

Wedding Planning: The New Wedding Rules

Yes, it's true there are a lot of traditions when it comes to weddings, but things have changed too. Here it is in black and white -- those formally set-in-stone rules that just don't hold up anymore (despite what the parents say).

1. Old School Rule: The bride's parents pay for the wedding.

New Rule Every couple funds the festivities in different ways. Maybe your mom and dad want to pay for every single thing, but, unlike in the past where the bride's family was expected to foot the whole bill, they're in no way obligated to now. Grooms' parents and the couples themselves chip in nearly as often as brides' parents do. It just depends on your family's situation. If you'd like your fiancé's parents' help, your husband-to-be will need to ask for it—not you, and certainly not your parents. Just remember: Whoever pays gets a say. If you know your mother-in-law will insist on an in-church ceremony if she contributes and you've got your heart set on exchanging vows on a sandy beach, you may be happier cutting your guest list than asking her to contribute anything.

2. Old School Rule: You must invite everyone with a guest.

New Rule If they'll know others, skip the plus-one. It's still polite (and very appreciated!) to invite guests' significant others, but if you're inviting a group of coworkers, for instance, and two or more of them are single, they should have no problem attending solo. Only when guests won't know anyone aside from the couple is it mandatory to let them bring a date. It's kind to invite attendants with guests too (they are shelling out big bucks for their attire!).

3. Old School Rule: Your registry should consist entirely of housewares for your new home.

New Rule You can register for anything from honeymoon hotel accommodations to skiing equipment. Guess what, Grandma? Lots of couples live together before they get married and may have all of the towels and blenders they'll ever want. You can request upgraded versions of home items you already own, but nothing should stop you from creating a honeymoon or otherwise "untraditional" registry. These are your gifts, and you need to be happy with them! If you're inviting a few Internet-less guests, including items from a brick-and-mortar store they can actually get to will help prevent a buildup of unwanted presents. But you should feel free to include a ping-pong table for your basement or the complete Sex and the City DVD collection on your wish list if you can't use yet another kitchen appliance. A word of caution: Some of the older folks think that they know what brides and grooms really need, so they may get you an iron even if you haven't requested one.

4. Old School Rule: You must wear a white gown.

New Rule Wear whatever you want! Sure, most brides go the white or ivory route, but for your wedding day attire, anything goes: from a cute cherry red flapper dress to a silver, slinky sheath to a (gasp!) black pantsuit. As long as you feel fabulous in your outfit, it can be any color or style. You can even skip the veil! Warning: Your fashion choices may wind up shocking your older guests, especially the ones who equate wearing white with "purity." If you'd prefer that your look pleases the crowd but aren't willing to go totally traditional, try working in a hint of color via a dress sash, your shoes, jewelry or a hair accessory.

5. Old School Rule: Your mom can't throw your shower.

New Rule Anyone can throw your shower! People used to think it was rude for the bride's mother to host a party where the sole purpose was for her daughter to get gifts. Other close family members, like sisters, were similarly forbidden from hosting. We didn't get this then, and we don't get it now, and luckily, today's mothers of the bride are ignoring the passé etiquette. In some cultures and regions of the US, like Italians in the Northeast, the mother always hosted her daughter's shower. So encourage your mom to throw yours if you think that she wants to! Your bridesmaids may be itching to throw a shower for you too, so make sure that they coordinate with your mom before they make any definite plans.

6. Old School Rule: You have to have a rehearsal dinner.

New Rule You can skip a rehearsal dinner. When couples lived separately before they got married and engagements were a few weeks long, not a year or more, the rehearsal dinner was the first time both sets of parents could meet. Since the mothers and fathers of the bride and groom would be responsible for introductions at the wedding the next day, they needed to see each other first! Having a rehearsal dinner is still smart when your and your fiancé's parents aren't acquainted, but if there's no time or room in the budget, then it's okay to skip it, especially if your ceremony rehearsal has to take place on a weekday or minutes before your actual wedding. It's nice to treat out-of-towners to a welcome meal, or you can just gather your closest local friends and family for a prewedding dinner, but neither is required. Ask anyone who tells you otherwise if they'd like to plan and pay for it!

7. Old School Rule: The first time you see your groom on your wedding day should be at your ceremony.

New Rule You can spend every minute with your groom before the ceremony. We promise that it's not bad luck if your fiancé catches a glimpse of you in your gown on the wedding day (or even before it, but why not surprise him if you both can hold out?). In fact, many couples who decided to wait until the ceremony to see each other would've preferred to have the inevitably emotional experience in private rather than in front of all of their guests. Photographers are happy to capture the moment you first see each other before the ceremony, so take photos then. That way, you don't have to miss your cocktail hour.

8. Old School Rule: Ceremony seating is based on a bride's side and groom's side.

New Rule Guests can choose to sit wherever they want! It used to be that guests of the bride sat on the left side at the ceremony and guests of the groom sat on the right. Even now, plenty of your guests will go by this guideline to find their seats. But if your fiancé's family is huge and yours is tiny, your ceremony will look a little weird if most people are seated on the right side. And at Jewish weddings, the sides are flipped anyway! (Gotta love when everyone winds up on one side at an interfaith wedding!) If you're having ushers, ask them to direct your VIPs, parents, grandparents and the like to prime seats toward the front of either side and instruct your other guests to sit in any open seat. No ushers? No problem. Place a sign in the area where people pick up their programs and have it read, "Sit anywhere you like!" That'll send the message loud and clear.

9. Old School Rule: You must walk down the aisle.

New Rule You don't have to walk anywhere! Perhaps you're a flats-wearing gal and your trip down the aisle may turn into a real trip in your wedding day heels. Or maybe you'd prefer to skip all the hoopla that's associated with that long walk. Whatever your rationale, it's your prerogative. Your groom is already going to be up at the altar; why can't you be too? Who says that you have to have a processional at all? Yet, for Jewish weddings, it's strongly suggested that brides (and grooms too!) walk down the aisle. That's because they each make their way to the huppah with both of their parents. If you want to skip the walk but still want to honor your mom and dad, present them with flowers or other gifts during your ceremony.

10. Old School Rule: You have to leave for your honeymoon right after your reception.

New Rule You can go on a honeymoon whenever you want. Heading straight to your honeymoon sounds romantic, but it can be a logistical nightmare. Think it over: You'd have to lug your luggage from the ceremony to the reception and keep your passport and plane tickets in a safe place the entire day. But even if you're the queen of organization, you'll be so exhausted from your whirlwind day that you'll want nothing more than to just veg out for a while with your new husband after the wedding. And that's okay! When you take a honeymoon is entirely up to you two (and maybe your boss a little bit). No matter if you leave the day after or the year after, it'll still be the wonderful, well-deserved vacation you always imagined it'd be.

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