

Panic-Proof Your Wedding Day

Don't freak before you even start. Here's how to take that first dive into preparing for the big day.

Just engaged? You're probably feeling a little overwhelmed by all of the planning ahead. So, we've put together a to-do list that'll keep you on track. Here's where you should start.

1. Tell everyone providing you services, exactly what your requirements are. Put everything in writing and make sure your vendors sign the agreement. Be sure to specify items you don't want as well (i.e., racy rap songs, too many posed photos, onion dip, whatever else you don't want).
2. Two or three days before the wedding, call all your vendors and verify your bookings. Have them read back to you the time, date, and location of the wedding as they have it noted as well as the services or items they'll be providing. That way, you'll know if they have the right information. Make sure they know how to get to the site. It's a good idea to send a reminder letter as well. Bring your list of phone numbers so someone can make a phone call if they don't show up.
3. Avoid asking friends or family to provide food, flowers, or official photography. It will create an awkward situation if you're not pleased with the results. It's easier to expect perfection from someone being paid rather than a favorite uncle whose feelings may be hurt if you complain about his photography. He probably also doesn't have a spare camera to bring along if his breaks or an assistant to fill in if he catches the flu and can't make it.
4. Never let a friend serve as a bartender. He may pour too much liquor which could quickly deplete a limited supply, run up the bill, or get guests too drunk. He might also get drunk, or leave the bar unattended to socialize.
5. Avoid heavy cake tops or too many tiers. These can make the cake unstable.
6. Protect your bridal gown. Never iron it or attempt any kind of touch up. If it is badly wrinkled, contact the bridal shop for pressing. Do not eat, drink, or smoke after putting the gown on. Do not apply makeup and keep away from pets. If you're traveling to the wedding in your gown, avoid exiting the car near dirt or bushes.
7. When you get your gown, practice putting it on, walking, turning, and moving like you will during the ceremony. Get a feel for how the dress moves and how much extra time you'll need to handle the train.
8. Avoid having children under age three in the wedding party. If you do, let one of the attendants walk with the child or pair them with an older child.
9. Secure fake rings to the ring pillow so they won't fall off. Have the Maid/Matron of Honor and Best Man carry the real ones.
10. Make sure someone knows of any plans to use alternate entrances to the ceremony (side doors, back doors) so they won't be locked out for the ceremony.
11. Accompany the bridesmaids to their fittings to make sure the dresses are not

altered to be too short, too loose, or too tight.

12. Advise out of town members of the wedding party to arrive early on the day before the wedding so you don't run the risk of missing or delaying the rehearsal.
13. Have attendants arrive early to get dressed so there is no delay when the photographer arrives and no worry about making the wedding on time.
14. Have a spare tape recorder, batteries, and extra tape in case the one you're planning to use to record the vows acts up.
15. Get your marriage license in advance of the ceremony and have it with you on the wedding day. You don't want to discover on your wedding day that you aren't licensed to be married!
16. Have someone assigned to take care of the last minute details and ensure the bridal party is dressed and ready to go. She can answer the phone, go on errands, and make sure everyone has something to eat before the wedding.
17. Practice driving the route to the ceremony at the time of day and day of week to check out traffic patterns. That way you'll know how much time you'll need to get to the site.
18. Bring along an emergency bag. Include a needle and thread, safety pins, nail polish, hairpins, and extra panty hose. Also tuck in a couple of cookies and some hard candy in case someone needs a quick pickup.
19. Try not to stay up late the night before the wedding. Avoid drinking too much alcohol or caffeine so you'll be at your best all day.
20. If something goes wrong, don't panic. You'll probably be the only one who notices that the ribbons in the bridesmaid's bouquets are the wrong color. Don't let little things ruin your day. Accept the idea that your wedding may not (and in fact, probably will not) go as planned. Always keep your sense of humor!