

# Rules of Engagement



Having recently been a bride myself, I remember how many of long lists of wedding plans exist, and how reading them made me more nervous than necessary. Instead of lists, I will give you what I believe to be the crucial **Rules of Wedding Planning** or as I prefer to call it, **Rules of Engagement**. By Heather (Konitshek) Orawsky. Photos by Catherine Fiehn.

## Rule One

Use the aforementioned lists as a guideline, but do not become consumed with every little checkmark or you will give yourself an anxiety attack every time you look at the calendar and see all the things that still need to be checked off your list. (Believe me, I know.)

So I am going to try to touch upon topics I didn't necessarily read about in wedding countdown lists. These key points stood out for me as the most important, based on things that happened while planning my own wedding. Now keep in mind, having had a year as Miss Teen America back in 1999, I'm a bit of a pageant diva, so this was definitely not going to be a simple affair. I was going all out. Every bride wants her wedding to be the most exotic, most elaborate and most romantic affair that anyone has ever attended. In short, we are all on a mission to plan the perfect wedding. It is very important to remember this next rule no matter what happens.

## Rule Two

Your wedding will be perfect even if every little detail isn't as you planned. When that day comes, nothing can ruin it. Even the most unexpected event can't keep your wedding day from being the most wonderful, amazing and memorable day of your life, because it is all about you!

So let's jump back to the engagement. I won't bore you with details on my amazing engagement, but basically from that moment forward, the next 14 months were entirely consumed by 'the wedding'. I was a part-time mortgage loan processor and full-time 'bride-to-be wedding planner freak'. Did you notice that I said the next 14 months?

## Rule Three

Give yourself at least a year to plan for your dream wedding.

A year feels like forever, but there is so much involved that it is important you have every day of that year to plan. Give yourself a week to do nothing but stare at your new ring. Doesn't it just look perfect on that finger? You can't imagine how that finger was naked for so long. Okay, week's up. You can still stare at your ring, but it is time to get busy!

## Rule Four

Reception halls can book a year in advance, so start scouting out locations immediately. The research alone will take a few weeks. Note: Before you start looking for reception halls, you must first make sure the dates you have in mind are available at the church, or wherever you plan to have your ceremony.

The reception halls will have pricing lists. This will make it easy for you to compare different locations and the services that they offer. Do they have an open bar, or will you have to supply your own and hire a bartender? Some places supply the alcohol, but you have to pay \$300 for each bartender. Some places will also tag on a fee for hiring a police officer for traffic, again, another \$300 or \$400. Be sure to ask them about the wedding cake. Do they provide the cake? If you are like me and want to bring in your own cake, some places may charge you a 'cutting fee'. It could be as much as \$3 to \$5 a slice. You will need to figure this into your budget. You may not know exactly what you want at first, but after visiting numerous places you will figure it all out. Nothing else can be done until you have your date. Take your time and don't judge a place by the pictures you see online or in a magazine. Visit every potential location in person.


Another thing I would like to mention before we move on is the fact that some places hold more than one wedding at a time. As I told you before, I am a bit of a diva and therefore I had no intention of sharing my reception hall with another bride. What if she was more of a diva than I was? That could get messy, so I chose a place that would cater to only me on my wedding day. Plus, I didn't want the music from both weddings competing against each other through the walls.

## Rule Five

Start looking for your wedding dress ASAP. You can still lose weight after you order it!

I visited about 5 or 6 different dress stores. I actually visited the dress store I finally ordered my gown from three times before ordering it! My dress took ten months to come in mostly because the pageant girl in me came out and, of course, I had to order a dress that was made in Europe. Delivery times will vary with each designer. The more elaborate the dress, the longer it will take.

They will measure you when you order it, but don't worry, you will have three to four fittings when the dress comes in long before the wedding. My bridal store called me their 'incredible slinking bride'. I lost so much weight from the day I ordered it. The funny thing is, I tried all year to lose weight and the day they called me to tell me my dress was in... stress hit and I started shedding pounds like it was nothing! Don't stress about your weight. Exercise, and eat healthy and the stress will do the rest!

A bride is the central figure, seated on a dark wooden piano. She is wearing a white, strapless, floor-length wedding gown with intricate lace detailing on the bodice and a full, flowing skirt. Her hair is styled in an updo, adorned with a tiara and a long, sheer veil. She is smiling warmly at the camera. In her left hand, she holds a large, round bouquet of vibrant red roses, tied with white ribbons. The piano's keyboard is visible to her left. The background features a large window with a grid pattern, through which some outdoor greenery is visible. The overall lighting is soft and romantic.

*“ Every bride wants her wedding to be the most exotic, most elaborate and most romantic affair that anyone has ever attended. ”*

## Rule Six

Your DJ or band will make or break the wedding.

The DJ and photographer are two things you do not want to skimp on. The adage 'you get what you pay for' will certainly come true on these two points. You don't want to see one of your guests in their seat once the music starts unless they are desperate to catch their breath, so preview the music ahead of time. When it comes down to it no one is going to notice the flowers on the table, but they will remember how much fun they had because of your DJ or band. You won't remember much at all because it will be a giant blur, so you will need great photos.

## Rule Seven

Meet with your photographer. Make sure you look at his/her portfolio, love his/her work and feel comfortable around the person.

Your photographer will be following you around from sun up to sundown and maybe even longer than that, so it is important that you like him/her! I was fortunate in the fact that my photographer, Catherine Ficht, is also a pageant photographer and has been taking pictures of me since I was 10! When it comes down to all the money you are spending on the wedding, the photos are what you will have to remember this special event for the rest of your life.

## Rule Eight

Send deposits and signed contracts to your chosen vendors as soon as possible. The good ones always book quickly.

You are probably wondering why I haven't mentioned anything about bridesmaids. That is because you should not have picked them yet; after all we are only 3 to 4 months into your engagement!

## Rule Nine

DO NOT, I repeat DO NOT pick your bridesmaids until 6-7 months before the wedding.

People talk about Bridezilla... let me tell you, Bridesmaidzilla is the sequel not to be missed. I was in a lot of weddings the year that I was planning my own, and I saw some horror stories that even Hollywood could not have produced. No matter how good or how long you have been friends with someone, just hold off. I had my list of friends picked, but I waited. Talk wedding with them, keep them in the loop on plans, invite them to do wedding related things with you. But don't ask them to be in your bridal party. Analyze their reactions to things. Are they excited, are they listening, are they participating? Some friends may be supportive or they may become distant and jealous and you want them to be totally there for you. You may even find you become closer with some friends than you had been before the engagement. Keep an open mind. It is a lot easier to just wait (even though you are bursting with excitement) than to have to fire someone or add a last minute bridesmaid.

## Rule Ten

Don't let your bridesmaids talk you into changing your mind about the dresses or the colors.

Okay, it's time. Go ahead and pick your bridesmaids now. Once I asked my bridesmaid, I picked a date for all of us to go to the bridal store to pick out their dresses. I actually had a specific dress and color in mind. With the help of my matron of honor, we picked an elegant, conservative gown that would fit all their different frames. When we arrived at the store, the bridesmaids started picking out all sorts of different dresses and trying them on. Each bridesmaid liked a different dress of course, but I still liked the one I chose the best.

This is your wedding, they will have their chance to pick out bridesmaid dresses when they get married. Tell them what you want and move on. The bridesmaid dresses usually take about five to seven months to come in.



## Rule Eleven

Shop around for your wedding invitations and do order professional printed invitations. It will save you the time and trouble of doing it yourself, and they will look so much nicer.

You can order your invitations three to four months before the wedding date and they are typically mailed out between six to eight weeks before the event. You can mail out the out of town guest invitations a little earlier if you want, but the guests usually wait a couple of weeks before they respond. A common misconception on invitations is that if you print them yourself on your computer, it will save you money. I found, however, that the quality of paper you get isn't as good. Plus you don't get the folded invitation; just a single layer and you also don't get the fancy inside envelope. If your printer jams, or you make a mistake, you might end up having to order more blank invitations, and now you have spent more money than you had intended.

## Rule Twelve

Play around with your floral estimates to get the best price.

When you go to price out flowers, they will try to throw in everything from pew bows to extravagant centerpieces and even flowers for stairs at the reception site. Decide what is really important, and take off things that you think you can live without or get cheaper somewhere else or on your own like the flower girl basket, silk petals, unity candle, etc. If you are on a tight budget, I think flowers are the first thing that should be scaled down. Seriously, no one will remember them.

Remember that as far as flowers are concerned, bigger isn't always better. Don't opt for the giant size bouquet unless you really think it will look nice in front of your tiny waist. The more flowers you are holding in front of you, the less people will see of you and your gorgeous gown. If you notice, almost every bridal magazine shows the bride with a smaller bouquet. Coincidence? I think not! Also keep in mind that a big giant centerpiece on the tables at your reception will cut down on conversation as it will block the view of the people across the table. I personally like seeing who is seated across from me, so I went with small centerpieces.

