

Basic Components of the Wedding Ceremony

A wedding is a public affirmation and acknowledgment of a couple's life long commitment to one another. A ceremony has a number of standard sections. In creating a wedding ceremony, it is important to consider the message you wish to convey about marriage in general and your union in particular. Though the ceremony sections that follow may seem like a lot to consider, they create a beautiful and meaningful ceremony. Not all sections need to be included but do create a wonderful flow to the pace. Have fun and imagine while you review how your wedding can be like a finger print on the hand of marriage.

At the end, there are questions to consider that will help the creation of your wedding unfold.

The Procession:

The wedding march is a symbolic expression of moving from the past as individuals and into the future as a couple. It also symbolizes entering the teaching circle of the officiant whose blessings sanctify the union.

Consider the following:

Will you walk together or will one of you wait at the alter while the other is escorted by a parent, family member or friend? What sort of music would you like to fill the air with?

The Convocation/Opening Words:

To commence the wedding, words are spoken to all those in attendance about what is to transpire as you affirm and express your love and commitment to one another. It's a call to witness and is usually conducted by the Officiant. But one couple chose to have a poem read in this section

The Invocation/Introduction:

This calls upon the spiritual source to bless and acknowledge the commitment that is about to take place. This higher source is also called upon here to watch over you in your journey of marriage. As the Officiant conducts the invocation you'll notice the tone is meditative and reflective. One couple used this section to acknowledge the love of their family as their source in lieu of a religious source.

Other couples like to acknowledge loved ones who have passed or special recognition of parents – 'Honor Family' (family here means anyone whom you recognize as a meaningful presence in you life)

The Readings:

Whether read by officiant, friends or yourselves, this part is meant to inspire the minds and hearts of all who are in attendance for the celebration of love, marriage and commitment. Selections from classical vignettes or poetic verses can express what is important to you about your relationship and the vision or hopes of your future together.

The Address:

The address given by the officiant is meant to teach and inspire deep appreciation for marriage and its meaning in your life. The words spoken are written as a unique expression of your story shared with the officiant and become the source of the teaching and inspiration.

The Consecration/Dedication:

This highlights and makes holy the message and the undertaking that you are embarking upon. With its inspiration and instruction, you are now preparing to make your intent.

The Expression of intent/Consent:

Here your desire to wed is made public by acknowledging aloud your intent to go forward.

The Vows:

You speak your heartfelt promises to one another. This is the emotional and spiritual binding part of the ceremony.

The Blessing and Exchanging of the Rings:

The rings are, of course, the symbolic representation of your bond. The officiant speaks of the rings meaning and what they embody. You then express their meaning to you as the rings are exchanged.

The Unity Ceremony:

The unity ceremony is a symbol of two families joining. Often when couples already have children this section acknowledges the children and the united family. The following are examples of ceremonies used to commemorate the family united:

Unity Candle • Sand ceremony • Wine Ceremony • Candle-lighting ceremony •
Dove/Butterfly release • Ribbon ceremony • Flower ceremony • Breaking of the glass

The Pronouncement of Marriage:

The officiant publicly proclaims your union and presents you to your community as a holy embraced union of husband and wife.

The Kiss:

In response to the presentation, you then claim one another through the kiss which symbolically seals the promises of marriage you have made to one another. It is your first public display of affection as partners.

The Benediction/Conclusion:

Is the brief 're-cap' and send off blessing for you as you embark on your path of marriage. It is energetic and exciting finish of all that has transpired and can be followed immediately by celebratory recessional music.

The Recession:

The bride and groom now lead the way as representatives for a future full of radiance and love. They are followed by the flower girl and ring bearer; then the maid of honor and brides maids whom are also accompanied by the best man and ushers. The bride's parents are then followed by the groom's parents and finally the entire congregation.

Questions to Consider

Why not create a customized ceremony that is meaningful to you? As a couple, you have an opportunity to collaborate and share ideas with one another as well as with an officiant. The following questions are simply meant to help you begin considering what is important to you and your ceremony. Like with any creation, there are many drafts and revisions. Therefore, as you read these questions remember your answers may evolve as the ceremony begins to take shape. As we work together I am looking to express what is important to you and will put some of these pieces together to create your ceremony. Have fun, relax and play around with your ideas. Be as silly or as serious as you like but know that whatever you decide it is your story that inspired the creation of this wedding!

1. What do we want to say about our relationship in a public forum? What do we value about one another; the strengths we bring out in one another; the support we give to one another...
2. What stories about our relationship do we want to tell? (initial meeting, first date, the proposal, anything funny or unexpected, etc.)
3. What beliefs about relationships in general do we want to reveal? (important aspects on relationships meaningful to you or that yours has created)
4. What do we want to say about the meaning of marriage, both for our benefit and for that of the gathered guests? (A wedding is also a teaching ceremony for those who sit in witness. Are there any symbolisms you would like to share?)
5. What is the style of our ceremony; what is the image we want to project? (An intimate conversation, theatrical performance, a religious ritual, a carnival or festival, a gathering of clans, a formal social event?)