

Weddings 102

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

Reception events: What they are, and how to use them to create a flow

In the last section, we covered preparations for you to make before the reception. Among the topics covered were reception events such as dances, cake cutting, toasts, and other items. We will break out these items and go over them in detail, and explain when to utilize them in a reception.

It is important to not only know how to execute events at a reception, but also when to execute them. Why is this important? Events at a reception help set the way the reception flows. For instance, a garter and bouquet toss is not proper before the bride and groom have their first dance. It is not expected and is bad etiquette. The same applies to first dances. You do not want to have a father/daughter dance before the bride and groom take their first dance. You do not want to have everyone come into the venue, complete a meal, then set up a receiving line. This type of shuffling creates a very bad flow for the reception. There are events that can be shuffled, and we will go over what can and cannot be changed.

Why worry about how the reception flows? There are several reasons for this. First off, receptions generally start out with a meal, which provides at least some down time where you play background music. When dancing gets underway, you want to have the slow feeling of dinner behind you so the party-dancing atmosphere can fill the room. Stopping suddenly for an event that clears the dance floor and permits only a couple or two to dance kills the mood you have set with dancing for the entire party. Start, stop, start, stop can wear out and confuse the crowd. The usual end result is that guests leave early and people will take the attitude that the DJ was not great. We want you to be great!

To make this section easier to follow, we have split it into two sections. Weddings 102A will break out each standard reception event and go over it in detail. Weddings 102B will take these events and discuss how to set up an order that will create a smooth and exciting flow for the reception.

This is our typical reception order from Weddings 101. Events are *in italics* and will be covered here:

- 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*

One item that will not be covered in this article, but will be discussed in a future article, will be on how to execute specialty and ethnic events at a reception. This applies to items such as a hora, glass-breaking, etc.

The First Event: The Receiving Line

While these are not as popular as they once were, a receiving line is the formal way guests and the new couple can “meet and greet” each other. The way it works is the bride, groom, and possibly the parents (they are not required unless they wish to be included) stand next to each other. The guests that wish to congratulate them line up, then walk past the new couple, stopping to shake hands, hug, and basically wish them well. The line can include all of the guests, or just a few. If a line is set up, you can usually count on most of the guests going through the line.

If the couple has a long receiving line, you will notice the major drawback of such a line- it will be very time-consuming! This is why a couple wishing to have a receiving line should either have it at the church, or have it upon their arrival at the reception venue, following the formal introduction of the wedding party.

Another option that is more popular is to NOT have a receiving line. Instead, the bride and groom go from table to table during the meal to visit with people sitting at the table for a few minutes. This method saves time because there is no line, and people are relaxed and sitting.

Formal Introductions

The formal introductions event is the introduction of the wedding party into the room where the reception is taking place, and is the first event to take place at a reception. The introduction starts out with the parents of the bride, then the parents of the groom. Next to follow are the bridesmaids and groomsmen, followed by the flower girl and ring bearer.

Following that is the maid and/or matron of honor and the best man. Finishing out the list is the brand new bride and groom.

If possible, try to keep the wedding party from entering the main room. The idea is that they all enter the room with a bang, and etiquette says that the guests should not see them until they all enter together.

The list is almost set in stone in so far as who needs to be included in introductions, but you can make changes to the order of introductions. One potentially explosive topic is introduction of the parents. It is likely that one or both sets of parents have gone through a death, divorce, remarriage, or an event that can make introductions something other than normal. You will need to work with the bride and groom on how they would like the parents introduced. If the bride has no parents but had a blood relative that gave her away in the ceremony, that person can be introduced in place of the parents. If life events have provided two sets (or one set and a single one) of parents for either the bride and/or groom, the introductions (or leaving the parents out of introductions entirely) must be worked out beforehand to resolve any sensitive family issues. It is vital to go with the wishes as outlined by the bride and groom.

Not so explosive, but equally important is the introduction of the rest of the wedding party. At this point, you can pair up the bridesmaids and groomsmen to come in as couples, or you can introduce them separately by introducing the bridesmaids first, then the groomsmen.

The flower girl and ring bearer follows the bridesmaids and groomsmen. You may have to be patient here, as these roles are usually filled by small kids that can be total stage hams or really cranky and tired. If there were no kids in the ceremony to act as flower girl and ring bearer, then there will be no one to introduce for these roles and you can bypass these introductions.

Next on the list, we have the maid and/or matron of honor and the best man. Just like the bridesmaids and groomsmen, you can introduce them separately or together.

Last, but not least, we have the highlight of the day, the bride and the groom! They always are the last to be introduced into the room regardless of how the rest of the wedding party is organized for introductions. How they are introduced is a question that the new couple should answer in their pre-planning with you.

If the bride and groom do not wish to go with a formal full wedding party introduction, you have the option of introducing just the couple before their first dance. As mentioned earlier, you have the option of not introducing the parents if the bride, groom, if their families agree that is proper for the reception and avoids explosive family situations.

Now that the introductions are over, it's time for the blessing so people can eat...

The Blessing

If you ever have attended Sunday dinner with religious relatives or friends, chances are someone has said a prayer, statement, or a few words to a god or higher power thanking them for the wonderful food everyone was about to eat. It may be a ritual in your household. The blessing at a wedding is no different.

The bride and groom will usually ask their wedding official or a close relative to say the blessing. At this moment, you turn the show over to them to conduct the blessing. If you are utilizing a wireless microphone, this will most likely be the first guest of the evening to use it.

It is important to note that the blessing is not the time to toast the new couple. Offering toasts takes place later.

Once the blessing has been given, everyone is free to dine on the meal.

Time for Toasts

With the meal winding down, the time comes for the best man to step into the spotlight and offer a toast to the new couple. Before you offer the microphone to the best man for the toast, there are some items you must attend to:

- Verify the bar/catering staff is serving champagne for the toast. You do not want them caught by surprise, and it is your role to make sure the “back end” of the reception goes smoothly and is ready for the next series of the events.
- Find the photographer and/or videographer, and make sure they are ready to go.
- Since the cake cutting traditionally follows the toast, confirm that the catering staff is ready to finish cutting and serve the cake.
- As soon as everyone else is prepared, make sure that the best man is ready for his moment in the spotlight, and offer the wireless microphone to him. If he uses the microphone, quickly advise him on how to properly hold it so his voice properly projects and feedback can be prevented.

While the best man is offering his toast, he is the momentary center of attention in the room.

After he toasts, it is possible that others may want to offer a toast or a short speech. This is fine, and this is where your judgment comes in. If drunk Uncle Joe wants to toast, or if the speeches start to run a little long, be ready to jump in to pick up the pace and move people along to the next event, usually the cake cutting.

It's Time For Cake!

As far back as the Roman Empire, there has always been an item of food at weddings referred to as cake. It has evolved from sweet bread to pies, fruit-filled pastries, and everything in-between into today's multiple layer cake. Although we no longer have the tradition of the groom breaking cake over the bride's head, there is a time-forged order to the cake cutting. The order goes like this:

- The bride makes the first cut in the cake, usually with help from the groom
- The groom cuts on the second side, completing the cut, then puts the cake slice on a plate
- The groom picks up a fork, takes a small bite of cake from the slice, then feeds the bride
- The bride picks up a fork, takes a small bite from the slice, and feeds the groom

While these items are taking place, the photographers and videographers are working at what they do best, capturing the moment on film. The cake cutting is one of the best opportunities for these professionals to quickly obtain their best shots for the evening. Your responsibility is to work with these vendors in accordance with the bride and groom's wishes. If the bride and groom want special music or a sing-along (The Bride Cuts the Cake), make sure that it is set to go. As our service is how we shine at weddings, the pictures at the church and the cake cutting create high points for the photographer and videographer to shine.

The First Dance

The first dance is the most important dance at the reception. The new couple takes their first steps together as husband and wife, dancing to a song that has special meaning for the both of them.

This tradition has been around as long as wedding cakes, and it's the dance that means the most not only for the couple, but all of their guests. It means this much because everyone who has not seen them hold each other previously will now see this. It helps drive home the point that they are now a couple. This also officially opens the dance floor to dancing.

Again, be guided by the wishes of the bride and groom. Make sure that you have "their song" well in advance of the day and are familiar with it. They will express this in their pre-planning with you.

Another item to note is that the couple normally has the floor to them for the first dance. Some couples may feel uncomfortable with this, and allow other couples onto the dance

floor to share this moment. If the bride and groom wish this, it is okay. The only thing to be aware of, if this is the case, is to give the photographer and videographer enough time to get their pictures before calling everyone out to the dance floor.

Father/Daughter Dance

Almost as important as the first dance is the father/daughter dance at the reception. This is the dance for the bride and her father to symbolically take their last steps together, since she now has a husband.

This tradition expresses the bond the bride has with her dad. It goes back to when she was very young and at some point was invited to a father/daughter dance at school, church or a place that encouraged daughters to bond with their dads.

Not all brides have dads, and some brides will not dance with their dad. Again, this is where the wishes of the bride need to be expressed in pre-planning and honored. She may have a special relative other than her dad she wants to dance with. Whatever is important to the bride for this dance is what the DJ should go with.

Mother/Son Dance

Just as the father/daughter dance is to the bride, the mother/son dance is to the groom.

This dance expresses the bond between a mother and son, just as the father/daughter dance does between the bride and her father.

The same rules that apply to the bride for the father/daughter dance also apply to the groom and his mother for their dance.

Parents' Dance

The parents' dance is the last of the couples dances before taking the dancing tempo up and doing what you do best, showing the reception attendees a wonderful experience by playing their music and interacting with them, getting them on the dance floor.

This dance has a long tradition, and has recently (in our culture) become the parents' dance. In this day of single parents, stepparents and non-traditional households, this gives the parents of the bride and groom an opportunity to dance with the important (and usually current) mates in their lives.

Depending on the wishes of the bride, groom, and their families, this dance may take place with just parents (and their current mates), with grandparents, or not at all. Again,

the wishes of the bride for the dance and the song selection need to be spelled out in the pre-planning meeting.

Bouquet Toss/Garter Removal/Garter Toss/Dance

Another tried-and-true tradition that has been around forever is the bouquet toss, garter removal, garter toss, placement of garter, and the dance for the winners of the bouquet and garter tosses.

The legend is that the single lady that catches the bride's bouquet will be the next to marry. The same goes for the single guy that catches the garter the groom throws to them. This is where you come in as the *Wedding Emcee Extraordinaire*. It is your responsibility to make sure these events go off smoothly, tastefully, and with a flare and pinosh that people will remember and enjoy.

Before we go over these, one item you must be aware of is that this is potentially an adult event, and you must work out with the bride and groom in the pre-planning if they want little kids to participate, and how far these events can go if the guests 'push the envelope'. As we go over these events, you will see why.

The first part to take place is the throwing of the bouquet by the bride to all of the single female guests in attendance. Before starting, make sure the photographer and videographers are ready to go, and that the bride has the bouquet and is wearing the garter. Once everyone is ready, invite all of the single ladies to the dance floor. The bride will have her back to the dance floor, and the single ladies will group together behind her. When she is ready, she will toss the bouquet over her right shoulder, and one of the ladies will catch it. Once she has caught it, ask her to come to the edge of the dance floor and wait just a moment, you will need her help in a few moments.

Before the groom can toss the garter, we need the garter for him to toss. It is on the bride's leg, and he must remove it!

Place a chair in the center of the dance floor, and invite the bride to have a seat. Invite the groom over to remove the garter. The groom will reach up under the bride's dress, and remove the garter. Once completed, remove the chair and call all single guys to the dance floor.

Similar to how the bride tossed the bouquet, the groom will toss the garter over his right shoulder to the crowd of single guys, and one of them must catch it. Have the groom stand on the edge of the dance floor with his back to the group of single guys. When he is ready, have him toss the garter.

You have arrived at the final step. Place a chair on the center of the dance floor, and invite the winner of the bouquet toss to have a seat. Next, invite the winner of the garter toss over. His mission is to place the garter high on the leg of the lady that caught the

bouquet. Have him kneel on the floor in front of her and place the garter on her right leg. Once they are done, the event is over.

It has become a tradition to play a slow song for the winners of the bouquet and garter toss. It introduces a special song for them, and allows you to get back into a dance set.

In your pre-planning with the bride and groom, carefully go over this event with them. Some may feel uncomfortable and not wish to do it, some may want the ages of the participants limited to exclude children, and some may only wish to do the tosses. Some may want you to have fun with it and get the guests involved. This is a fun event, but must be done with taste, according to the wishes of the bride and groom.

The Last Dance

As with great events, all things must come to an end. The last dance is the final dancing song of the reception before everyone departs the hall to blow bubbles or throw rose petals at the bride and groom.

Before the last song is played, people will need to know if there is a sendoff for the bride and groom. If there is, check to make sure that the bubbles, rice, rose petals (or whatever else they might be using) is ready for people to obtain. A friend of the bride and groom usually passes this out or makes it available. After the last song ends, announce where to go to say goodbye to the bride and groom, and announce that they will need the items being passed out.

Once the crowd moves outside for the big goodbye, let out a sigh of relief and relax- you have just completed a wedding!

Now that we have broken out each event that takes place at a typical wedding, the next phase of this course deals with changing the order of these events to have a smooth flow and keep the reception going, while *customizing* the event to suit the needs of your clients and create a fabulous reception for their guests.

On to Weddings 102B...