have stylists come to their homes. There may be an extra charge for

this service, but it may be well worth the cost.

DON'T make any drastic changes to your appearance right before the wedding. This includes changing your hair color or texture, extreme tanning, using colored contact lenses, or chopping off all of your hair. It's better to wait until after the wedding to change your style.

DO bring a veil, headpiece, hair extensions, and any other accessories to your hair consult. This enables the stylist to practice working with these items.

DON'T tweeze or wax brows too close to the start of the ceremony. Redness and swelling are common side effects of tweezing and waxing, and they can be difficult to mask with makeup. Instead, take care of hair removal a day or two prior to the wedding.

DO exfoliate your skin prior to the wedding. This doesn't necessarily mean you should endure a harsh fruit acid peel or another procedure. You can exfoliate with a gentle washing of your skin with a nubby washcloth to remove any dryness and errant flakes. Moisturize well to ensure a smooth palette for makeup application.

DON'T wash or condition hair the day of the wedding. Intricate styles tend to stay better when hair has a little grip. "Dirty" hair is easier to work with than shiny, freshly washed locks. If you must wash, remember to thoroughly dry your hair before going to your appointment.



DO wear a little extra make-up than you are accustomed to wearing because it will show up better in photos. However, do not wear so much that you look clownish. A makeup artist can help you achieve the right balance.

DON'T have bridesmaids wear makeup that is bolder than yours, especially red lips. No one should upstage the bride.

DO experiment with any products you haven't used before to test for allergic reactions and see how well they wear.

DON'T wear too much under-eye concealer or one that is too light of a shade. This can draw more attention to problem areas than remedy them.

DO bring a pain relief medication in case a tight hairstyle or headpiece causes a headache.

DON'T forget that men need a little help as well. Exfoliation and moisturization can help dry skin. Guys should use

a new razor and plenty of cream before shaving to avoid irritation. A dusting of finishing powder can banish shiny noses and foreheads for photo-ready faces.

Chances are more photographs will be taken of a newlywed couple than at any other moment in their lives. Certain beauty dos and don'ts should be followed so couples put their best faces forward.

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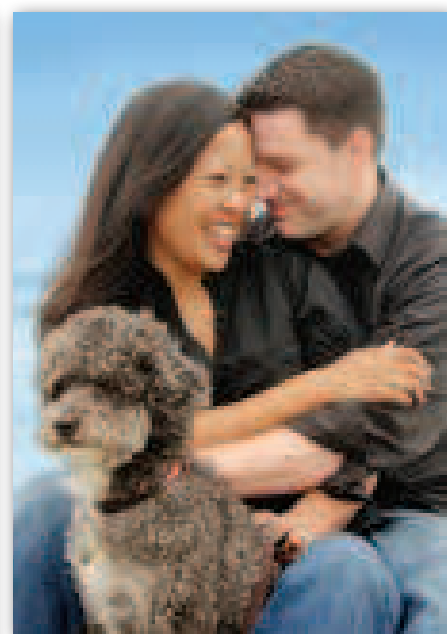
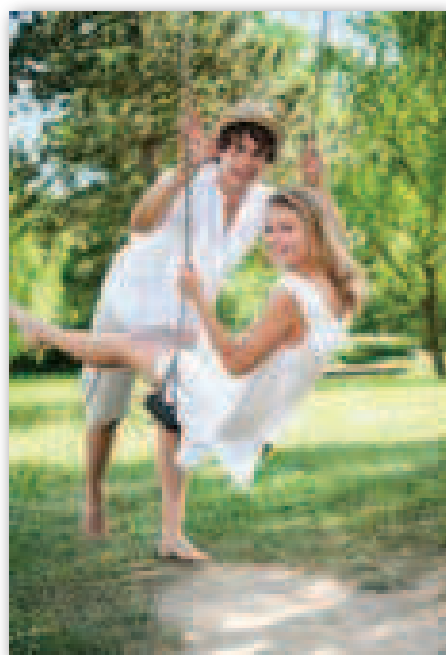
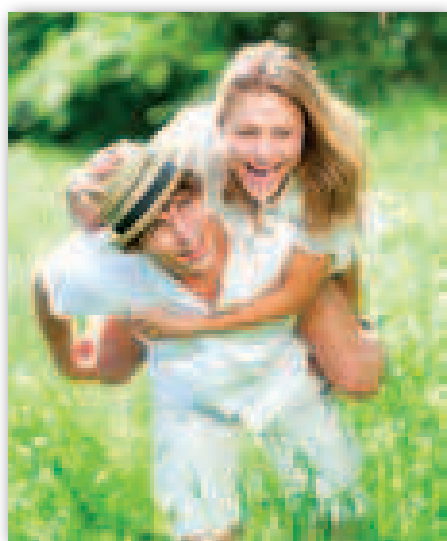
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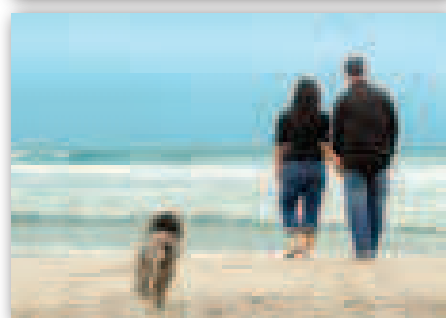
Engagement photos vary depending on the couple. Often reserved for save-the-date cards and now commonly used to spruce up wedding websites, engagement photos can range from formal shoots in which couples are dressed to the nines to more laid back shots featuring couples in more everyday attire. When planning an engagement shoot, couples should give themselves carte blanche with regard to style, as the photo shoot need not follow many of the more accepted rules that the wedding itself will ultimately adhere to. Once couples have settled on a style for their photo shoot, there are additional ways to ensure the session is a success.

- Find a photographer who shares your sensibilities. Photographers can vary greatly in style, and an engagement photo shoot will be most successful when couples find a photographer whose style matches the theme they are looking for with their photoshoot. You likely would not hire a nature photographer to photograph a basketball game, so don't hire someone who specializes in posed shots if you want your photos to be more lively and spontaneous. Before you hire anyone, ask for samples of each photographer's work to be certain you're getting someone



who has experiencing shooting the type of photos you want to take.

- Solicit ideas from the photographer. Some couples already know exactly where they want their engagement photos to be shot and which poses they want to be arranged. However, many couples have little or no experience with professional photo shoots, and such couples should solicit ideas from each photographer they are considering hiring. A skilled and/or seasoned photographer should propose several ideas. Be wary of photographers who offer little input, as you may ultimately be dissatisfied with their work once the shoot has come and gone.
- Avoid studio shots. Many couples prefer their engagement photos be taken somewhere they



have a personal connection to, such as the sight of their first date or a park they frequently visit. Studio photo shoots might provide the best lighting, but couples have no connection to such spaces, and down the road they may regret not taking the photos in someplace that's a little more meaningful. In addition, a photo shoot outside the studio affords couples and their photographer more opportunities to experiment

and improvise, which can produce a wider array of shots than a studio photo shoot is likely to deliver.

- Don't forget candid shots. Candid shots make the photo shoot more fun and loosen couples up a little bit. Many engagement photos will never be seen by anyone other than the photographer and the couple he or she is shooting, so don't be bashful during candid shots for fear of being embarrassed down the road. Have fun with the candid shots, and your other photos are likely to come out better as a result. An engagement photo shoot should be fun and reflect the personalities of the couple. A few simple strategies can ensure couples' shoots accomplish both of those things.

Factors to consider when choosing a wedding photography package

Couples must make a host of important decisions when planning their weddings. Some decisions, such as choosing a venue to host the reception, require more effort and research on the part of couples than others.

One decision that couples must make carefully concerns the photography package they choose for their ceremonies and receptions. Wedding photographers play a big role on a couple's big day, and it's important that men

and women about to tie the knot consider a host of factors before choosing the men or women they will ultimately task with visually documenting their wedding days.

- Engagement photo shoot: Couples who want to do an engagement photo shoot may want to negotiate such a shoot into their photography package. Some agencies include engagement shoots in their packages while others do not. If the engagement photo shoot is on your list of needs, then look for an agency that provides such services as part of its packages or agencies willing to include the engagement photo shoot for free or for an added fee.
- Party size: The number of people on the guest list should factor into your choice of wedding photographer. If your guest list is especially large, then you might want to consider hiring two or more photographers to document the day. Many agencies offer separate packages for couples who want one photographer and couples who prefer two or more photographers, so it pays to examine the price differences between such packages

to see if more than one photographer can fit into your budget. Couples with relatively small guests lists can typically get by with just a single photographer to document their ceremonies and receptions.

- Travel: When discussing a wedding photography package, ask how much travel is included in the package. This is important for couples whose ceremonies are in a separate location from their receptions. If the distance between the ceremony site and the reception venue is considerable, you may have to pay extra for the photographer to travel between both sites. While a reasonable amount of travel is typically included in a photography package, it's best that you confirm this prior to signing an agreement.
- Videography: Many photography agencies also offer videography services in some of their wedding packages. Videography can be a great way for couples to document their wedding days, and it can be fun for couples to watch their wedding videos with their families down the road.



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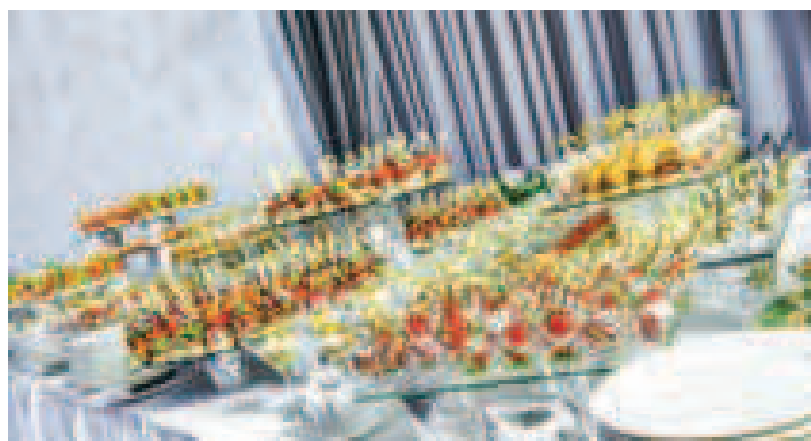
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Hot trends in wedding cuisine

Once a couple has officially tied the knot, the newly recognized man and wife and all of their guests will retire to a party room where they can mingle, dance and enjoy a good meal. In the past, standard fare like prime rib and roasted chicken dominated wedding menus. But today's weddings cater to people of various culinary tastes, and couples and their guests can expect more upscale and creative cuisine to be rolled out for wedding receptions. The following are a handful of the more popular trends with regard to wedding cuisine. Miniature bites Many people say good things come in small packages, and when it comes to miniature versions of favorite foods, they may be right. Instead of large meals that fill guests up fast, they can munch on smaller bites of their favorite dishes. How about a piece of meatloaf topped with whipped mashed potatoes? A cherry tomato with a small piece of mozzarella cheese makes a mini caprese salad. Turning favorite foods into bite-sized adventures can add a touch of whimsy to the reception. Breakfast for dinner Some couples are circumventing high price tags for their weddings by choosing to hold the festivities at less expensive times of day. Brunch-themed weddings are a big hit with those who would much

rather dine on a stack of pancakes than a dish of pasta. Omelet stations, croissants and a bevy of other breakfast table fare can be enjoyed any time of the day. Dim sum Dim sum allows guests to sample different foods without filling up. Carts of dumplings and other small plates of appetizers can be wheeled around so everyone can choose what they want and what they want to avoid. Gourmet comfort food People love familiar comfort foods, but now gourmet comfort foods are shaking up wedding receptions. Mac-and-cheese with gouda and brie or chicken pot pie with a puff-pastry crust are a few offerings that can add glamour to down-home cooking. Food with a show Instead of passed foods or buffet stations, couples are opting to make food an experience for guests. An oyster bar with a chef serving fresh seafood or a dessert master whipping up flambé is a feast for the eyes and mouth. Interesting buffet stations Keep guests on their toes with various meal stations. A bountiful display of artisanal cheeses, fruits and breads will be a cheese lover's dream. These stations also can be appetizing focal points around the room and ensure all guests get a bite of what they like best.





Family style Rustic and informal weddings have grown in popularity. Rather than food being brought to the guests or participants lining up in buffet lines, family-style dining allows guests to share conversation and pass the peas at the same time. Larger, rectangular tables allow more guests to sit with one another and serve themselves food from community plates located in the center of the tables. Food and beverage pairings Food-forward wedding couples are offering guests mouthwatering appetizers matched with a cocktail. A slider and a craft beer or a dumpling and a shot of saki are examples of this trend. Nontraditional 'fake' cakes Instead of a multi-tiered cake or the cupcake fad that is starting to fizzle, couples are now opting for something new. Desserts that mimic the look of cake, but aren't quite that combination of sponge and frosting are trending. Crepes, pies, cookies, and doughnuts are acceptable and can add a creative spark to the cake-cutting ceremony. When offered along with dessert stations, guests can certainly get their fill of sweet delights. Vegan and gluten-free options Chances are one or more people attend-

ing the reception will be on a restricted diet. Rather than relegate these guests to dining on side dishes and patchwork meals, certain couples are building entire offerings around vegan and gluten-free foods. Couples are getting creative with their food and beverage offerings at their weddings. Guests never know which culinary wonders they will encounter as they gather to wish the newlyweds well.



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Cake-cutting etiquette and guidelines



The presentation of the wedding cake marks the culmination of the day's festivities and a final symbol of a happy couple's new partnership. Many people eagerly await the cake as much as they may anticipate catching a glimpse of the bride in her beautiful gown. While the cake in all its finery can be a beautiful sight to behold, a cake can only last so long before its fate as a delicious dessert is sealed.

As is the case with many wedding traditions, there is some established etiquette with regard to cutting and serving wedding cake. If you plan on putting your cake on display, be sure it is made with a frosting and filling that can endure room temperature. Certain creams may sour if not refriger-

ated, and you do not want anyone becoming ill. If you have your heart set on perishable fillings, keep the cake refrigerated and then have the big reveal right before it is cut.

The cake cutting usually comes near the end of the wedding reception. Schedule the cutting so that older guests or young children can leave without feeling as if they would be offending anyone. The emcee of the evening typically announces the cake cutting, and the band may play a quirky tune or revisit the wedding song while the first slice is being cut.

A bride should hold the cake knife with her right hand, while the groom places his right hand over hers before they proceed to slice down together. If the cake has a

foam or cardboard support, be careful not to cut through it. Use a cake server to grab the first piece.

Traditionally the newly betrothed will feed each other a bite of the cake to symbolize their first meal as a couple. Couples can feed each other a small amount, taking care not to spill any. Many couples no longer embrace the once-popular tradition of smashing cake in each other's faces, but whether or not couples follow this tradition is up to them.

Some couples like to serve their parents a piece of cake. Traditionally the bride should serve the groom's parents and the groom the bride's parents.

If there is a groom's cake, guests may prefer a slice of both cakes. Guests

may also want to take home a slice of the groom's cake. Tradition states that a piece of the groom's cake should be presented to an unmarried woman attending the wedding. The woman is not expected to eat the cake, but rather to put it under her pillow. Superstition held that this tradition would help an unmarried woman find a husband. Make arrangements for proper packaging of the groom's cake, so guests can take home a slice if they so desire.

The waitstaff typically handles the slicing of the cake. The uppermost tier is reserved for the couple to save, and the remainder of the cake will be served.

Recognize that not all guests like cake, but it's better to err on the side of caution and have a cake that will feed all of the guests. You also may want to offer a dessert bar for guests who prefer another type of sweet treat. However, this is a luxury, not a necessity.

The cake-cutting ritual at weddings has withstood the test of time, and many couples still prefer to present the cake with fanfare and excitement.

Did you know?

The timing of when a couple cuts the wedding cake can have a specific meaning. Long ago, the cake was usually cut at the very end of the reception and would signal to the guests that it was the end of the festivities. Today, cutting the cake is an unspoken signal that represents that the formal wedding is nearing a close, and guests who would like to leave can do so without worry of being rude. Many couples will cut the cake right after dinner as a courtesy to older guests who may want to get started on their trips home. This affords them the chance to make an earlier exit, rather than staying through the dancing that could extend into the wee hours of the night or missing the cake entirely. Cutting the cake mid-reception also serves another practical purpose for couples who are paying a photographer by the hour. Photographers typically go home after the cake-cutting, so a mid-reception cutting can save couples a substantial amount of money.



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Music mistakes to avoid



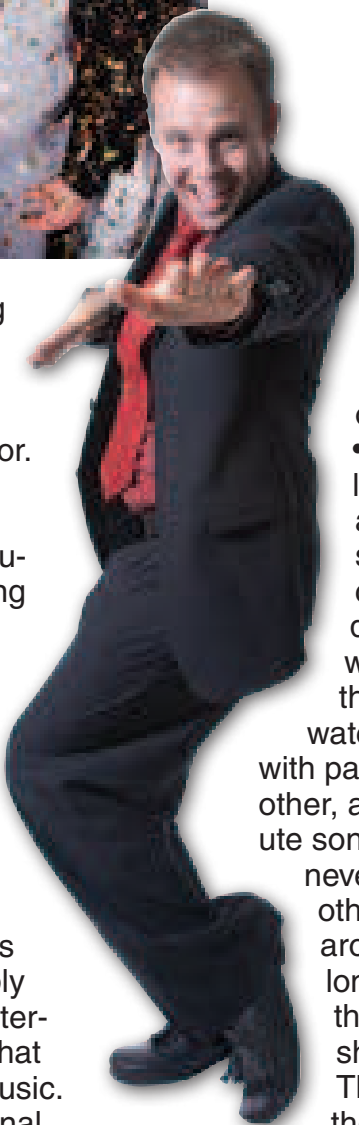
Steering clear of wedding music mistakes means couples have a greater likelihood of throwing spectacular parties.

Wedding guests are usually anxious to head to the reception, where they can let loose and party. Music is an essential component of a lively and fun wedding reception, and there are some musical miscues couples should look to avoid to ensure the music is not memorable for all the wrong reasons.

- **Blocks of silence:** Nothing makes time seem interminable more than silence. Always have a constant flow of music to avoid awkward silences. This includes the time guests are waiting prior to the ceremony as well as when they're entering the cocktail hour. Music will help everyone feel comfortable, and it creates a pleasing atmosphere, so make sure music plays throughout the festivities.
- **Second-guessing a professional:** In an effort to curb costs, some couples provide their own playlists via an mp3 player or a streaming service for the music. This is often a mistake. Hiring a professional means you will not have to worry about managing music on top of your many other wedding day responsibilities. A band or deejay usually also serves as the emcee for the event, announcing key moments of the reception as well

as getting guests up on the dance floor.

- **Playing only one type of music:** Playing too many songs from one genre of music will alienate some of the guests who simply are not interested in that type of music. Professional deejays or performers know how to offer a great mix that will appeal to the masses, and they are often well worth the cost. Try to span different decades and genres to keep as many of your guests on the dance floor as possible.
- **Failure to make a song list:** Some songs you may feel are essential to the wedding and others may be on a do-not-play list and are associated with negative memories. Band leaders and deejays are not mind readers. Give your band leader or deejay ample time to review your requests so that he or

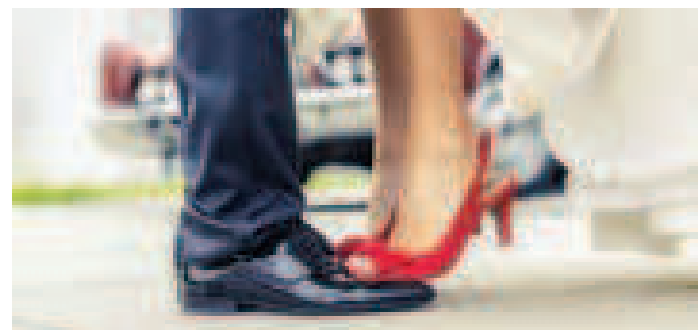


she has time to find a song that may not be in his or her collection.

- **Dancing to long songs:** Pay attention to a song's length, and choose spotlight dance songs wisely. Remember that guests will be watching you dance with parents or each other, and a five-minute song can seem never-ending while others are waiting around. Avoid very long songs, as the mix of music should be upbeat. The wedding isn't the time to play "American Pie" by Don McClean, Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" or Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Free Bird."

- **Inappropriate lyrics and volume:** Keep the music at an acceptable volume, and avoid songs with suggestive language or curse words that are inappropriate in a family setting. Music is a key element of any good party, including a wedding reception, and it's essential that couples take steps to avoid any musical miscues.

Popular & modern first dance songs



A couple's first dance as man and wife is a cherished wedding tradition. While the first dance can help set a positive tone for the reception, it also can negatively impact the festivities if a poor song is chosen.

Couples may feel pressure to choose the perfect song. Yes, this is a song that the couple has selected to represent their love for each other, but it also should be one that will speak to the masses and can be thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Couples want to avoid a song that does not seem to fit with the festivities. For those couples who need a little musical inspiration, turn to many of the modern hits you're bound to hear on the radio which may help you to shine in that first dance.

"A Thousand Years" by Christina Perri:
"Twi-hard" fans enjoyed this romantic song during the pivotal wedding scene between Bella Swan and Edward Cullen in the popular "Twilight" movie "Breaking Dawn." Couples looking to recreate the magic of these star-crossed lovers can embrace Perri's delicate tone and tender lyrics.

"All of Me" by John Legend:
It's been hard to escape this popular love song by R&B artist John Legend. An ode Legend wrote to his wife, this song has quickly become a popular choice for a couple's first dance.

"I Choose You" by Sara Bareilles:
This peppy song by singer/songwriter Sara Bareilles is a good choice for couples who prefer being nontraditional. It's faster paced and less sentimental than many other wedding songs.

"Better Together" by Jack Johnson:
Johnson is known primarily for his soft rock and acoustic guitar work blended with catchy lyrics. Also an accomplished surfer, Johnson's work is enjoyed by many but may be especially prized by couples who want to their reception to be a laid back affair full of fun and whimsy.

"I Won't Give Up" by Jason Mraz:
Another acoustic ditty, this song has a country influence and talks about not giving up and staying in a relationship for the long haul.

"I Don't Dance" by Lee Brice:
Speaking of country influences, couples who want a little twang in their first dances can choose Brice's breakthrough hit. Romantic lyrics about spinning his partner around in circles despite not liking to dance illustrates what one partner will do for the other when in love.

Couples can make that first moment on the dance floor a special experience by choosing modern classics for their first dances.

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