

WeddingChaplain.com Rehearsal Guide

Follow these easy steps to rehearse the wedding ceremony quickly and easily, your friends and families will thank you and you can get on to your rehearsal dinner!

Start in the middle. Instead of starting with the processional (entrance), start by getting everyone into place where they will be standing during the ceremony. We usually start with everyone lined up and beginning with the entrance of the bride and her father/ escort. You can practice the hand off, shaking the parent's hands etc. Remember that you are practicing walking in and out, so knowing where to stand is the first step. See the diagram below for the standard positions for your officiant, parents, and attendants. It is important to have your wedding party evenly spaced and standing at a slight angle in relation to your wedding guests, with the attendants at each end a little more forward than the Maid of Honor and Best Man. This looks better for pictures, and helps the guests see each person in your wedding party better. Bridesmaids should hold their bouquets in front of them with both hands, and groomsmen should clasp their hands in the front of their body. It is important that everyone do the same thing, if everyone is doing something different it looks awful in your ceremony photos.

The hand-off. This is what happens when the Bride and her escort make it to the front of the ceremony and are standing in front of the Officiant and the Groom. If the escort is a parent of the Bride, they should give her a kiss and congratulate her. The escort then typically shakes the Groom's hand, the Bride hands her bouquet to the Maid of Honor and steps forward next to the groom, and the escort moves to where they will be seated. The Bride and Groom should then be standing facing one another, holding hands in front of the Officiants. At this point, the Maid of Honor can hand off both sets of flowers to one of the Bridesmaids and fix the Bride's train, if necessary.

Age of Flower Girl and Ring Bearer. If the kids are less than five years old, then we highly recommend that they process in and have a sit, not stand with the party. We also highly suggest there is another adult in charge of the kids. The most challenging situation is for the parent of the child to also be in the wedding party. We have seen moms who are also bridesmaids trying to hold their child during the ceremony. This just never works out. It is completely fine to have an adult guide the toddlers down the aisle and then gather them up before the entrance of the bride. This person can sit with the children and take them out if need be. Everyone wants this moment to be cute, but no one wants this moment to take away from the bridal entrance or the ceremony.

Speak through the ceremony headings. Take a look at the ceremony draft and read through the headings aloud, so everyone knows roughly the order of the ceremony. Do not read through the entire ceremony word-for-word or say the vows, save that excitement for your big day. You can practice one line for sound, or they can use a version that is not actually the one from the ceremony, just for practice. Make a note of any wedding ceremony readings, candle lighting or sand/ wine box ceremonies, and when the rings will need to be presented. Double check that any items needed during

the ceremony like candles, a wine box or a table will be there that day. The last item on the list will be the kiss and, if the couple has chosen to do so, the presentation of the couple.

Practice walking out (the recessional). Since you have everyone in place already, practice the recessional as if the ceremony has just ended and you are walking out. Start with the kiss and/or the presentation of the couple and exit in the proper order. The Bride will take her bouquet from the Maid of Honor and exit with the Groom. Typically, the wedding party will exit in pairs even if they enter separately, followed by the Flower Girl and Ring Bearer and then the parents and grandparents. It is important to make sure that each couple that exits the ceremony leaves enough room between themselves and the couple in front of them. To do this, everyone should agree on a set distance they will wait for before walking. Most people choose to start walking when the couple in front of them is halfway back up the aisle. In general, it is best to leave at least 20 feet between each couple for the sake of pictures, but not much more than that. Once everyone has successfully exited the ceremony, it's finally time to practice walking in.

Practice the processional last. Now that everyone knows where to stand when they enter the ceremony, practicing the entrance should be a piece of cake. Line everyone up in the order they will enter, for our clients this information is at the top of the ceremony draft. The Officiant, Groom, Best Man, and Groomsmen enter first, typically from the side of the ceremony site but sometimes up the aisle depending on preference. Following them are the grandparents, the parents of the Groom, and the Mother of the Bride. Finally, the Bridesmaids, Maid of Honor, and Flower Girl enter. While the Officiant, Groom, and Groomsmen normally enter together as a group in a straight line, everyone else needs to be spaced evenly.

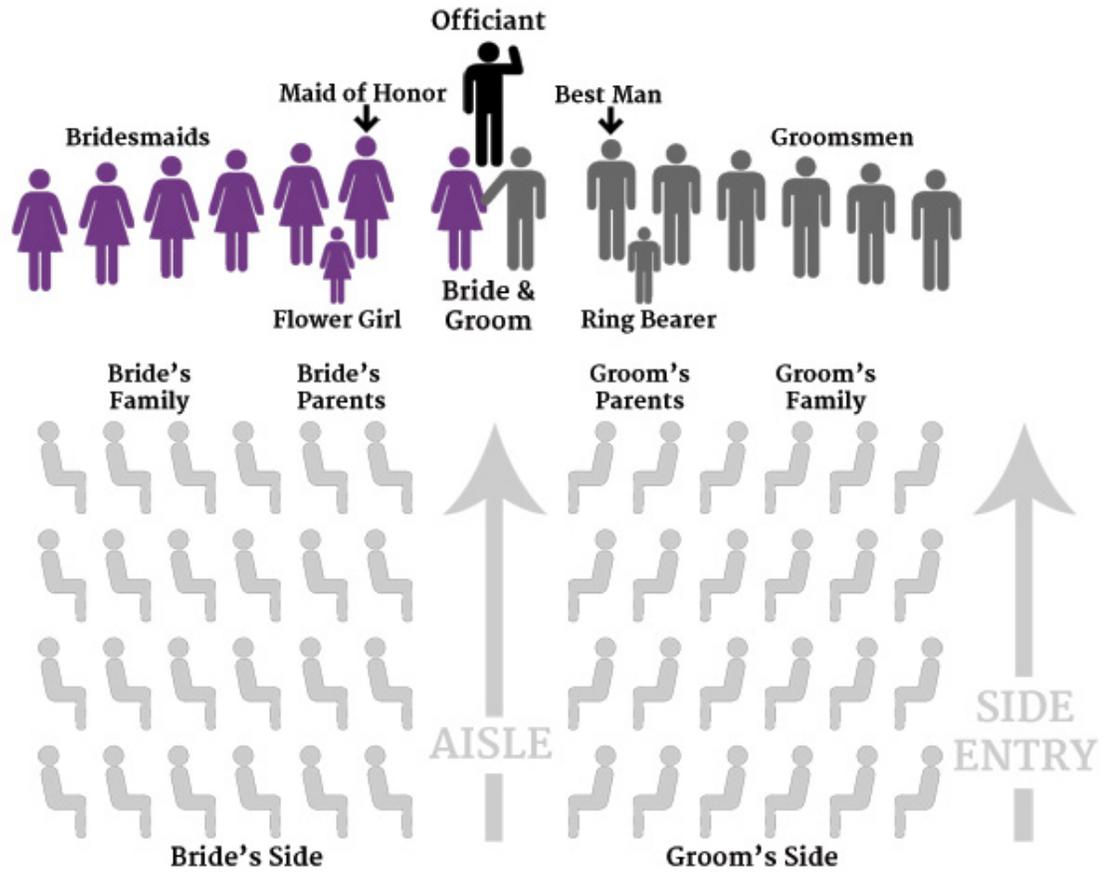
The groomsmen can also serve as escorts. If there are 6 groomsmen, you can use 3 or 4 to escort grandparents, parents and especially the mother of the bride. Once then drop off their party they can take their place in the lineup at the front with the groom and other groomsmen.

As with the recessional, it's important to agree upon how much space to leave between people entering the ceremony – normally about 20-30 feet. The Bride and her escort (typically the Father of the Bride) should not enter until the entire wedding party has entered and is in place. Normally there is a separate piece of music for the Bride's processional, and the officiant will usually say "If everyone will please rise," in order to invite your guests to stand.

Do it again. Now that everyone is in place, practice walking back out and back in one more time to make sure everyone knows what to do, then you're done! The rehearsal should not last more than 20-30 minutes at most.

Following these steps will ensure that everyone knows exactly what to do on the wedding day, and that you are not wasting a lot of time practicing unnecessary parts of the ceremony itself. Below is a helpful diagram of where everyone should be standing:

Wedding Ceremony Rehearsal Guide



ENTRANCE ORDER (PROCESSIONAL)

1. Grandparents of the Groom
2. Grandparents of the Bride
3. Officiant, Groom, Best Man, and Groomsmen
(from side entry if desired)
4. Parents of the Groom
5. Mother of the Bride
6. Bridesmaids
7. Maid of Honor
8. Flower Girl and Ring Bearer
9. Bride / Father of the Bride

EXIT ORDER (RECESSIONAL)

1. Bride and Groom
2. Maid of Honor and Best Man
3. Bridesmaids and Groomsmen
(in pairs when exiting)
4. Flower Girl and Ring Bearer
5. Parents of the Bride
6. Parents of the Groom
7. Grandparents of the Bride
8. Grandparents of the Groom
9. Officiant
10. Wedding Guests

Variations

The Midwest Processional – Couples from the Midwest are sometimes surprised to see the Bridesmaids and Groomsmen entering the wedding ceremony separately. Regional differences in wedding traditions are common, and in the “Midwest Processional” the Maid of Honor, Best Man, and all of the Bridesmaids and Groomsmen enter the ceremony in pairs. The Officiant and the Groom still enter first from the side, and then the rest of the wedding party enters in reverse order, with the Maid of Honor and Best Man the last to enter before the Flower Girl and Ring Bearer.

Multi-Parent Escort – Many of our couples choose to be escorted into the ceremony by multiple parents, instead of just by one. While the Father of the Bride traditionally escorts the Bride down the aisle, we often work with couples who have their mother and father, or father and stepfather, walk them down the aisle together. This isn't just limited to the Bride; we also have plenty of weddings where the Groom is also escorted into the ceremony by his parents. This is often seen in many Jewish and interfaith weddings as well.

Jewish Traditional Entrance – For our Jewish and half-Jewish weddings, our couples sometimes opt for a traditional Jewish entrance to the wedding ceremony. In this variation, the Officiant enters first, followed by the Groom who is escorted by his parents. When the Groom and his parents reach the wedding canopy, or Chuppah, the Groom stands in the “standard” position but his parents stand under the Chuppah on the opposite side, so behind the Officiant's right shoulder across from the Groom so they can see him. Next, the Bride enters, escorted by her parents, and they take the opposite positions, behind the Officiant's left shoulder. Both sets of parents remain standing at the Chuppah for the entire ceremony.

Breaking with Tradition

We always tell our couples that there is no “right” way to do a wedding ceremony, and we encourage them to work with our officiants to create something that is a unique expression of their love. Traditions are wonderful, and many of our couples choose to perform a traditional ceremony – others choose to break with tradition and do something entirely different. We encourage you to listen to your heart and do what feels right for the two of you, whatever that may be.