

REHEARSAL ROADMAP

Your rehearsal is the beginning of the celebration, so have fun while being serious enough to get everyone organized. If your wedding is intended to be informal, this roadmap is overly complicated but parts of it will be helpful.

I. BEFORE THE REHEARSAL

Plan a seating arrangement. First, for special guests and immediate family members, especially those who are part of the processional. Next, for caretakers for any children involved such as ring bearers, flower dropping people, etc. Then, for people who are reading/singing. Give a copy of the plan to each usher.

Arrange a plan for ushers to seat your guests. If you have no designated ushers, recruit groomsmen, or, family members. Be sure that they understand what seats are reserved for the special guests, readers, children, etc. Be specific regarding when to seat the guests, especially for an outdoor wedding on a hot day. Have a place for wheelchairs, the aged, or the physically challenged. The back row is the best place for guests bringing infants. Instruct your ushers to begin seating guests in the non-reserved front rows. Since they probably are not sure how to usher demonstrate what you want them to do. Prepare them for being asked “which side is the brides/grooms.” Provide the ushers with a copy of the processional list and, if possible, assign a specific usher to specific honored guest, e.g., bride’s mother, etc.

Decide upon the order and cues for your music. The following works well.

- 1.) Gathering music is played for 10-15 minutes before the officiant and groom enter.
- 2.) Processional music is cued by entry of officiant and groom and continues until final member of wedding party passes officiant.
- 3.) Bridal music is cued when officiant announces “Please stand for the Bride”.
- 4.) Recessional music is cued when officiant formally introduces married couple to gathering “Ladies and gentlemen it is my honor and joy to be the first to introduce to you . . .”.

II. THE REHEARSAL

Arrange for the necessary parties to get together at a given time and place, most likely the wedding site or a place nearby on the evening before the ceremony. While the exact site may not be available, because it is being used for another ceremony, your people at least will become familiar with the site.

Begin by positioning the wedding party as you wish them to be during the ceremony. First, decide if you want them facing directly toward the gathering or on a 45 degree angle toward the bride and groom. Then, check that the groomsmen and bridesmaids are standing symmetrically with their hands placed as you would like, and importantly, all in the same position. The quality of your photographs/video is directly related to the uniformity of the bridal party: distance of separation, angle to gathering, etc. See it with your own eyes and politely change what needs to be changed. The bridal party needs a center from which to “line up”. If you are using an arch, the sides of it are the easiest and best center. In the absence of an arch, the officiant becomes the center. Arranging the bridal party equi-distant from the center and from each other will pay huge dividends when you see your wedding photos. Remind the wedding party that each gesture they make may well be immortalized by the photographer or videographer.

A.) PROCESSIONAL

Show the wedding party where they will gather before the processional and how you would like them to line up – a printed list is helpful. The traditional order is (groom’s people first) grandparents, parents, other special guests, groomsmen and bridesmaids, ring bearer, flower girl, (aisle runner?) bride and her escort.

After deciding if the bridal party will walk in as couples or if the groomsmen will “stand up” with the officiant and groom, PRACTICE THE PROCESSIONAL. Have a plan as to spacing e.g. each person begins when the person next in front reaches half way down the aisle. Walking slowly is good. If step-parents are involved use common sense and plenty of good humor in arranging their entrance. Children will appreciate direction; “smile, head up, look at groom and sit next to mom after you get to the front”.

(When bridal party is in place the officiant will say “please stand for the Bride” to cue music change and bride’s entrance.)

Bride and her escort should decide on a parting gesture or kiss. If you like I will ask “who presents this woman. . .” Traditionally, the groom, who is standing to the bride’s right, takes a couple steps forward. The bride’s escort places bride’s hand in his hand or bride will take hold of the groom’s left arm. Then, bride and groom take a couple steps away from their respective families to the place where they will stand during ceremony. You may decide to face each other directly or 45 degrees toward the officiant or gathering.

B.) RECESSIONAL

At the conclusion of the ceremony the officiant cues the music for the recessional.

The traditional recessional is cued by the officiant formally presenting the married couple “. . . the first to introduce to you Mr. and Mrs. Groom and Bride”. As the recessional music begins the wedding party retraces their steps up the aisle perhaps pausing halfway so the photographer can get a good photo of each: Bride and Groom ; children as flower girls/ring bearers?; Maid of Honor accompanied by Best Man; attendants as couples; Bride’s parents; Groom’s parents; Bride’s grandparents; Groom’s grandparents. PRACTICE THE RECESSIONAL. Have a plan for where everyone will go after passing the guests. Receiving line?

C.) MISCELLANEOUS

Designate a person to hold the wedding rings. I recommend they be in boxes in the best man’s pocket. Remind him to inconspicuously get ready to hand off the rings after the couple says their vows. (If a ring bearer is to carry in a pillow attach costume jewelry to avoid the possibility of losing a ring and the awkwardness of getting the rings off the pillow.)

If you are incorporating a unity candle ceremony, run through the logistics. Light the wicks to be sure they are not broken or stuck in the wax. Also check that they fit in the candleholders. (For an outdoor ceremony you might prefer to light the unity candle during the reception or to substitute the sand blending ceremony.)

If the bride’s dress has a train, designate someone to do “arrange” it. Likewise, arrange for someone to hold the bride’s flowers during the vows and ring exchange and agree on cues for the hand-off and hand-back.

If you are using props, e.g., unity candle, unity sand ceremony, wine or water sharing, etc. place everything in a box for easy retrieval at the time of the ceremony: candles, candle holders, matches, lighters, vases, bags of sand, chalice or goblet, bottle or wine or water, etc. Delegate a responsible person to keep it safely and deliver it to the ceremony site an hour before the ceremony is to begin. If incorporating doves or butterflies please tell the officiant well in advance.

III. DAY OF CEREMONY ORGANIZATION

Some things cannot be done before the time of the ceremony. The officiant should arrive in plenty of time before the starting time to take responsibility for several important tasks.

1. Check that the microphone is working and set at a sensible volume.
2. See that distracting noise from air conditioners, waterfalls, etc is eliminated or minimized.
3. Coordinate music cues with DJ, musicians or CD button pushers
4. Eyeball rings being placed where you expect them to be.
5. Review bride's escort's role and, if you choose, to rehearse the escorts, answer to "who presents . . .?"
6. Review vows with the groom.

7. Talk to your readers so as to introduce them correctly and be certain that they know their cues as well as where to be seated and to stand while reading
8. Check that the wedding party and ushers are familiar with the processional/recessional.
9. Double check pronunciation of any names included in a remembrance and mention fact of remembrance to anyone you may have asked me to notify.