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Organising The Wedding Reception

Originally introduced as a way of celebrating the marriage and the joining of the two families, the reception, or wedding breakfast as it was once called, is almost as old as the ceremony itself. Historically only close family members or members of the church attended, unlike today where everyone invited to the ceremony normally attends the reception.

Today, the usual format for the reception would be drinks on arrival followed by a meal, speeches, cutting of the cake and then less formal celebrations such as a disco or dancing. Financial constraints may dictate which style of reception the bride, groom and their families choose. Some may opt for a sit down meal with unlimited drinks while others prefer a buffet style affair.

The wedding reception allows family and friends of the couple to offer their congratulations and celebrate the couple's new status. The style of reception will depend on the budget available and the number of guests as well as personal preferences. The wedding reception is one of the most expensive elements of any wedding. The main decisions to be made are:

- the type of location, e.g. hotel, church hall, home
- who will do the catering? e.g. in-house, outside caterer, family and friends
- style of catering, e.g. sit-down meal, buffet

Plans for the wedding reception should be initiated as soon as the wedding date is set. Advanced notice of 3 months is usual for many venues although longer may be necessary for popular venues or at busy times of the year.

The reception should be held near to location of wedding ceremony if possible, as this simplifies the transport arrangements.

Ask friends and acquaintances for recommendations when choosing a reception venue. It is essential to visit the venue before making a booking. Relying on telephone enquiries and pictures in brochures is not adequate preparation when making such an important decision.

Timetable for the Big Day

Q: Can you advise me on the timings for our wedding? I don't want our evening guests to arrive whilst we are still eating dinner! 3pm Church service (Church of England) 3.45pm Photographs (only having a couple of group shots as we are having more reportage style pictures) 4.30pm Guests leave church 5pm Guests arrive at reception (2 miles away) venue for champagne reception and more informal photos inside the venue. 6pm Wedding dinner 7.30pm Speeches/Cake cutting. 8.30pm Evening guests arrive 9pm Band/First dance. 10pm Evening buffet.

A: Your timings look fine - you've managed to leave enough time between each event for your guests not to feel rushed. One important thing to remember about the day is that the schedule is just there for reference. If things don't run according to plan don't worry, just enjoy the day. If you find that you're still in the middle of the speeches when your evening guests arrive I'm sure they'll be only too happy to buy a drink and listen to the tales.

Q: We're getting married at 1pm, and are having a C of E (higher) service. The venue is about 20 mins away from the church. I would like to have outdoor photos taken at the church and some also at the venue. There will be 100 guests to the wedding. Could you please advise me on a rough timetable for the day?

A: I hope this helps as a guideline:

1:00pm-1:45 Wedding service
1:45 - 2:15 Wedding photos at church
2:15 - 2:35 Travelling to reception
2:35 - 3:05 Photos at reception, (guests having welcome drink)
3:05 - 3:20 Drinks
3:20pm Wedding breakfast
5:00pm Speeches
6:00pm Cake cutting
7:00pm Evening reception begins

Q: Our ceremony is at 2pm in our local register office. The evening reception is going to start at 6pm but we're on a very tight budget and can't afford a sit down meal after the ceremony and before the evening. I can't expect the guests to go home after the ceremony and then come back at 6pm. There will be about 70 people - what should we do?

A: You have a number of options here.

1. Move the ceremony to later in the day and go straight into your evening reception.
2. Word your invitations as follows:

The ceremony will take place at [location] at 2pm and there will be an evening reception at xxx at 6pm. You could then suggest places for guests to spend the afternoon. However, I would bear in mind that this might put some people off staying for the reception.

3. Have less people at your service and a small private reception in the afternoon, saving all the fun stuff like the cake cutting and speeches for when all guests come along in the evening.
4. After the ceremony, instead of a sit-down dinner, just have an informal finger buffet with sandwiches, crisps etc in a local pub - people will be very happy to stand and have a few drinks and a bite to eat until the evening party.

Types of Venues

Hotels, Restaurants, Banqueting Suites

The main advantage of holding the reception in a hotel, restaurant or banqueting suite is that they can organise all the catering and other arrangements leaving the couple and their family to enjoy the celebration.

When you have drawn up a short-list it is a good idea to visit the hotels or restaurants for a meal before making enquiries. This will give some idea as to their standards of food, service and the general atmosphere of the venue.

Many function venues provide a wedding service. They may offer an inclusive price for a fixed number of guests which includes changing room for the couple, food, drink table decorations etc. or they offer these services for an extra charge.

If there is to be an evening reception, it usual to hold this in the same location.

Ask for a brochure, if available, and then arrange an appointment.

The following is a list of topics to be discussed before making a booking:

- The number of guests and the size of the function room. The larger venues may have several function rooms of different sizes.
- The menu. Most venues will offer a choice of menus and wines at various prices. Ask what provisions they make for special diets such as vegetarian or for diabetics.
- Seating plans. Ask what seating plans are possible in the space available. The final choice will depend on which groupings of people you think get on well with each other.
- Discuss the times when the reception venues will be open to your guest and the timings of meals, music etc. Make sure that there are no time gaps between the wedding and reception or reception and evening celebration and if this is unavoidable inform guests in advance.
- Room and table decorations. Ask to see the table linen and place settings to ensure they do not clash with the overall colour scheme of the wedding. Floral room and table decorations and balloons may be supplied by the venue or you may wish to use another supplier from outside.
- Parking. Does the venue have enough parking spaces for all guests and, if not, is it easily available in the surrounding area?
- On arrival guests are usually greeted and offered a drink. The venue will probably offer Champagne, sparkling wine, Bucks Fizz or Sherry. Ask for prices and which soft drinks they can offer.
- Will the head waiter or some other member of staff act as master of ceremonies, or will you employ a Toastmaster?
- Changing room for bride and groom. Most venues offer a room for the bride and groom to change in.
- Ask which other weddings are taking place on the same day and if you will you be sharing any facilities such as bars or reception areas.
- Check the toilet facilities. The bride and bridesmaids will need more room than usual if they are they are wearing elaborate skirts.
- Does the venue have an adjoining room or perhaps a table in a corner of the main room where wedding gifts can be displayed?
- If the reception is being held in a hotel they will often offer special rates for the bridal suite or for guests to stay overnight.

Community Halls

In most localities there is a church, school or local authority hall available for hire. Also, many pubs have private function rooms available for hire. It is usual to book halls 4 to 6 months in advance. For a small number of guests the catering may be done by family and friends although it is more convenient to have outside caterers for a larger gathering. The suitability of halls for wedding receptions and the facilities they offer vary enormously so it is essential see the hall and its surroundings and discuss what facilities they offer in detail before booking. Items to check include:

- General appearance. Is the hall in a suitable condition to hold a wedding reception and is it in a state of cleanliness suitable to serve food.
- Will the hall be heated? Some halls do not have heating or heating may not be turned on at certain times.
- Is the hall a suitable size for the number of guests? Are there enough general facilities such as toilets and parking?
- Will the hall provide tables, chairs, linen, crockery, cutlery and glasses etc? If hiring caterers they may provide these items.
- What cooking and cleaning facilities are available. Most halls will only have a basic cooker and a single sink. Are refrigerators, tea urns etc. available? It is probable that most of the food will

be prepared by caterers or at home, away from the hall, but enough worktops will be needed to store food and to add finishing touches to food displays.

- Find out where everything is in the hall and how all the equipment operates in advance. Help may not be available on the day.
- Discuss when access can be gained to the hall to prepare for the reception. For example it may not be possible to set up the tables the day before if the hall is booked for some other activity. When does the hall have to be vacated? Ensure that adequate time is left for clearing up.
- Will consumption of alcohol and smoking be allowed?

Marquees

Hiring a marquee is an option if a large enough garden is available. Marquees come in varying sizes to accommodate most wedding parties. It allows the reception to be held at home when the house is not large enough. Flooring, dance floors, linings and lighting can also be hired and in the winter heating may also be necessary. A marquee is not an inexpensive option however. The hire of the marquee together with the cost of caterers and other fixtures will leave a bill in the same price range as holding the reception in an hotel.

Most marquee hire companies provide a brochure to allow you to choose the marquee and other items such as flooring, matting, lighting etc. Choose a firm who are prepared to visit the site before accepting an order. This ensures that they will be aware of any possible problems the site may present. Also, ensure that they are prepared to be called out if any problems occur on the day of the wedding. Marquees are usually erected two or three days before the wedding day.

Caterers usually occupy a separate tent to prepare the food although they may require access the house kitchen.

It is usual to use toilet facilities in the house although for a large reception portable toilets may be hired.

At Home

The reception held at home is suitable for a small number of guests. It is informal and can be a more relaxed affair. It may also be less expensive than other options.

A sit-down meal is possible if the party is very small. However, the most practical option is to have a buffet. This not only adds to the informal atmosphere but also requires less equipment such as crockery and cutlery and people can serve themselves.

If not using outside caterers it is possible to hire crockery, glasses and even tea urns to boil water. Alternative you can borrow from friends or use disposable items.

Catering

Hiring Caterers

When choosing a caterer seek recommendations from family and friends. It is difficult to judge the standard of service on offer just by looking at brochures.

Caterers can supply table linen, crockery and cutlery. They can also provide drinks. If the caterers are supplying the drinks they may only charge for bottles opened. If you are providing the drinks they may charge a little extra to serve drinks.

The caterer should visit the site of the reception to allow him to decide what further equipment and facilities he will need to provide. For a small buffet they will bring the food already prepared and may only need washing up and coffee making facilities. For a larger event the caterer may need to bring a cooker and a fridge.

Most caterers will clear away. Discuss with the caterer when the clearing away will be done and if serving staff will be required after the meal to serve drinks. Also, ask if a member of staff will act as Master of Ceremonies and if they can organise the cutting and serving of the wedding cake.

Self-Catering

Preparing food for a reception is a major task and should only be undertaken after serious thought and planning. The couple and their family will have many other arrangements to deal with in the period leading up to the wedding. The day itself is for the family to celebrate the wedding and they may not wish to spend a major part of the day preparing food and cleaning.

A buffet is the easiest food serve. Food can be prepared in advance and guests can serve themselves. Draw up a plan with a list of food to be prepared and tasks to be done and then decide who will do which task and when.

Ensure that you have adequate storage space for food. You may have to borrow fridge or freezer space from friends. Some items can be ordered from caterers and delivered on the day.

As fridge space is at a premium at this time drinks should be chilled in bins filled with ice (bought from supermarkets or off-licences to save freezer space). Many off licences will lend glasses for events if you buy drinks from them.

Arrange to borrow cutlery, crockery, serving dishes etc. from friends. These may also be hired. Using disposable plates, cutlery and table coverings will result in less cleaning afterwards.

Formal Meal or Buffet?

The main decision to be made about the food is what style of meal to have:

- formal meal with waiters
- sit down buffet (fork buffet)
- standing buffet (finger buffet)

Hotels and restaurants usually provide sit-down meals for wedding receptions although many will provide a buffet if requested.

Formal Meal

When choosing the menu it important to choose items which most people will find acceptable rather choosing the more exotic dishes in the hope of impressing guests. Safe dishes include soup, chicken, roast meats and vegetables while. For dessert fruit salad or apple pie are acceptable. Hotels and restaurants may offer a choice of two three choices for each course but they will charge extra for the service.

Guests should notify hosts when accepting invitations if they require vegetarian or special diets.

Sit-Down Buffet

The sit-down buffet allows is less expensive than a formal meal but allows the hosts to determine the seating plan and guests are ensured a table place. Guest usually serve themselves from the buffet and then return to their places. Because a variety of foods is on offer to guests some experimental or

exotic items can be included with the standard buffet items of cold meats, vol au vents, salads, sausage rolls, canapés, sandwiches etc.

Hot food can also be included in a sit down-buffet. Dishes which guests can easily help themselves to include curries with rice, pasta with sauce and casseroles.

Standing Buffet

This is the most informal eating style. The food is normally laid out at one end of the room and at the appointed time guests help themselves. Because at least some of the guests will be standing while eating they will not be able to use cutlery and therefore the foods should be suitable for eating with the hands. Clips are available for attaching glasses to plates. This frees one hand for picking up food.

Some seating should be provided. Although guests do not have set places most people will want to sit for at least some of the time at the reception, particularly if they are elderly.

Drinks

Guests are usually greeted at the reception with a drink of sherry, Champagne or Bucks Fizz.

Wine is served with meals although a variety of drinks can be served with a buffet.

For the toasts champagne or sparkling wine should be served. If a white wine was served with the meal this is also acceptable for the toasts.

A plentiful supply of soft drinks and mineral water should also be available for people who have to drive and for children. Other guests may have the occasional soft drink particularly if an afternoon reception is to be followed by an evening celebration.

Drinks are usually supplied by the management in hotels and restaurants. If you want to supply your own drinks they will charge a corkage fee. Hotels often provide a bar. The host can choose to pay for all bar drinks or allow guests to purchase their own. A third alternative is for the host to put a fixed sum of money "behind the bar" until it is spent when guests buy their own drinks. In some communities, such as Jewish or Greek, it is not considered appropriate for guests to buy drinks. A licence is needed to sell alcohol and so it is illegal to sell drinks in most hired halls or home receptions.

When buying drinks for a reception shop around. Many off licences offer discounts on bulk purchases or allow the return of opened bottles. Others may offer to lend glasses or supply free ice.

Organise a rota of people to serve at the bar if this is not one of the caterer's duties. Most people will be glad to help for a short period.

The Wedding Cake

The traditional wedding cake is a two or three tiered round or square fruit cake with marzipan decorated with royal icing. The softer fondant icing is becoming increasingly popular. Some couples choose other cakes such as suitably decorated sponge or chocolate cakes.

The cake can be decorated with coloured icing sugar piping, flowers made from sugar, a small vase or spray of real flowers or figures of the bride and groom or lucky horseshoe.

The cake is usually supplied by a specialist confectioner. The confectioner will have a brochure of their various sizes and styles of cakes and the type of decorations available. This will give the couple basic ideas which they can modify and personalise to design their perfect cake. A good cake supplier will

have samples for you to taste. The confectioner should also be able to advise of the appropriate size of the cake for the number of guests.

When deciding on the size of cake remember that you may want to send some to people who are unable to attend the reception. It is traditional to keep the smallest, top tier of the cake for the first wedding anniversary or the christening of the first child.

Some hotels and caterers can supply the wedding cake as part of their reception service.

The wedding cake should be ordered at least three months in advance.

Because the cake can be baked months before the wedding it is possible to bake one at home in advance when not preoccupied with the last minute wedding arrangements. Cake tins of appropriate sizes are available for hire.

Some cake confectioners provide a cake decorating facility. This may be the solution if you have an old family cake recipe you want to use but are less confident about your decorating skills.

The cake is usually delivered to the reception venue on the morning of the reception. Ensure in advance that the cake supplier or the caterer will assemble the cake and add any final decorations.

The Guest List

Until you have booked the reception and ceremony venues you won't actually know how large the guest list can be. It's always a good idea to establish numbers of family members and close friends that will make up the essential invites. Before compiling the guest list, a budget for the reception must be decided and agreed between those who will be paying the bill. Once you establish your budget, decide how many people you can invite, and be realistic. Now is the time to agree ground rules. You may decide on a separate list of those that you would rather not attend (perhaps ex-boyfriends/girlfriends etc). If parents are paying, you should ask them how many people they wish to invite. Be prepared for some negotiation if they want to invite far more people than you had anticipated.

Who to invite?

Q: I have invited close friends from work to the wedding service and meal but plan to invite other not so close colleagues whom I am still friendly with to the evening reception. I am unsure whether I can just invite them or whether I should be inviting their partners also, although I don't know their partners. Please help, I'm getting very stressed out about offending people!

A: It is usual to invite a guest plus their partner so you could either ask them for their partner's name to include it in the invitation or simply address it 'To Sarah and partner.' If you really don't want to invite their partners then you could just put their name on the invitation, but they are likely to expect their partners to be invited and may ask you if it's alright to bring them along.

Remember, it is your wedding day and ultimately you decide the names and numbers that will appear on the final guest list.

Seating Plan

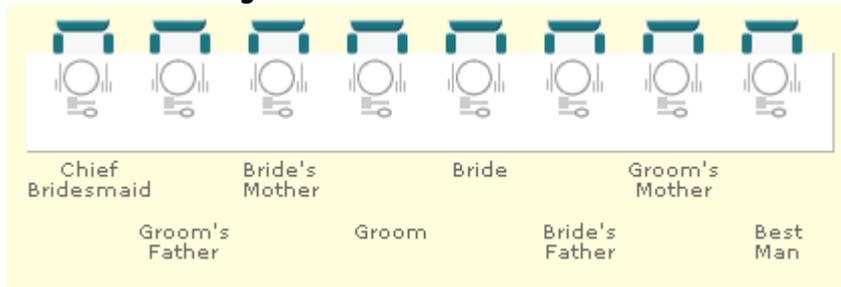
A seating plan should be drawn up for a formal reception. The exact arrangement of tables will depend on the venue. The top table will be for the wedding party and should include the couple, their parents, the best man and the chief bridesmaid. Ushers and other bridesmaids may also sit at the top table if places are available.

The most popular layout is a long top table for the bridal party and a series of small round tables for the guests. Smaller display tables for the cake and gifts should also be provided.

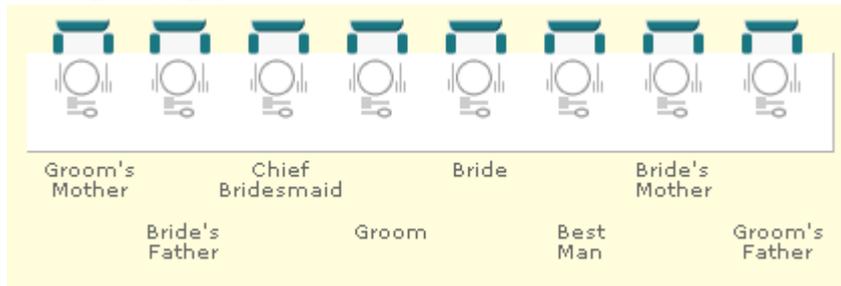
The Top Table

The following diagrams illustrate a traditional top table seating plan. We have also provided diagrams to show other possible scenarios where certain parties would benefit by not sitting next to each other. For example, divorced parents, or where there is conflict between the two sets of parents. In these situations it is advisable to adopt an alternative seating arrangement in order to satisfy all parties.

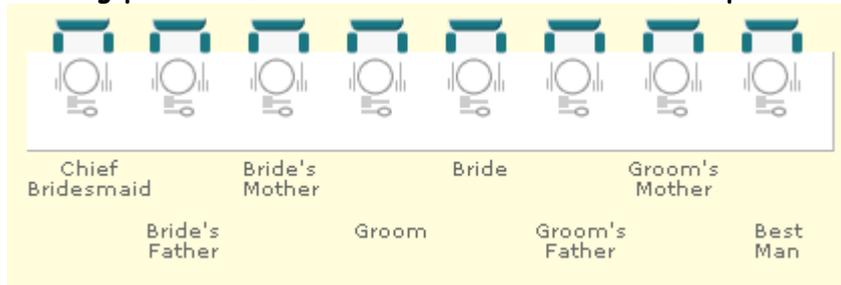
Traditional Seating Plan



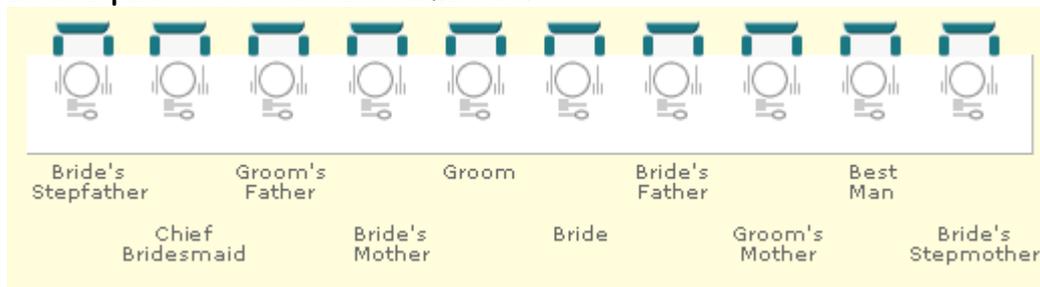
Alternative Plan.



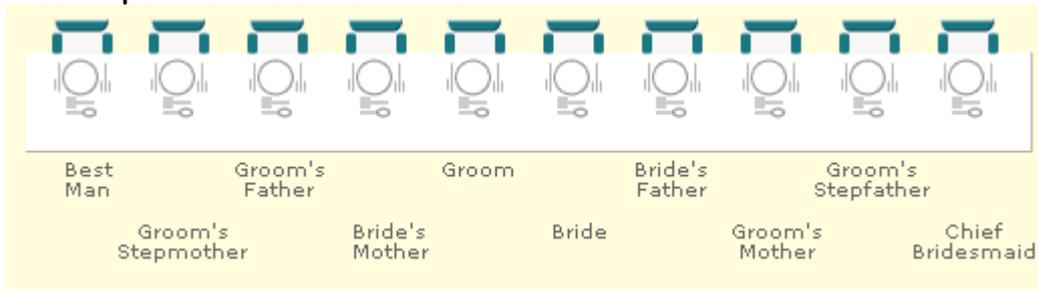
Avoiding potential friction between Bride and Groom's parents.



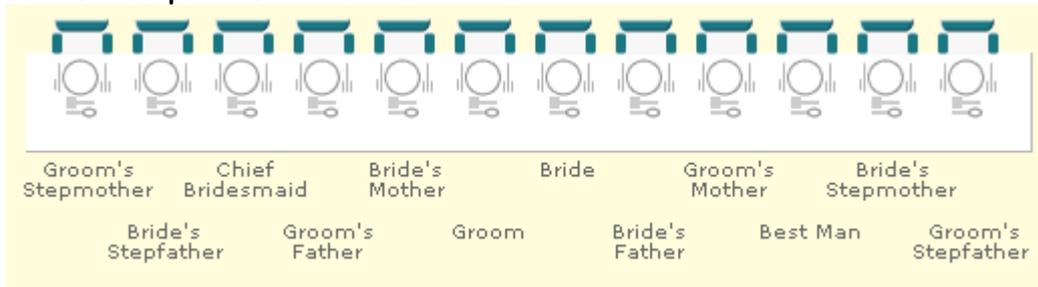
Bride's parents divorced and remarried.



Groom's parents divorced and remarried.



Both set of parents divorced and remarried.



As a general rule the closer relations and friends are seated nearest the top table. Some people choose to seat the bride's family on one side of the venue and the groom's on the other side. However it is more important to combine people who will get on well together than to keep to any 'rules'. After all, the wedding in many cultures is seen as a joining two families.

Seating plans are not necessary for buffet receptions although they are an option if there are enough seats for everyone present.

Greeting Arrivals at the Reception

When greeting guests into the reception, who should be in the receiving line and in what order?

The receiving line can either take place as people arrive at the reception or as they make their way into the dining room if drinks are being served first.

The receiving line is a formal line is where the bride and groom line up with both sets of parents and greet each guest as they go to sit down for a meal. However, it can be just the couple that receives their guests. If both sets of parents are in the line, it is advisable to go through the guest list together before the day so that everyone is acquainted with the guest's names.

If you have lots of guests attending the reception, it is wise to keep the receiving line as short as possible. Perhaps just you and your new husband can greet the guests, thus avoiding long queues. The receiving line order is as follows:

- Bride's Mother
- Bride's Father
- Groom's Mother
- Groom's Father
- Bride
- Groom
- Chief Bridesmaid
- Best Man

As an alternative to the full line-up, the bride and groom could do the welcoming on their own - it's a lot quicker and avoids any potential family problems completely. Or, you could decide not to have a line at all, and simply to walk around the tables during the reception saying hello to everyone.

Speeches

After the meal the Toastmaster introduces the speeches. If there is no Toastmaster the Best Man takes this role.

The Bride's Father

The bride's father is the first to speak. In his speech he normally thanks the guests for attending, mentions the groom's parents, welcomes the groom into his family, and says a few words about the joy the bride brought to her parents as she was growing up. He may offer advice to the couple or express confidence in their future happiness. Finally he proposes a toast to the health and happiness of the bride and groom.

The Groom

The groom replies on behalf of his new wife and himself. The main purpose of his speech is to offer thanks. He expresses his gratitude to:

the guests for their presents and good wishes

his parents for his upbringing

his new in-laws for hosting the wedding and/or allowing him to marry their daughter

all the other people who have helped with the wedding arrangements including the best man and drawing particular attention to the bridesmaids.

Finally he proposes a toast to the bridesmaids.

The Best Man

The best man replies on behalf of the bridesmaids. His speech should be light-hearted and amusing. He should congratulate the bride and groom and thank anyone who has been of particular assistance to him. He should also thank anyone the bride has asked him to acknowledge on her behalf. His speech may include amusing anecdotes from the groom's past but should not under any circumstances cause embarrassment or offence to the bride. He should also mention close family members or friends who are unable to attend the wedding. He closes his speech with a toast to the bride and groom's future happiness. He may also read out any telegrams or emails, and if there are too many he could just read out the senders names. But this duty could be given to the Toastmaster.

The bride does not usually make a speech. She may say a few words if she wishes after the groom has spoken.

Best woman speech

Q: I'm chief bridesmaid to my oldest school friend in June and am really looking forward to it. The bride's father will not be attending the wedding as he holds a lot of bitterness towards his children after they sided with their mother when she left him after many years. The upshot of this is her brother is giving her away but he is not looking forward to making his speech and the shorter it can be for him the better. With this in mind they have asked me to make a best woman's speech. I'm fine about doing it but don't know what I should say!

A: I think that the best place for it to go would be directly after the brother's speech. The type of thing that you should mention are what the father of the bride would usually cover. Therefore the brother can do his more formal bit first, welcoming the groom to the family, commenting on how beautiful the bride looks etc. Then you could go with your stories and tales. Then either you or the

brother should give a toast to the happy couple. This would then normally be followed by the groom, then bride (if she's doing one?) and ends with the best man and a final toast.

Cutting the Cake

The cake is cut by the bride and groom after the speeches and toasts. The bride and groom together make the first cut, with a suitably ornate knife, in the bottom tier of the cake. The cake is then taken away and cut up by the caterers or some other designated person.

Some couples choose to cut the cake before the speeches. The cake can then be cut up while the speeches are taking place and served immediately after the toasts. The cake can be distributed by the waiters or the bridesmaids.

When to throw the bouquet

Traditionally, the bride throws her bouquet at she leaves the reception. All unmarried females are asked to gather round the bride, she then puts her back to the ladies and throws her bouquet. The person who catches it is said to be the next to marry.

Some bouquets these days are certainly quite large and heavy so you might want to be careful when you throw it, or even consider throwing a much smaller bouquet that you have made especially for throwing. This is also a good idea if you want to keep your bouquet.

After the Formalities

After all the formalities music can begin. The dancing is usually led by the bride and groom.

During the later part of the reception the bride and groom should circulate and exchange a few words with all the guests and allow them to admire the wedding outfits at close range.

While the bride and groom change into their going away outfits guests can decorate the car with balloons, cans, shoes etc. Before leaving, the bride usually throws her bouquet to the unmarried female guests. Tradition holds that the one who catches it will be the next to marry.

The best man or the hosts should ensure that arrangements have been made to take away all the wedding presents, the couple's wedding outfits etc.

Once again, this order is just a suggestion because this is YOUR big day and everything should be planned to make it feel right for you. The most important thing is to just enjoy yourself and take some time to remember what is really important about this day — you are getting married! Everything else is really secondary to that.

Things to avoid at Wedding Receptions

With the ceremony safely over, will your reception see your guests getting down - or will it just get them down? Learn from some real-life mistakes.

The one where my partner was seated half a mile away...

"I'd travelled two hundred miles to this wedding with my new husband," sighs C, recalling the wedding of her school friends, T and S, "to find that they'd come up with what they thought was a marvellous idea... to split all their guests up from their partners and make sure everyone "mixed". I was sitting on a table where I knew no one. And my new husband was about eight tables away. Everyone ate in silence; we were all in the same boat. I just thought it was really dictatorial and rude."

Moral: Mix and match couples at your peril.

The one when the food was inedible...

"I'm no gastronomic shy-baby but the food was drenched in chilli sauce and every conceivable spice," says P, recalling his friend I's wedding. 'I had been on holiday to South America and insisted on imposing his new-found favourite cuisine on everyone else. Unfortunately, people didn't know what they were eating. Anyone who braved eating more than a mouthful spent the night on the loo."

Moral: Choose a menu that anyone can eat.

The one with the comedy waiter...

"We were in the most beautiful setting," remembers S, cousin of P who married N, "just about to get stuck into the bubbly, when this waiter dropped a tray of glasses. We just thought it was an accident. He turned out to be a hired actor who then spent the whole night causing "hilarious" incidents and orchestrating side-splitting accidents. I think the bride's dad made him leave in the end."

Moral: A good party atmosphere can't be manufactured on the spot.

The one with the cliquy parlour game...

"To round the evening off, the bride's family played some ancient game (that only their family knew the rules of), at the suggestion of the bride," recalls T, of a wedding of a good friend he recently attended. "There wasn't enough space for everyone to play, so about 20 of us were left at the end of the night, just milling about at the bar, feeling totally excluded. H, the bride, is Austrian and over there it's a tradition - only not one that apparently we were allowed to take part in. It was a real anti-climax."

Moral: A game is one for all or not at all.

The one where everyone made a speech...

"And then the groom's mother's best friend's auntie got up to thank everyone for their thanking her for helping to do the flowers!" says M, of her best friend N's wedding. "It was the eighth or ninth speech, so I gave up and slipped out until it was over. I'd been sitting there for an hour and a half, my bum was numb and I was dying for the loo. Nightmare!"

Moral: Less is more on the speech front.

The one where we all had to barn dance for three hours solid...

"I don't mind dancing but I like to dance when I want to, not when I've been told to," says S. "So you can imagine that three hours of being forced to barn dance is not my idea of fun. Everyone was press-ganged into it, there was no escape and it was horrendous. The man who was leading the dance up on stage even shouted at people who were just leaving the room to go to the loo! I was black and blue by the end."

Moral: People enjoy dancing but hate being made to.

The one where the photographer was a former drill instructor...

"Without being melodramatic, the guy nearly got his lights punched out by three or four different people," recalls P, referring to the photographer at his brother's wedding last year. "He just pushed people around, told my mum to "lose that hideous hat", barked orders at us like we were kids. He was recommended to my brother through his work but we didn't check the guy out beforehand. Big mistake."

Moral: Check out recommendations of wedding 'helpers', don't just take them on trust.

I hope that this has given you a few ideas, so that you can make your wedding and reception a day to remember, not a day to forget!

Congratulations on your forthcoming wedding, and have a wonderful day!

Mike Wabe - Toastmaster

Member of the Executive Guild of Toastmasters and Town Criers