



# Wedding Planner Timeline

## Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Assess Consequences of Wedding Timelines
- ✓ Identify Common Wedding Vendors in Timeline Order
- ✓ Categorise Sample Wedding Reception Timelines

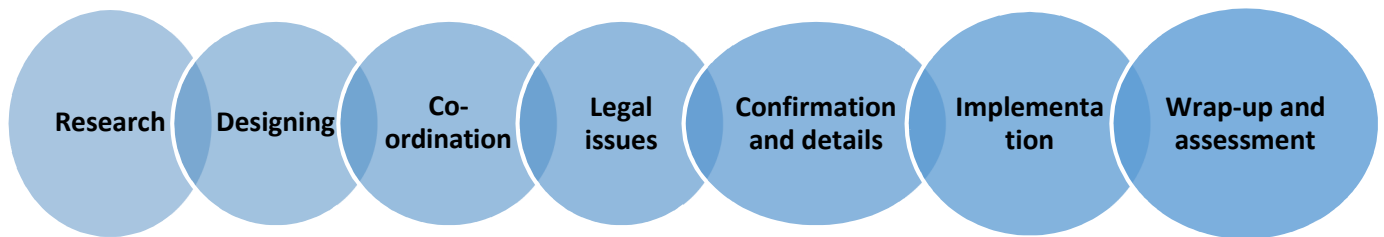
## Wedding Planner Timeline

A timeline lets the wedding consultant or planner, the vendors and the clients all remain organised, and stay on track while remaining realistic about what needs to be done and when. Every couple's timeline will be different and distinct, however, there are certain commonalities and these will help you assist your clients and set their priorities as they plan and prepare for their special day.

Engagements now tend to be more stretched out and are usually around 17 months. This is the timeline you will usually work within, but remember, each couple is different. Some couples need more planning time while others will move quite quickly. There is not only one type of time period in which to work. You must look at wedding timelines as phases.

There are seven phases of wedding timelines:

**Table 1.1**



As shown in Table 5.1, some phases will overlap. As the consultant, one of your jobs is to offer clients guidance throughout the entire process, or perhaps you could come in to help for only one phase. It all depends on what the clients need. Utilise the items mentioned in every one of the phases as a checklist, a reminder of what must be completed next. As every task is completed, note down the correlating date. Over a period of time, you'll notice some consistencies within the region you live. This will help you to streamline the process of planning and fine-tune the task list order to fit your particular target market. This list can be used as a guide for questions to ask your clients.

### 1. Research

The very first one is the research phase. It begins shortly after the couple gets engaged. Initially, a couple must estimate how many guests they want to invite. This will impact on other decisions, especially the ceremony and reception locations. For example, many historic venues have magnificent backdrops for weddings and receptions but can have limited capacity. Assessing the location will then influence

any wedding date options because popular venues often become booked quickly and the couple has to book up to a year or even more in advance. Getting a venue booking could take precedence over the ideal date, and many couples opt to marry on a Thursday, Friday, and Sunday because it gives them more of a chance to get their preferred sites.

This research phase is also the right time to get a list of vendors to be included in the wedding planning process. A list of the most common vendors involved in weddings is shown in Table 5.2. A vendor would be any individual or any entity which receives payment for goods and/or services that pertain to implementing weddings. The order of these vendors is based on the most common booking necessity. It doesn't mean that the top vendors are more important but rather that some vendors, such as photographers, can only work on one wedding per day, while others, like pastry chefs, can handle multiple weddings in one day. Based on the original estimated budget, which must be determined at this particular time, a realistic feasibility assessment can be done by having "must haves" columns versus "include if the budget permits" columns. Here, for example, a couple who loves music might decide that a string quartet is absolutely necessary, but will opt out of the limousine service if their budget becomes tight.

## 2. Design

The second phase of the timeline is the wedding design. Discussing design options will usually happen during the research phase, so there will be considerable overlap between the two stages. During the preliminary design phase you will be developing the theme and the vision for a wedding. At the start of the design phase, clients must inspect possible ceremony and reception venues and book their choices. This will occur at the same time as the determination of the wedding date. Some couples will give date precedence over venue. They will only consider the venues that are available on their preferred dates. Other couples feel that the venue is much more important than the date.

It is likely that your clients might have only one or two vendors in mind that they must have. You have been hired to assist them with the rest. So, during the design phase you will give your clients a list of between two to four vendors in every vendor category. Part of your planning job is to make sure you know your local area and a good number of vendors in every category. This way you can match your clients with the most appropriate vendors and make contacts with people who will get the wedding organised. As a consultant you should offer options in the low, medium, and high-price range for every area. This allows couples to more easily decide where and how to target their budgets. During this particular phase, the guest list must be finalised. The couple must also determine who will be in their wedding party and begin considering the formalwear that will fit in with their chosen theme and vision.

Table 5.2

Phase	Task	Start Date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Estimate the number of guests to be invited</li> <li>Assess potential location for ceremony, reception, and honeymoon</li> </ul>	12–24 months prior or as soon as possible

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify wedding date options</li> <li>• Identify potential vendors</li> <li>• Determine the budget</li> <li>• Conduct a feasibility analysis</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the theme and vision</li> <li>• Perform site inspections</li> <li>• Choose a date and book the venues</li> <li>• Contact and visit the potential vendors</li> <li>• Determine members of the wedding party</li> <li>• Finalise the guest list</li> <li>• Consider desired styles of formalwear for the couple and the attendants</li> </ul>	10–18 months prior
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-ordination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose and book vendors, sign any contracts and start making payments as necessary</li> <li>• Choose the formalwear for the couple and attendants</li> <li>• Book the honeymoon destination</li> <li>• Mail out save-the-date notices</li> <li>• Develop a draft of production timeline</li> <li>• Develop a draft layout of the ceremony and reception sites</li> <li>• Prepare gift registry</li> <li>• Reserve a block of hotel rooms for any out-of-town guests and for the wedding night</li> <li>• Take engagement photos</li> <li>• Mail the invitations</li> </ul>	6-12 months prior  4-8 months prior  2-6 months prior
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal Issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the contract legalities for final payment and accountability <u>Marrying out of the country</u></li> <li>• If marrying outside of resident country, establish all documentation requirements (this can take a year or even longer)</li> <li>• Get passports, (if applicable)</li> <li>• Get blood tests done if required</li> <li>• Apply for and obtain a marriage license</li> <li>• Get name-change forms if needed</li> </ul>	1-3 months prior (longer if marrying out of resident country)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmation and Dates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalise the production schedule</li> <li>• Finalise the layout of the ceremony and reception sites</li> <li>• Finalise seating arrangements, create escort and placement cards</li> </ul>	1-6 weeks prior

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalise the confirmed guest list</li> <li>• Establish a security plan</li> <li>• Confirm with vendors</li> <li>• Prepare gifts, favours, and any on-site stationery elements</li> <li>• Update the gift registry</li> <li>• Finalise the hotel block and wedding night location</li> <li>• Confirm details of the honeymoon</li> <li>• Send out the newspaper announcement</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation</li> </ul>		1-3 days, sometimes longer

### Common Wedding Vendors in Timeline Order

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Wedding consultant</li> <li>✓ Ceremony and reception venues</li> <li>✓ Celebrant</li> <li>✓ Caterer</li> <li>✓ Photography</li> <li>✓ Videography</li> <li>✓ Musician/Disc jockey</li> <li>✓ Wedding attire</li> <li>✓ Florist</li> <li>✓ Honeymoon site</li> <li>✓ Dentist</li> <li>✓ Web site designer</li> <li>✓ Transportation</li> <li>✓ Rentals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Pastry chef</li> <li>✓ Jeweller</li> <li>✓ Lighting expert</li> <li>✓ Hair stylist</li> <li>✓ Makeup artist</li> <li>✓ Dance instructor</li> <li>✓ Special effects (e.g. butterfly release)</li> <li>✓ Ice sculptor</li> <li>✓ Chocolate fountain</li> <li>✓ Favours and other gifts</li> <li>✓ Clerk of court's office</li> <li>✓ Local newspaper</li> <li>✓ Invitations</li> </ul>
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### 3. Co-ordination

When all background research is completed and the design elements have been chosen, move on to phase three which is the actual co-ordination. As the planner/consultant, you must help your clients make the final vendor choices, go through the associated contracts with them, and make sure all downpayments are made on time. Select the formalwear for the bride, groom and attendants. The honeymoon destination should also be chosen now and booked. Notices for save-the-date have to be mailed, in particular if the couple are having a destination wedding which will be away from home, or if it falls on a holiday weekend. It is at this time that you must start the first production schedule draft. This

would include everything which will occur during the wedding implementation. At this same time you must prepare a draft site layout of the ceremony and reception.

In the latter co-ordination phase, the couple might like to get engagement photos taken, reserve hotel rooms for any out-of-town guests, and prepare the gift registry. Many of the top photographers have only two weekends in the year when they take engagement photos for all their clients. Make sure you check the dates with the chosen photographer and inform the clients so that, if they want engagement photos, they can book in.

#### 4. Legal Issues

The fourth phase is where all the legal issues have to be considered. If the wedding is a destination wedding outside of the couple's country, then there will be even more legalities involved. Because every country varies, it is important to contact the embassy or the tourist information bureau of the chosen country. This way there will (hopefully) be no unexpected surprises.

Documents, birth certificates, and blood tests (if necessary) must all be certified. This process is more often than not, time consuming, so beginning this process as early as possible is a good idea for a destination wedding. In some cases, where locations specialize in destination weddings, the documentation process is usually expedited. Even if the couple is marrying in their country of residence, blood tests might still be required. U.S. requirements for blood tests, for example, are determined at state level but have mostly been eliminated nowadays. Many blood test laws in the U.S. began around 1930, before penicillin or other antibiotics. They were mostly intended to test for sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis, and others which can be passed on to a foetus during pregnancy.

Regarding marriage licences, you must inform clients about any rules or regulations in their area. This would include any waiting periods or expirations. When applying for marriage licences identification will be necessary to prove age. A birth certificate or a driver's licence, passport, or a military identification will suffice. The couple will also have to provide social security numbers and proof of residence. The licence has to be purchased and filed in the county where the ceremony will take place. If either the bride or groom have been married before then proof of divorce will likely be needed. Both parties have to be present for the marriage licence application and it may also be necessary to have a witness. A marriage licence usually costs around £30 to £100. Regulations can vary quite a lot so it will be necessary for you to familiarise yourself with the process in counties where most of your clients reside.

Lastly, if any one of the parties chooses to change names (usually the bride), then the appropriate forms will need to be obtained ahead of time. This name change will apply to everything from the person's driver's licence to a workplace ID card. These forms do not need to be submitted until after the actual wedding because a marriage licence copy may be needed, but it will save time to get these forms in advance. Brides must know what name they intend to use once they are married.

## 5. Confirmation and details

In the fifth phase of wedding planning, working out and confirming all final details must be done. The site layout and production schedule should have been completed at this point, as well as confirmation of the guest list. A security plan must be in place. This could be as straightforward as figuring out who is responsible for transporting all the gifts, but in higher profile weddings this could actually include security staff.

Final confirmations should occur at this point with each of the vendors. Many consultants have partial production timelines or schedules for each of the vendors. Vendors won't need the entire production schedule, however, they will benefit from any specifics which pertain to their particular roles. The more detailed the needs of an individual couple, the more important it is to ensure vendors have targeted production schedules. If the bride and groom opt to not have a father-daughter dance then the DJ must be given specific instructions on his/her individualised timeline in order to avoid any errors.

Some other details at this point which must be attended to are: on-site stationary elements like escort cards and seating, and the final preparation of favours. You should also advise your couple to consult the registry to check if it needs updating. Confirmation of the hotel block and honeymoon should be done at this point too. Lastly, if a couple wants to announce their up-coming nuptials in a newspaper then they must submit an announcement at least ten days before publication.

## 6. Implementation

If you, as the planner/consultant, have a comprehensive production schedule, then the wedding implementation will happen smoothly. The production schedule may also be called the build-out schedule, and is a timeline which gives a detailed plan of specific tasks regarding the actual implementation of any event (Goldblatt, 2005). With regards wedding events, the schedule usually includes the rehearsal, the day-of, and day-after the wedding. It is the primary tool which will ensure the wedding implementation goes smoothly. On the first page there should be all day-of contact information for all the key parties. After this there is a comprehensive agenda which includes every task, every start time, and every point-of-contact for each task, as well as any other important notes or details. Below is a sample of a complete production schedule. Remember that day-of activities will vary depending on background culture.

## 7. Wrap-up and evaluation

Contact with your clients will usually continue for a short period after the wedding in order to evaluate and wrap-up any details. As the consultant, part of your job will be to solicit feedback from clients. If you are working with any new vendors it's a good idea to request suggestions and commentary from them as well. Compile all the information so a final summary of the wedding can be filed for future reference. Some ad hoc services may continue after the wedding day too. Some couples choose to hold luncheons on the day after the wedding. This provides an opportunity to unwind with family, friends and any out-of-town guests as well as a chance to open their wedding gifts.

Wedding consultants are often asked to co-ordinate these types of events and also to tie up any loose ends i.e. preparing thank-you cards. For this reason, the timeline you set out should incorporate all services from beginning to end.

## Sample Wedding Reception Timeline

### 5:00pm: Cocktail Hour

Once the wedding ceremony is complete, the newlyweds leave first, followed by their bridal party and the photographer. Most couples take formal photos during this time, and the guests will usually begin arriving at the reception hall for cocktails. Therefore, cocktail hour should start when the first guests arrive.

### 6:00pm: Arrival of the Newlyweds

This is where the bride and groom will officially arrive as husband and wife. The event co-ordinator makes sure all the guests are seated before the emcee announces the couple's arrival. The bridal party and the parents are usually introduced first and then the newlyweds make their entrance.

### 6:10pm: The First Dance

As the couple is the highlight of the day, this makes it the perfect time for them to move to the dance floor and start the first dance. This may also occur after the serving of the first course or even after they have cut the cake.

### 6:20pm: Welcome and Blessing

Traditionally, the bride's father welcomes everyone to the wedding reception. He also says table blessings.

### 6:30pm: Food Service Begins

As this is the couple's special day, they will be served first along with their parents. This allows them some time to make table visits after they have their meal. During this time, light, conversation-friendly music will be played by the band. This will allow people to socialise as they wait to be served.

### 7:00pm: Cheers and Toasts

The best man and the maid of honour will make their speeches and toasts.

### 7:15pm: Father/Daughter, Mother/Son Dance

The bride and groom should have finished their meal by this time and be ready to dance with their parents.

### **7:45pm: Dance Floor Open**

The dance floor is now open to everyone else and the party can begin.

### **8:30pm: Bouquet/Garter Toss**

This is the time for extra activities like the bouquet and/or garter toss as well as any centrepiece giveaways.

### **9:00: Cake Cutting**

The cake is served with tea or coffee.

### **9:45pm: Last Dance**

### **10:00: Final Farewell**

#### **Further Reading:**

- 📖 *Easy Wedding Planner: Workbook & Organizer, (2008), By Elizabeth Lluch, Alex Lluch*
- 📖 *Wedding Planning Made Easy: The Ultimate Wedding Planning Guide, (2012), Kayla Andrew*
- 📖 *Wedding Planning For Dummies, (2013), By Marcy Blum*