



P.O. Box 1471 - Front Royal, Virginia 22630
(540)635-3503 Fax(540)636-3503

www.thedjconnection.com – Email: fundj@thedjconnection.com

Wedding Ceremony Etiquette

SEATING FOR THE CEREMONY

The first pew on the left side of the church is usually reserved for the bride's parents, while the right side is usually taken by the groom's. (These directions are reversed for Conservative and Orthodox Jewish weddings).

Relatives and other honored guests are seated in reserved pews just behind the parents. Often these pews are ribboned off and special cards may be issued to the guest who will be seated there. To avoid confusion, the head usher should be given a list of the guests who will be seated there.

WEDDING TIME CHART

There are many types of ceremonies and traditions and customs. The following procedures are followed by the majority of brides, but you must determine with your family and clergy what procedures you will follow on your wedding day.

The following schedule is recommended for a large formal wedding taking place about fifteen minutes away from the bride's house.

Two hours before the ceremony, you should begin dressing with your mother and your maid of Honor in assistance.

One hour before the ceremony, the bridesmaids - all fully dressed - gather with their flowers and pose for pictures. This allows you time to make sure everyone is properly dressed and ready to be transported to the ceremony in a group.

Forty-five to sixty minutes before the ceremony, *the ushers arrive at the ceremony site and put on their boutonnieres. They gather near the entrance to await the arrival of the first guests.*

Thirty minutes before the ceremony, *the organist begins the introductory music while the ushers escort guests to their seats. Your friends and relatives are seated on the left side of the church, your groom is on the right.*

At this time, the groom and his best man arrive. This is when the clergyman checks the marriage license, receives his fee from the best man and issues last minute instruction he may find necessary.

Ten minutes before the ceremony, *your Maid of Honor, bridesmaids, and other attendants arrive at the church, followed by your mother, the groom's parents and other members of both families. The bridal party and the parents wait in the vestibule while the other relatives are seated.*

Five minutes before the ceremony, *the mother of the groom is escorted to her seat in the first pew on the right side of the aisle. The father of the groom follows a few feet behind the usher escorting his wife, then takes his seat beside her. You and your father arrive in a chauffeured limousine about this time or stand inside at a back entrance of another room where your guests won't see you. Your mother is escorted to her seat in the front pew. If guests are still waiting at this time, however, they should be seated first. The bride's mother is always the last person seated by an usher. As she starts down the aisle, you and your father join the waiting members of the wedding party.*

Just before the ceremony, *two ushers walk in step to the front of the aisle to lay the aisle ribbons and canvas. The ribbons, used only at very formal weddings, remind guests to stay in their places until the parents and other relatives have been escorted out. At this time, the guests should all have been seated and the candles lit. The ushers can now pull out the runner if there is one. Care must be taken that the runner be secure if one is used and not impair or in any way cause the bridal party the chance of slipping.*

THE PROCESSION

Everything is now set for the procession. In Protestant services, the congregation stands as soon as the wedding march begins, the clergyman enters and takes his place at the front of the church. The groom and best man follow him to a position just in front of the first, right-hand pew, and all turn to watch the procession,

The ushers enter from the back of the church in pairs according to height, followed by the bridesmaids. If there is an odd usher or bridesmaid, the smallest attendant leads off first. The maid or matron of honor comes next, followed by the ring bearer, if there is one, and the flower girl. The pages, if any, follow the bride, carrying her train. Catholic brides and grooms may follow the same procedure. Jewish processions vary according to local tradition, whether Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform and according to the preference of the families.

In the simplest Reform service, the ushers lead the procession in pairs, followed by the bridesmaids in pairs. The groom comes down the aisle next, with his best man followed by the maid of honor, the flower girl, if there is one, and the bride on her father's right. The groom's parents and the bride's mother may join in the procession and remain standing under the chupa or canopy during the service.

An elaborate procession may be led by the rabbi and cantor, followed by the couples' grandparents, the ushers, the bridesmaids, the best man, the groom and his parents, the bride's honor attendants, her flower girl(s), and the bride with her parents. Ask your rabbi how he prefers to organize the procession, and take into account the amount of space available for the wedding party to stand in.

ALTAR PROCEDURES

When the bridal party gets to the first rows of seats they can form one of two alternate arrangements.

1. The ushers all turn right to form a diagonal line behind the groom and best man. The bridesmaids do the same thing on the left side.
2. Each pair of attendants separates going to each side placing a groomsman and bridesmaid beside each other.

Children may stand through the ceremony or be seated in the second or third row.

In the Protestant service, when you reach the altar where your groom is waiting you leave your father's arm and take one step forward. The groom steps forward and stands to your right. Your father remains standing behind you until the minister asks, "Who gives this woman to be married?" The bride is given away because in early times she was looked on almost as chattel. Her parents arranged her marriage, and she was literally given to the groom. Today, the father walks his daughter to the altar and give her in marriage as a sign of his approval of the union.

In most ceremonies, the father returns to his seat by your mother as soon as he gives you away. In the Jewish ceremony, all the parents may remain standing throughout.

If you are required to kneel or climb steps during the ceremony, your groom usually takes your arm and helps you up and down. When the ceremony is over and the clergyman has congratulated you, your face veil (if you have one) is lifted by your groom. The traditional kiss may follow, or you may simply turn to face your guests. The maid of honor puts your bouquet in your right hand and can arrange your train in preparation for the recessional.

THE RECESSIONAL

When the organist begins the recessional music, you'll take the groom's right arm and proceed up the aisle together. Your attendants will follow you. Make sure you remind the groomsman to go back and escort any grandmothers and mothers that are seated in the front of the church!

Photographs normally follow the ceremony, once your guests have left the church. If you are not having a receiving line, it is recommended that you and the wedding party find a place (out of your guests view) to wait until all your guests have left the church. If you and your wedding party mill around in the lobby of the church, you will get the equivalent of a receiving line, whether you want it or not! Meet at the altar for portraits of the wedding party and parents. A good professional photographer will take no longer than 30 minutes.

THE RECEIVING LINE

In recent years, the trend for many brides is to omit the receiving line and prefer to go around meeting their relatives and friends during the reception. This is a more personal touch, and doesn't force your guests to stand in a long line. If you feel that you really want a receiving line, it is recommended that you do this at the church or ceremony location rather than at the reception. The receiving line is normally formed at the back of the church or stairway, and pictures are normally taken immediately after the guests go through the line.

SPECIAL VARIATIONS

If your father has died, you may ask any relative or friend to act as your escort. Sometimes the mother or groom walk the bride down the aisle.

If your parents are divorced, your father can still give you away. He does not need to sit with your mother.

If the church has two center aisles, it's customary to use the left aisle for the procession, and the right aisle for the recessional. However, in most cases, the bride uses the aisle most convenient.

SEMIFORMAL WEDDINGS

Most formal wedding procedures also apply to semi-formal Weddings. At smaller weddings, pew ribbons and aisle carpets are usually omitted but I have seen very small weddings decorated very pretty and charmingly elegant. Small weddings do not have to be without charm and atmosphere and can be decorated very effectively.

INFORMAL WEDDINGS

Guests at an informal affair seat themselves as soon as they arrive. When it's time for the ceremony, you and the groom, maid of honor, and the best man all take your appointed places in front of the clergyman. At the end of the short ceremony, you can turn and greet your guests.