

The JVG Wedding Method

These suggestions may help you with your ceremony. They are only suggestions. Remember it's your wedding, you can throw the rule book out the window if you want. I'll do pretty much anything you ask of me. The only rule I insist upon is that you have a plan B if you're thinking of having an outdoor wedding. And of course, the necessary legal stuff.

If you have no set ideas about how you want your ceremony to proceed I recommend the following. Not too long, no fluff, a few jokes, yet a serious and respectful occasion. Laughter, tears and no yawning.

THE ENTRY, MUSIC AND STRESS

It doesn't have to be the bridesmaids, then the bride with her old man anymore. It's not uncommon for the groom to make an entry with the bride. Or the bride with her family, and the groom with his family. Or the bride and groom with their children, or their dogs. Limitless choices. Think about what best suits you. Remember it's your wedding, it's all about you.

It's good to have some music here, recorded or live, to punctuate the start of the ceremony. This is the part of the ceremony where your choice of music is going to have a big impact. Choose some music you both really like. If you don't have "a song", sit down one night with your cd collection or your ipod and a bottle of wine and find a song that you both really like. A song or piece of music that's really "you". Don't start thinking about what sounds weddingish. Weddingish is tedious, reflective of you is going to work. It's amazing the stuff you can get away with. It's amazing the stuff that goes down a treat if it reflects the two of you.

If you use recorded music make sure you know how long the piece of music will run for and do some basic choreography to ensure the music doesn't finish before your saunter is complete. Nothing worse than a track running out before the bride and groom are standing up there.

Live music means your choreography can be a bit looser, your musicians can repeat solos and choruses until all is in place.

Live music is great. If you have a musical family member or friend, get him or her to play. To ask someone to perform one song at your wedding is not a great imposition. In fact your buddy may well be honoured by the request. To ask guests to perform a set at the party is a huge imposition. I reckon you should be paying them for that.

Having said that, a good recorded song is better than a bad live song.

I get a few couples that don't like the sound of the dramatic entry. They plan to hang out with their guests and then a bit later they want me to politely shift a few people around and start the ceremony there and then. This approach is fraught. To hang with your guests before the ceremony is likely to make you more stressed, not less stressed.

You're going to be a bag of nerves before your wedding. Even if you've got it into your head that it's going to be a relaxed affair. And just before the ceremony you'll be at your most nervous. If you're hanging with your guests all you can really do is dabble in small talk. And small talk when you're toey is excruciating.

You can't not have an entry. You have to turn up at some stage or other. Best to get the ceremony over and done with as soon as you get there. Straight after the ceremony you'll feel like a huge weight has been lifted off your shoulders. Then you'll feel like enjoying your party.

Having said that, the whole stress thing is important. Without your stress there's no tension, no theatrical tension, no vibe. Your guests will love the tension. Your guests are counting on you being beside yourselves with nerves. A wedding is a big deal, if you're not stressing, there's something wrong.

MY INTRO

All about you, the couple. I will meet with you around two or three weeks before the wedding and do an investigative journo job on you. I will write this up and email it to you before the wedding so there won't be any unpleasant surprises.

I don't preach about the institution of marriage. I won't mention the institution of marriage. You won't get any talk about two rivers joining to become one, or journeys. I talk about what's going on with you two, your happiness, your history, your future. That's what the celebration is all about.

THE INTERLUDE

This usually takes the form of a reading or a song by a family member or friend. I often suggest, perhaps some interpretive dance. Strangely no one's taken me up on this yet.

Many couples choose to do away with this whole interlude bit. It needs to be something very relevant to you. If it is it'll work well. It will take the focus off me for a bit and allow a friend or a family member to make a contribution that'll make them feel really good about being involved. If you use a piece that doesn't resonate with the two of you it will sound like you've chosen a poem, a song, a piece of writing just for the sake of having a poem, a song, a piece of writing.

And a tip – if you do have a friend or a family member do a reading make sure they can read and project. Sometimes a microphone will be necessary for a reader. I don't need a mic because I am the projector. I've found it's much better for me to work with out one.

And for god's sakes if someone offers to sing for you, have a listen to him or her first. I have been known to accompany singers on guitar. I play pretty well. Please don't ask me to sing, it would not be nice.

THE MONITUM FROM THE MARRIAGE ACT OF 1961

This is the government stuff I have to say –

Now I, Jon von Goes, a civil celebrant, am duly authorised by the law to solemnise this, your marriage according to the laws of Australia.

Before you XXXX, and you XXXX, are joined together in marriage in my presence and in the presence of these, your family and friends, I am bound, as you know, to remind you publicly of the solemn, the serious and the binding nature of the relationship into which you are now about to enter.

Marriage, according to law in Australia is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others and is voluntarily entered into for life.

The law says that I must recite this prescribed monitum verbatim. I'm not too happy about being forced to do this. Our previous socially regressive government removed the "or words to that effect" loophole from their directives, meaning I can no longer use the line "of one person to another" as an alternative to "of a man to a woman". Our relatively newly elected attorney general has not made mention of what celebrants can or can't say. Hopefully he couldn't care less.

HONOURING YOUR PARENTS

When you think about it, a father can't give away a bride unless he is in the business of denying his adult daughter her basic human right of freedom. In some square weddings this ridiculous custom is still performed.

However, if it's a matter of keeping parents happy, which is not a bad thing to do, having the bride's dad walk her down the aisle can be good. Or the bride's mum, or the bride's mum and dad, or her grandmother, or her child, or her dog or whoever. Or any of the groom's family or friends if he's walking in too.

I've thought of another idea. It makes sense and it works a treat. I ask of the parents or whoever it was who raised you:

"Who raised this woman who today is marrying this man?" and "Who raised this man who today is marrying this woman?" (Or words to that effect). I then congratulate the parents referring to them by name and they'll get a round of applause.

You certainly don't need to have a mother and father who are still a married couple to make this work. It gives you a chance to give credit where credit is due and to realize that the nuclear family is most certainly not the only way go about it all. If any of your parents are no longer living it's a good time to remember them. I can go on about how happy and proud they would have been.

If your family politics are such that for me to pose such questions would be too awkward I can make an acknowledgement of your parents without asking questions. Something like —

"XXXXX and XXXXX would like to thank everyone here for all the love and support you have given them. XXXXX and XXXXX's parents are incredibly important in the context of this day. If it weren't for their love and support this wedding would not be happening. XXXXX's parents, blah blah (applause) and XXXXX's parents, blah blah (applause)".

You can get around most family politics with a bit of thought to how you phrase this bit.

And sometimes the politics of a family are so fraught that this bit is best left alone. All families have their issues.

It can also be a good time to honour other family members who deserve it. Grandparents, brothers or sisters, or other people who have been like parents, grandparents, or brothers and sisters to you.

Some couples have also expressed a wish to have all the guests promise to do all they can to make sure the couple in question remain happy. I can ask something like —

"Are you willing now and always to support and strengthen this marriage by upholding both XXXX and XXXX with your love and support?"

Response — "We are", or preferably, a spontaneous "Yeeeeeah".

THE ASKING

These are the precursory questions I ask you, the bride and groom, before you state your vows. Vows are required by law, askings are not. But an asking will make your guests feel like they are at a wedding, a fairly informal wedding, but still undeniably a wedding. An asking also provides a good segue from the honouring of the parents bit into the vows.

These are examples of some fairly standard lines you may wish to use if you don't want to write your own. You may wish to borrow bits from these examples to use in your own, or you may wish to have none at all.

I have only given the groom's examples here, needless to say the bride's bits are the same save for the gender specific words.

("I will" being the answer to all these questions, can be changed to "I do" by changing bits like "will you" to "do you promise to" and other bits as needed.)

1. XXXX, will you take XXXX to be your lawful* wife
 Will you love her, comfort her
 Honour and keep her, in sickness and in health
 And, forsaking all others, keep only unto her
 So long as you both shall live?
 (*Some couples choose to do away with the “lawful”)
2. XXXX, will you take XXXX to be your wife
 Will you love and cherish her
 Stand by her whatever may come
 Will you give your relationship all it requires and deserves
 So that you can live the rest of your lives together in love and happiness
3. XXXX, will you take XXXX to be your wife
 Will you love & respect her
 Be honest with her, and stand by her through whatever may come
 So you can genuinely share your life together?
4. Will you XXXX take XXXX to be your lifelong partner
 Will you make the daily effort to relate to her and listen to her
 Will you be gracious and generous in your giving of yourself
 Will you work for what is best for her for the rest of your life?
5. Will you XXXX promise to be a fabulous husband?

THE VOWS

Usually the bride and groom repeat their vows phrase by phrase after me. That’s because it’s the best way to do it. I’ve got a whoppa of a voice and everyone will hear the vows you’ve sweated over if I get to read them as well. It is rarely the case that the bride and groom get heard if they recite their vows on their own. They are usually trembling and crying and carrying on, not that that’s a bad thing, that’s what’s expected of you. I mean it’s your wedding, if you can’t show a bit emotion at your own wedding, when can you? But such states make for ordinary elocution and poor projection. And if someone goes and sticks a microphone in front of you it makes for very clumsy theatre especially if you’re reading off a piece of paper you’re holding. If you want to try and attempt to commit your vows to memory you’re more stupid than brave.

What to say? It has become law to begin your vows with the words —

I, XXXX, call on the people here

To witness that I take you,

XXXX, to be my wife.....

(More meddling from our previous socially regressive government.)

If you want you can leave your vows as bare boned as that. But the vows are often the best bit of the ceremony. It can get pretty heavy here. Good heavy. It’s worth promising each other a bit more. You can write your own vows from scratch. If you want to do this be mindful of your phrasing. If you’re going to repeat the words after me long sentences can make things difficult.

You certainly don't have to write your own. Sometimes writing your own vows can sound quite self-conscious. Sometimes recognizable vows will make your guests feel that they are at a wedding. Sort of like how a birthday cake makes you feel like you're at a birthday party.

If you don't want to write your own vows, here are some examples. If you want to write your own vows you may wish to borrow from some of these examples.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. You can go on the www to get many more examples. Also I have only given the groom to bride examples here where the vows are gender specific. Remember these examples all begin with –

*I, XXXX, call on the people here
To witness that I take you,
XXXX, to be my wife.....*

1.To have and to hold
From this day forward
For better for worse
For richer for poorer
In sickness and in health
For the rest of my life.
2. I want to be with you always
I choose you above all others
To share my life with me in marriage
I love you as you are
I promise to honour this pledge
As long as I live
3. I will try to be a loving husband
I promise to respect you as an individual
I intend to develop as a person in partnership with you
I want to love you
Through good fortune and adversity
For the rest of my life
4.I want to be with you always
Just as you are
I choose you above all others
To share my life with me in marriage
I love you for yourself
And want you to become all that you can be
I promise to honour
And tenderly care for you
To cherish and encourage
Your own fulfilment as an individual
For the rest of my life

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| 5.I want to be with you always
Just as you are
I choose you above all others
To share my life with me in marriage
I love you for yourself
And I want you to become all that you can be
I promise to honour this pledge as long as I live | 1.

2. |
| 6.In times of sickness and in times of health
In times of joy and in times of sorrow
I promise to respect you
To care and protect you
To comfort and encourage you
I vow to listen to you and to keep an open mind
To grow with you throughout the seasons of life
And to stay by your side for all eternity | 3.

4. |
| 7.I pledge to share my life openly with you
To speak the truth to you in love
I promise to honour and tenderly care for you
To cherish and encourage your own fulfilment as an individual
For the rest of my life | 5. |
| 8.I pledge to share my life openly with you
To speak the truth to you in love
I promise to respect and tenderly care for you
To cherish and encourage you
Through all the changes in our lives | 6. |

THE RING CEREMONY

Nearing the end of the ceremony now. It doesn't have to be the best man who gets the ring gig. I've had mothers, fathers, grandparents, dogs, the barman, you name it. Sometimes when some people can't decide on one or two people, the groom's ring gets passed all along the line of groomsmen so every groomsman gets his filthy mitts on the ring. Same with the line of brides.

I make a big fuss about the chosen ring bearers. I tell the guests why they've been chosen, how important they are in the context of the day and I get a round of applause for them. I usually manage to embarrass them somewhat. Good embarrassment.

To slip rings on in silence is an option that is often preferred. A bit of quiet relief before the pronouncement of you becoming husband and wife works well. These examples may help should you wish to have something said during this part of the ceremony. They are repeated phrase by phrase by the bride and groom after me.

I've chosen not to stick any examples of stuff like the roundness of the ring symbolising eternity, no beginning and no end and the preciousness of the metal reflecting the preciousness of your love because I hate that stuff. But then again it's your wedding, you can do what you like.

1. XXXX, take this ring
And wear it as a pledge of my love
And as a symbol of all we share
2. XXXX, I give you this ring
It is my personal promise
Of love and trust
And pride that you are my wife
3. XXXX, this ring I give to you
It is my personal gift
My personal promise of love and trust
And pride that you are my wife.
4. XXXX, I thank you for this ring
I accept it as a symbol of our love.
This ring will remind me of you
And I will wear it with love
All my life
5. XXXX, with this ring
I thee wed
Wear it as a pledge of my love
And as a symbol of all we share.
6. XXXX, take this ring
And try not to lose it

THE DECLARATION

I pronounce you husband and wife with a bit of theatre and sense of occasion. This is the fun bit. It's when the party starts. You'll feel a surge of relief that the show is over. Seriously, for me it's the best part of the ceremony. Big emotion time. The music needs to come on (recorded music is best here. Live music can demand attention, when all the attention at this stage should be focused on you two), the champagne should start to flow (if possible). Your family and friends will want to come up and hug and kiss you. I'll encourage them to do so before everyone else mobs you. I'll let you and your guests enjoy the moment.

I'll come and drag you away to the sign the papers 10 – 15 minutes or so later, when I feel the time is right, depending on how many guests you have and other variables. To force your guests to sit quietly and watch you sign boring documents is like forcing some kid to watch his sister do her homework. The party will be well underway by the time you do your paperwork. Some guests will want to watch, others will not. When you have completed your papers I will make an announcement that you are well legal. Then my work will be done.

Cheers

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