

# Weddings 101

By Bill Goode, A Celebration with Music! and Mobile Beat

## Introduction

Weddings are probably the most special day in anyone's life, and are some of the most sought after events DJs compete for in the private entertainment business.

If you have never done a wedding before, it can be a daunting task. This series is designed to give the DJ a roadmap to a successful reception.

We will talk about the events that take place at a wedding, expectations of the bride and the groom, and how your service will make the day magical and worry-free for the bride and the groom. We will cover some of the "little things" that add to your image of a professional DJ at a reception such as attire, appropriate and not appropriate announcements, working with the other wedding vendors, and planning for some potential problems.

This is NOT designed to give you every wedding idea that all DJs do. It is designed to get a beginner up and running with results that will make the client happy.

This paper is also not going to deal with the wedding ceremony itself. Paul Beardmore has written about how to execute a basic wedding ceremony, which is available at <http://dju.prodj.com/courses/weddings/c2.html>.

Let's move on to the first section: preparing for the reception!

## Before the Reception, Plan to Succeed

In this section, we will talk about what happens after you have made the sale. We will talk about using a basic wedding planner to create a roadmap for you and the client, your attire, and some other pre-planning ideas that will help you develop a superior level of service.

Let's start with the planner...

Why even use a written planner?

When you consult a couple planning their wedding, most are savvy enough to ask a DJ what they offer to help them prepare and if they have a written planner. If they are not thinking about the reception preparation, offering the written planner will give the couple the perception you are organized and have their best interests at heart. It also gives the couple items to think about that they may have not considered up to this point in their

planning. Providing copies of your completed planner to the wedding vendors such as photographers, caterers, venue managers and videographers will allow you to be on the same page with everyone. It will also allow everyone to see what the bride wants, recorded in her own handwriting and words.

Using a written planner also has positive benefits for the DJ, not just for the client. It allows you to add to your image as a well-organized, professional entertainer. If someone has a question for you or wants to know what is happening, the information is immediately available for you. There is no having to remember what should happen, or what to do, when you have it written down. In planning for future weddings, you can refer back to planners from receptions that were a clear success and utilize what worked for them. Conversely, you can refer back to the less-than-perfect weddings, and keep notes of what you would like to improve on.

Having a written planner also gives you a record of the day for your files. If an unhappy bride and groom claim that you did not honor their wishes, you can refer to the documents they filled out for you. It gives you a weapon if an event comes back to haunt you.

To prepare your written planner, you will need to understand what happens at a wedding reception, and when does it happen.

Here are the typical items that take place at a reception and the order they usually take place in:

- Guests arrive
- Bridal party arrives, formal introduction of wedding party and bride/groom into the room
- Receiving line
- A blessing is given
- Meal is served
- After meal, Best man gives a toast
- Cake is cut (also a possible Groom's cake)
- First Dance
- Father/Daughter dance
- Mother/Son dance
- Parents and/or bridal party dance
- Money Dance
- Bouquet toss
- Removal of Garter from Bride's leg
- Garter toss
- Dance for the garter/bouquet toss winners
- Last dance for the night

With this information, you now can begin to put together your reception information sheet and discuss events with the bride.

Here is a sample, taken from the archives of the Georgia Mobile Disc Jockey Association:

Bride's Name:  
Groom's Name:  
Bride's Mailing Address:  
Home Phone:( )  
Work Phone:( )  
Fax:( )  
Wedding Date/Time:  
Wedding Location/Address/Phone:  
Reception Date/Time:  
Reception Location/Address/Phone:

- Reception Begins: (time) \_\_\_\_\_
- Reception Ends: (time) \_\_\_\_\_
- DJ begins music: (time) \_\_\_\_\_
- Will there be a: (check one)
  - Cake only
  - Appetizer
  - Buffet
  - Full dinner
- Blessing before the meal? Who will say it?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Guests wait until Bride and Groom arrive to begin eating?
- Would you like the DJ to announce the Bridal Party? (Time:)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Just BRIDE and GROOM announced? (Please supply names of ALL people to be announced, including their relationships.)
- Will there be a Receiving Line at the reception?
- Bride and Groom begin dancing after introductions?
- Bride and Groom begin dancing after eating?
- First Dance song: \_\_\_\_\_ Artist  
\_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

- Father/Daughter Dance song: \_\_\_\_\_ Artist \_\_\_\_\_  
Time \_\_\_\_\_
- Mother/Son Dance song: \_\_\_\_\_  
Artist \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_
- Bridal Party Dance song: \_\_\_\_\_ Artist \_\_\_\_\_  
Time \_\_\_\_\_
- Photographer's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
(scheduled time to leave) \_\_\_\_\_
- Videographer's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
(scheduled time to leave) \_\_\_\_\_
- Bridal Consultant's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
(scheduled time to leave) \_\_\_\_\_
- Favorite Songs or Artists  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Special Dance or Family Tradition?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Toast time: \_\_\_\_\_
- Best Man Toast?
- Maid of Honor Toast?
- Parent toasts? (Please specify which: \_\_\_\_\_)
- Bride toast?
- Groom toast?
- Other toasts?
- Cake Cutting time \_\_\_\_\_
- Is there a Groom's Cake? \_\_\_\_\_
- Will there be a money dance?
- Will there be any special dances?

- Bouquet Toss time \_\_\_\_\_
- Garter Removal & Toss
- Garter placed on bouquet recipient
- Last Dance \_\_\_\_\_

More reception planner material can be found in the archives at [dju.prodj.com](http://dju.prodj.com).

The first thing you will note is that there are lots of specialty events and dances at a reception, but not every couple wants every one of these at their event! For example, the couple may opt not to have a receiving line or many of the dances after their first dance. This is OK. They can pick and choose what their entertainment wishes will be. Here are the events that make a 'bare bones' minimum reception:

- Introduction of the bride and groom
- Meal
- Toasts
- Cake cutting
- First dance
- Bouquet/Garter toss, removal, placement
- Last dance

Somewhere between the full event reception and the 'bare bones' is where a majority of clients select their options.

It is also important to note that the client may want events arranged differently, and some events to take place at different times, depending on what part of the country you are located in and the wishes of the client.

A good example is the first dance. While some brides and grooms prefer the first dance after the cake cutting, others may want to jump to it immediately after their formal introduction, to get it out of the way to save time before they eat.

Another example is dancing between meal courses. While people in the southern United States want to use their mealtime to socialize, a New York style wedding may feature dancing between servings of the meal courses. Another couple may just opt for background music and little dancing during the entire event.

The list goes on. The couple may choose not to have a receiving line, or have it at the church. There may be divorced parents of the bride and groom that do not want to be introduced together as a couple. The bride may be uncomfortable having a garter and bouquet toss, and may want to do something different. All of this needs to be worked out and recorded on your written planner.

Now that we have covered the basics of a written reception planner, it's time to take a look at what your 'look' will be at a reception. What will you wear, and what will your equipment look like?

The topic of what a DJ should wear at a reception has been debated between DJs for some time. Do you wear a suit? Shirt and tie? Tux? Jeans? Collared shirt and bolo? Boots or wingtips? Of these selections, you need to decide what are the wishes of the bride and groom and what can you do to present yourself in the best possible image. Unless the bride and groom make a specific request, the expected attire for males should always be a black tuxedo with a white shirt and black tie. Your shoes should be shiny black and add to the appearance of the tux, and be comfortable. You will spend several hours in these shoes, so make sure your feet are not in pain or fatigued. The tux and shirt should not be stained or wrinkled, and you should be comfortable in the attire. Anything less should require approval from the bride and groom, but also must be weighed as to the image and public perception you want to build.

For ladies, you should wear the equivalent of a black tux. This could be a black cocktail dress, black pantsuit with a longer jacket, tux pants and white shirt, whatever is fashionable for an elegant evening that will not clash or upstage the bride and the bridesmaids. Makeup and jewelry should be tasteful, not overdone. Shoes should blend with the ensemble and be comfortable. Flats or short-heeled shoes are best. Avoid sandals or stiletto heels.

Why go with a tuxedo-type appearance instead of a shirt and tie or a simple dress? Since you are a beginning wedding DJ, one of your goals should be to build the image and perception that you are a professional DJ. The typical client generally accepts this style of attire as professional. You also are on public display. You must look like the image you are attempting to project to the audience. This image has already been put forth in major bridal magazines and at wedding shows and fairs across the country and is now the look of choice not only for a majority of DJs, but probably for your competition.

This perception also goes for your equipment. It is generally frowned upon to set up separate components and have visible wires going from component to component. It is also improper etiquette to have a table with no skirting or no tablecloths. While venues usually will provide a table with a tablecloth and skirt, a good wedding DJ will usually have a table with a tablecloth and skirting ready to go. Usual colors are white or black, no stains or wrinkles. As for the equipment, many DJs have used standard and creative means to 'hide' their wires and equipment. The basic choice for this is a road case or DJ coffin. More information on cases, tables, screens, and presentation ideas, can be found at the website [mall.prodj.com](http://mall.prodj.com).

Before the reception, here are some other ideas and tips that will help prepare for a successful reception:

- Make an appointment with the venue manager to go over and check out the facility. Some items to check for is equipment load-in, when you can begin to load-in, setup space for your equipment, driving directions to the facility, power requirements for your system, and a 'meet and greet' with the venue management.

- Once the written planner has been returned, contact the other vendors listed on the planner (primarily photographer, videographer, wedding coordinator, caterer if venue is not supplying the food). Introduce yourself, and just say hi! Make copies of the planner to give to the vendors. It will help keep everyone abreast of what the bride and groom expect.

- Give the bride time to fill out the planner, but give yourself time to prepare for requests generated from the wedding planner. Make sure you have their music requests for the specialty dances and do your best to honor their written requests. If you are uncomfortable with a music request on the planner, talk to the bride immediately and express your concerns long before you reach the reception. Be prepared to play your written requests.

- Communicate!! Always make sure you are accessible to the bride and groom, and make sure to call them a couple of days before to re-confirm everything with them. Confirm if the couple has last minute changes on the planner, and if there are last minute changes in the wedding party.

A good wedding reception DJ does much more than play music at a reception. Some of the best ones work weeks beforehand with the bride and all of her vendors to get a written plan of action together. The DJs that can work out the details before they load up their equipment and head out to the venue will find that the reception will have a smoother flow and very few, if any, problems that cannot be quickly resolved with a positive attitude and a smile.

In this article, we have covered planning and presentation for wedding receptions. We have built a wedding planner, gone over reception events and the order they take place, and some tips and tricks for organization. We have also discussed the basics on how to look professional at a reception, including dress codes and equipment.

In the next article, we will go over events that can occur at a basic reception in detail and offer suggestions on how to organize and conduct them.