

A bride in a white dress is holding a large, lush bouquet of flowers. The bouquet features several large, light pink roses, smaller pink roses, and vibrant red roses. It is interspersed with green eucalyptus leaves and small, round, golden berries. The background is softly blurred, showing green foliage.

# *Get Savvy*

**THE MODERN BRIDE'S GUIDE  
TO WEDDING PLANNING**

# Hello, Lovely!

Congratulations on your engagement! I couldn't be happier for you. I believe that planning your wedding should be fun and stress-free whether your budget is \$5,000 or \$50,000!

When I was planning my own wedding in 2015, one thought kept repeating itself over and over again- "If I didn't have almost 20 years of experience as a professional party planner, how on earth would I plan the wedding of our dreams on this budget?!?"

You probably already know that the cost of weddings in the U.S. are sky high. According to Brides, the average in 2018 was over \$44k. If you're anything like me, that figure is bonkers!

Even if we had access to that kind of disposable income, we would have never spent it on our wedding. It would have gone toward a down payment on a house, paying off student loans, traveling, or even basic living expenses. My hubby and I love to throw a party, but life comes first!

Ladies, I've been there. Wedding planning can be stressful and overwhelming. A HUGE part of my mission for creating Savvy Weddings was to break the mold and help women feel good about themselves and about the wedding planning process. I want ALL brides to be empowered to plan every element of their wedding with grace, ease and most importantly JOY!

Get Savvy: The Modern Bride's Guide to Wedding Planning is chock full of insider info for budget, logistics, and design. Think of this guide as CliffsNotes to plan your wedding in a snap! I'm so glad you're here. And happy reading!

xoxo,  
Jenn





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# Great Expectations

The foundation of every successful wedding lies in setting Great Expectations - for yourself, your guests and your vendors. When people know what to expect, they are immediately at ease. And as the bride you get to determine what that will be. Not your mom, or Aunt Ida or glossy bridal mags. Isn't that a relief? Everyone will follow your lead as you create a beautiful celebration with your beloved based on your unique love story.

Setting Great Expectations for your wedding begins with maximizing resources, minimizing stress and designing a wedding that honors both your budget and your creative vision. Three components create the foundation for your wedding: **Time**, **Treasure** and **Talent**. All equally important. But since money tends to be the biggest source of stress for most couples, we're going to flip the script and transform unknown "Treasure" into your biggest asset.

## Treasure

Corny, right? But here's the scoop. While money certainly matters, if you're Savvy, you can access a wealth of tangible resources to reduce your actual spend and elevate the look and feel of your wedding. That's where the real treasure comes in.

**"PRICE IS WHAT YOU PAY.  
VALUE IS WHAT YOU GET."**

*Warren Buffet*

For example, when I married Mr. H., We used multiple pieces from our home for our ceremony and reception. We chose a vintage, Scottish theme for our wedding so we brought an assortment of vintage books, letters and vessels to use as accents, battery operated pillar candles for the aisle, the

oriental rug from our living room to warm up the altar, votives for the reception to be used both as floral vessels and for candles, and a pair of gold rimmed glasses to toast with. If we had rented or purchased these items, we would have spent hundreds of dollars; instead we spent ZERO and warmed up the space with personal touches reflective of our own style.

If you don't own pieces that will work for your theme, we'll talk alternate, super cost-effective resources later on down the line in **Décor & Design!** In the interim, let's talk actual gold, aka money.

### **Communication is Key**

This may be the first time you're talking finances as a couple and it's important to start things on the right foot. Creating a budget that feels good to both of you will help alleviate stress throughout the planning process. It also gives you a solid framework for decision making moving forward.

Have an open mind when you're talking. Whatever you decide on will be right for you as a couple. Be kind, patient and compassionate with your partner and yourself.

### **Bank on It**

First things first. Regardless of how much actual money you have, your wedding will be beautiful, unique and special - just like you are!

When it comes to money, start with what you absolutely know you can spend on your wedding between your engagement and the big day. Whether it's \$100 or \$10,000.

Include the date(s) that these funds can be deposited in a shared bank account dedicated to your wedding expenses. Put anything that could fluctuate in a "pending" column along with the estimated date that you'll know if you can move it into your actual budget. This would include financial gifts, credit lines, bonuses, pending income or items you may want to consider selling.

While ultimately you may use these resources, you need to know that your core budget is based on what you can bank on, literally.

Case and point: I had a corporate client that had always been reliable. I had a verbal agreement on a gig for the following year and used the forecasted income as a part of building the budget for our wedding. Big mistake. The gig fell through, and as a result, my fiancé and I had to completely rethink our wedding plans which meant we needed to cancel our original location losing our \$1,500 deposit in the process - ouch! And while we were FAR happier with how our wedding unfolded in the new location, we could have done without losing that deposit!

Here's a sample of confirmed and pending investments as an easy reference.

### *Confirmed Investment*

Bride: \$2,000 (January)  
Fiancé: \$1,000 (February)  
Fiancé: \$1,000 (March)  
**Confirmed Total: \$4,000**

### *Pending Investment*

Family Gift: \$2,000 (February)  
Fiancé Bonus: \$1,000 (April)  
Credit Card: \$2,000 (if needed)  
**Pending Total: \$5,000**

## Keeping the Books

Open a joint account for your wedding finances and decide who will be the one managing your budget and paying vendors. It's important for one person to be in charge to avoid making duplicate payments or missing a due date on an invoice. And while this isn't budget related, this is the perfect time to decide on how to divide planning responsibilities.

## Gifted

Once you and your beloved have determined what you can financially contribute to the big day, the next step is to talk to family (biological or chosen) if that feels good based on your relationships. Some couples want the financial support and others prefer to be entirely self-sufficient. The choice is entirely up to you.

We're fortunate to live in a day and age where couples and their families can split financial responsibilities however it works best. Isn't that a relief? That being said, I know that some families may be more comfortable with a traditional division of wedding expenses. You can find those compliments of Emily Post on pages 47-48. As a Savvy couple, having control over how you choose to spend or splurge will make a big difference in the final look and feel for your wedding.

For example, it's traditional for the groom's family to pay for the rehearsal dinner. Assuming a wedding party of 15, plus their significant others, you could easily have 30 people at the rehearsal and dinner - more than that if you choose to invite out of town guests or family.

For a modest restaurant with a salad, entrée, dessert and glass of wine or beer, you can assume \$40 per person or more once you include tax and gratuity. Multiply that times 30 and we're talking \$1,200+! For our wedding, we had two big additional factors to consider:

- 1) We had a "local" destination wedding, meaning that while technically you could drive to and from our wedding, it was far enough away that most people were opting to drive over the day of our rehearsal and spend the weekend. That meant a lot more than just the wedding party was in town and ready to celebrate!
- 2) We had a BIG wedding party. Since we knew we had to cap our guest list at 80 guests, we decided that we would only invite our wedding party and local family to the wedding. We are very lucky to have a lot of great friends... so to ensure we could invite everyone we truly wanted to be there without hurting feelings, they were in our wedding party. (9) bridesmaids, (4) groomsmen, (2) groomsmen's wives, (3) ushers, (4) musicians, (1) reader, (1) officiant and (6) wee ones...for a total of 30 without their plus ones - not an insignificant number.

Our solution was simple. We invited the wedding party only to the rehearsal at the bed and breakfast where we were staying. After the rehearsal, we had a champagne toast along with beautifully displayed cheese, charcuterie and fruit that we picked up at Costco and then re-plated on vintage china and silver.



We also picked up a few fun snacks for the kiddos. After this reception, our wedding party, their plus ones, and the rest of the in-town guests were invited to join us at a non-hosted dinner at a local restaurant. We were able to thank our wedding party in style for a fraction of the cost of a formal rehearsal dinner and were able to invest the \$\$ that would have gone to that dinner into the rest of the wedding.

To keep a long story short, if you ask for a no-strings attached gift, you have more options on getting the most bang for your buck!

Since talking money can be particularly stressful, I've created a script that you can use to start the conversation with your family on sharing financial responsibility. Depending on your comfort level and location, this might be a conversation you have in person, over the phone or even in an email. Do whatever is most comfortable for you. The more comfortable and relaxed you are, the more comfortable and relaxed the conversation will be.

The script at the right is based on a no strings attached request for money vs asking for coverage of specific items. Although you can absolutely do the latter, and ask family or others to pay for flowers, music or the venue, you will have less control over the outcome.

### Little Luxuries

Now, while I'm a big proponent of getting a set sum gifted, I'm also a big proponent of letting your besties and close family know if there are specific personal items you really want to make your big day special.

Chances are they will LEAP at the chance to give you a meaningful wedding gift that makes a difference instead of buying you a new set of towels!

Brides may want to ask for jewelry, lingerie, veil, garter, clutch, shoes or a gift certificate for beauty services (lord knows they add up!).

For grooms, cuff links, handkerchief, and a special tie would all fit the bill. Other easy gift items include your gift book, flower girl baskets and picture frames for signage.

### Something Borrowed, Something Blue

Another fantastic way to offset costs is to see what you can borrow. This might be wedding attire, jewelry or décor. If you're self-catering, borrowing beautiful mismatched china and silver to use on the buffet is another fabulous way to save.

### Let's Make a Deal

One of the most important lessons I can teach you is that the answer is always no until you ask the question... so feel empowered to ask away! You would be surprised at the number of trades you can make to offset your budget.

.....

*"[Name] and I are starting  
to plan our wedding.*

*We are putting together our budget first  
so we can make the best choices  
every step of the way.*

*If you can help us financially,  
whatever the amount,  
we would really appreciate it.*

*We are committed to having a beautiful  
celebration while staying in a budget  
that works for our family."*

.....

It might be a trade of your personal expertise to a vendor for an exchange of services, or even a trade of product.

One trade I made was with my florist. I personally bought a gorgeous vessel for my altar arrangement (for 50% off I might add!). I asked my florist if she would transport the flowers from our ceremony to our reception at no charge in exchange for giving her the vessel at the end of the event. She said yes and I saved a cool \$100 in labor and delivery!

## *Talent*

Asking your tribe to help create the vibe for your wedding is a great way to offset costs while spending quality time together. These talented peeps will include your wedding party (I definitely consider being a good Maid of Honor a talent!), attendants to help you wrangle logistics on your big day, crafting queens (or kings!) that can help you create fun and fabulous DIY projects as well as actual talent, á la musicians, that can play during your ceremony.

### **Wedding Party**

Once you're engaged, asking your sisters from another mister to stand by your side as you say "I Do" is often the next step. While this is a decision led by the heart, there are a few practicalities that should be considered before you pop the question to your besties.

Did you know the average cost to be a bridesmaid is \$1,500? Yikes! Between attire, beauty appointments, parties and gifts, the costs really add up. Granted, there are many ways to minimize these costs, but no matter which way you cut

it, being in the wedding party is a financial commitment.

Ultimately, it's your 'maids responsibility to decide if they want to say "yes", but they may be concerned if their answer is "no", you'll feel like they are saying no to your friendship.

If you know that being a bridesmaid (or bridesman for that matter) may be a financial stretch, think about whether or not you can help off-set costs and offer that assistance when you ask the question. For example, one of my besties was finishing nursing school and working part-time as a single mother when I was getting married. I let her know that all that mattered to me was that she was there and that I would take care of the rest.

If you can't afford that, consider letting them know that while you would love for them to be a bridesmaid, that what's most important is having them as a part of your big day – whether that's as a bridesmaid, performing a reading or being a guest. And then let them choose the role that fits best.

When it comes to selecting your Maid of Honor, pick someone that has the time, energy and skill set to be your ride or die. They will be helping you with planning, organizing the bridesmaids and throwing your shower and bachelorette.

Another option is to pick more than one MOH to help lighten their load. Personally, I had three, and it made a world of difference for them to share the responsibilities as it best fit their availability, skill sets and actual interest in wedding planning.



For example, one was claiming dibs on throwing the shower out of the gate and couldn't wait to dish details with me, while another was relieved she could just help as time allowed.

### Attendants

We'll talk about attendants in detail in our chapter on [Perfect Planning](#). As a DIY bride, one of the most important ways your tribe can help you is by gifting you with their time on your wedding day. These attendants will essentially be sharing the role of your day-of wedding planner. Choose people that are responsible, organized, excel under pressure and are clear communicators.

### DIY Divas

If you have friends that are a wiz at crafting, recruit them out of the gate to help you. As your vision unfolds, you can assemble a list of items that you want to make together. A few common DIY projects that are fun to make, and aren't too hard include favors, non-floral décor and centerpieces as well as paper goods a la invitations, programs, menus, escort cards and signage.

### Musicians & Entertainment

Are any of your friends musicians or entertainers? If so, ask them for the gift of their talent for your wedding.

My hubby and I are blessed to have incredibly talented friends. We had a trio of friends play acoustic guitar, flute and percussion during our ceremony. And another pair sang a beautiful duet. The piece de resistance, however, was our friend who played bag pipes and led a parade from our ceremony to reception along with another friend on stilts!

Be creative with this and think out of the box. Do you have a friend who is charismatic to a fault? Ask them to be the MC for your wedding, Use the in-house sound system or rent one for a modest fee and skip the cost of a DJ. Know someone that loves games? Ask them to help guide lawn games or even a board game station! I once went to a brunch wedding where we spent the reception drinking mimosas and Irish coffee while playing board games - we were having so much fun they had to kick us out at the end!!

There are many ways to infuse your wedding with interactive fun at low or no cost, elevating the experience for you and your guests. Most importantly, think about what will be the most fun for you and your guests.

## Time

Taking stock of the amount of time you REALLY have available to plan your wedding will help minimize your stress and maximize your resources. Here are three real-life examples of how brides made choices that best fit their timeline:

### Jillian & Jordan

#### 1 Month - 10k - 100 Guests

Jillian was getting her nursing degree while working full-time. She and her fiancé, Jordan, are also an incredibly talented couple who can literally be called the King and Queen of DIY... but with their busy schedules, they knew that they needed to minimize the amount of time they spent crafting their wedding. Instead, they focused on vendors that could honor the creativity at the heart of their relationship in a short time period.

We planned their wedding in under a month. Here are the highlights:

- They secured a super chic venue that included the tables and chairs along with whimsically appointed rooms that perfectly complemented their personality and relationship. All we needed to do was provide a few linens, votives and a few fun accents from their home.
- To support the cost of the venue, they streamlined their budget by using the in-house sound system with a curated playlist for music, made their own invitations, opted for a cocktail reception vs dinner and limited the guest list to 100.
- The venue allowed them to provide their own alcohol as long as it was served by a professional bartender. We picked some fabulous and cost-effective wines from Trader Joe's along with some kegs of local craft beer. This saved them a ton of money. The bartending co. also provided all of the glassware, coolers etc. so all they needed to do was provide the booze. Win-win!
- They hired a Japanese restaurant to provide their favorite food - sushi!
- And last but not least, Jillian ordered her dress from ModCloth. It was gorgeous, arrived in a few days and cost under \$100 with no alterations needed. Including accessories, shoes and a wrap, her bridal ensemble was easily under \$300.

## Amber & Ty

### 18 Months - 8k - 120 Guests

Amber is a life-coach and graphic designer. Ty is a filmmaker. Talk about a dynamically creative duo! Unlike Jillian and Jordan, Amber and Ty had plenty of time to plan and execute the creative elements for their big day. Here are the highlights:

- One of the key components they agreed on was a taco truck for catering. One of their favorite foods and a great way to save! Since that was a priority, they limited their search to venues that allowed outside catering AND had room for a food truck. Since they had plenty of time to plan, they could really take their time to find the perfect venue.
- Because time was definitely on their side, Amber spent months carefully hunting through thrift stores to find perfect elements for the wedding including frames that she spray-painted silver for a perfect finishing touch.
- The florist was a dear friend of the couple and offered to do the flowers at cost... they received \$2k worth of flowers for \$500. ·
- And since Amber is a graphic designer, she designed all the paper goods for their wedding saving a bundle!

## Laura & Chris

### 4 Months - 1k - 70 Guests

Laura and Chris wanted a fun-filled day with family and friends that honored their modest budget. Although they could have chosen a longer engagement, they decided to fast track the date to take advantage of the summer weather. Here are the highlights:

- They picked a beautiful local park for their big day. This naturally lent itself to an alcohol-free wedding. A big savings out of the gate!
- Once the park rental was secured, friends of the bride worked together to quickly make invitations, bridesmaid dresses and tags for favors... vintage teacups gifted from a friend for the occasion.
- The budget primarily went to the park rental, chairs for the ceremony and some simple, but elegant décor - paper lanterns for the trees, lace linens for the picnic tables, and groupings of vintage books with petite arrangements with flowers sourced from a local market.
- The reception was a barbecue. The bride and groom hosted the entrée and guests brought side dishes. A friend gifted his time as grill master. I've worked with several brides that had a potluck style reception and they were all a big success! We asked guests to bring a family favorite as their potluck dish along with a recipe card for the couple to keep.
- And since Laura and Chris are big fans of historical reenactment, the theme was "A Time Traveler's Picnic in the Park." Guests were encouraged to dress in the period of their choice. The groom wore a Napoleonic naval uniform and the bride wore a vintage gown. It was a lovely afternoon filled with love, laughter and friendship.





# Dollars & Sense

We created the foundation for your budget in [Great Expectations](#). Now we're going to take a deep dive into the best ways to manage your spend by teaching you where to save and where to splurge to have a wedding that honors your budget and celebrates your vision. We're also going to talk budgeting systems and the keys to contract signing.

Before we start, let's review the financial milestones that you have in place from [Great Expectations](#)-

- You discussed the Time, Treasure and Talent that will help off-set costs. You have a bank account dedicated to wedding expenses.
- You have decided who is responsible for managing the budget and paying vendors.
- You have agreed on what you can each comfortably invest in your wedding. And if it feels good, you've asked your family for financial support.
- You've listed these funds, and the dates they will be available, in your Confirmed Investment.
- And last but not least, you've listed resources like credit card limits and bonuses in your Pending Investment.

With your financials in place, it's time to pick the priorities that are the most meaningful to you and your beloved.

# Priorities

Savvy couples are strategic about where they save and where they splurge.

There are six potentially big-ticket items that will have the most impact on your budget: **Venue**, **Catering**, **Décor**, **Entertainment**, **Photography**, and **Attire**. It's important to know which of these will take top priority.

## Venue

If the idea of selecting a venue feels overwhelming, I've got you! The questions below are the first step in prioritizing the best venue type for your wedding -

- **Do we want to have an indoor wedding, outdoor wedding or combination of the two?** Your wedding date and the area of the country you live in will also help with this decision.
- **Do we want to have our ceremony and reception in the same location?** It's worth considering that two locations will also double the time you need to set up on your big day.
- **How far do we want our guests to travel for our wedding?** If your venue is more than a 45 to 60-minute drive for your guests, they may need to consider getting hotel rooms which may limit the number of people that can attend your wedding.
- **How do we want to manage food and beverage?** If you are considering self-catering either the food or beverage or have your hearts set on something specific, like a taco truck, you'll need to select a venue that is happy to oblige.

- **What's our style?** Whether you're a boho, beachy or modern couple, selecting a venue that naturally lends itself to your style is important.

Here's a quick guide to the most popular venue types to help further refine your conversation -

## Banquet Hall Venues

Banquet halls are spaces dedicated to hosting private event. These can range from barns to modern city lofts. Many have great amenities built in as a part of their package.

## Creative Venues

Theaters, art galleries and museums are perfect if you're creative at heart. Art galleries and museums have the added bonus of beautiful décor built right in.

A few important caveats – candles with live flame are often prohibited, food & beverage may be limited to specific areas of the property and there usually isn't a kitchen on-site which means your catering bill may be higher.

## Foodie Venues

If you're a foodie, restaurants, wineries, distilleries and cooking schools are great venue options.

One of the things I love about restaurant receptions is how turnkey they are! Particularly if you want to have your ceremony in one location and reception in another. Venue, food & beverage, tables, chairs, even linens and light décor are a typically part of the package.

### Hotel Venues

Hotels, inns or bed and breakfasts are a perfect option if you think you'll have a lot of out of town guests. They are pros at managing events both large and small so you can rest assured your wedding will run smoothly. And much like restaurants, the venue, food & beverage and basic décor is built right in at larger properties.

### Nautical Venues

Getting married on a boat or yacht and/or hosting your wedding at a yacht club are beautiful ways to say "I do" on the water. If you're concerned about guests not having flexibility to come and go as they need, you can often opt to have minimal cruising time and enjoy more of your celebration dockside.

### Outdoor Venues

If you have your heart set on an outdoor venue like a park, beach or garden it's important to have a plan for inclement weather such as rain, snow or excess wind. Some venues will have spaces built in. Others will require tenting which will add to your costs. Parks, beaches and gardens will also require more time and labor for set-up on the day of your wedding. For public venues, like parks and beaches, alcohol is often limited to specific areas or not allowed. Be sure to check policies like these before signing your contract.

### Spiritual Venues

Getting married in your house of worship is often a cost-effective option. Most will require at least one pre-marital counseling session. On-site options and amenities will vary, so be sure to ask what they offer if you want to have your reception here as well as your ceremony.

If they have a kitchen, be sure to check on the capabilities of the oven, particularly in older locations.

### Vintage Venues

If you have your heart set on a vintage themed wedding, historic homes and government buildings like libraries and city land marks are a beautiful choice. Make sure you're aware of the rules and regulations before you sign your contract. Insurance is often required.

### Catering

Food and beverage costs can add up quickly. Not to worry, there are multiple ways to manage this expense regardless of your budget.

### Potluck

This is a beautiful opportunity for your friends and family to support you in a meaningful way as you start your lives together.

I recommend inviting guests to bring their family's favorite dish along with a recipe card to place in a cookbook commemorating your wedding day.

If you are inviting guests with food sensitivities, consider having cards made for each dish with space for the name of the dish and check boxes for basic allergens like gluten, nuts or dairy, or to denote if the dish is vegetarian or vegan. Guests can fill these out when they arrive and place them next to their dish.



If you're a stickler for presentation like I am, you can either ask guests to bring their dish in a vessel that works with your theme (like mix and match vintage china or modern white) or you can plan on securing dishes and platters from a rental company or thrift store and ask someone to help you re-plate for presentation.

You can opt to host a main course (like proteins for a bbq) and the wedding cake. If you love the idea of a dessert bar, asking people to bring a variety of baked goods is a lovely (and tasty!) option. Plan on hosting basic beverages like ice water, lemonade and iced tea to simplify logistics. You can rent dispensers from a local rental company and create a lovely display. Mason jars can easily double as guest's glass for the evening and their favor.

### Self-Catering

This can be a combination of handmade dishes and platters that are purchased from your local grocery store or Costco. Recipes and ideas abound on Pinterest.

Here are a few menus that are simple to assemble –

### Grazing Table

I LOVE a beautiful grazing table and this entire menu can be purchased at Costco -

- Domestic and imported cheese display with grapes
- Charcuterie
- Smoked salmon spread
- Crackers and French bread
- Olives and pickled vegetables
- Strawberries with sour cream and brown sugar dip
- Crudité with creamy dip

### Pasta Station

Pasta is the ultimate comfort food and an easy crowd pleaser. This menu also provides easy options for guests with food sensitivities.

- Penne (regular and/or gluten free depending on your guests)
- Marinara, pesto and alfredo sauces
- Toppings can include shrimp, meat balls, sautéed mushrooms, olives, parm, etc
- Garden salad with Italian vinaigrette
- Garlic bread

### Taco Bar

Another crowd pleaser that accommodates many food sensitivities.

- Sheet pan veggies
- Chicken, steak and or shrimp
- Corn tortillas
- Salsa, guacamole and sour cream
- Refried beans or pinto beans
- Mexican rice
- Garden salad

### Food Truck

Food trucks are a super fun and cost-effective way to have your wedding catered. If you think that you may want to go this route it's important to find a venue that will allow outside catering AND has ample room for them to park and set-up in a place that is convenient for your guests to dish up.

### Independent Caterer

There are a wide variety of independent caterers that can service your wedding and can arrange everything from the menu to the rentals. Ask your venue for a list of recommended caterers. They will know how to best work in the space efficiently and effectively.

### In-House Caterer

This applies to restaurants, hotels and some venues. Many will have pre-set menus for you to review. Stick with their specialties to have a winning menu.

### Décor

We will be doing a deep dive into options with **Design & Décor** including beautiful basics that elevate any reception. In the interim, as you are putting together your preliminary budget, think about how important it is to have luxe linens or fab florals and allocate funds accordingly.

### Entertainment

Good bands and DJs can cost a pretty penny. And well worth it if this is one of your priorities. I see you, Dancing Queen! In addition to providing the music, the band leader or DJ can also MC your reception, to ensure your reception flows smoothly. If you plan on having kids at your wedding, having an interactive DJ provides added value. At a recent affair, we were expecting 500 guests including 75 kids (!!)

The DJ brought hula hoops, led group dances and taught the kids how to Floss. Everyone had a great time!

In addition to music, it's worth considering other types of entertainment for your reception. Lawn games like corn hole, oversized chess or checkers and ring toss are great for outdoor weddings. A board game station is fun for day-time weddings or groups that aren't big dancers. "Kitten Hours" instead of "Cocktail Hours" have also been featured recently as a fun way to help your local shelter and give guests super sweet kitty cuddles!

### Photography/Videography

Next to your venue and catering costs, photography and/or videography is typically the next biggest spend. When it comes to photography, you truly get what you pay for. And depending on your budget, you may need to think quality over quantity.

For example, a bride I was working with had a budget of \$2,500 for photography. I recommended a proven photographer that took gorgeous photos and provided 6-hours of coverage and full-resolution digital images. Instead she opted for a photographer that was just getting started and offered a complimentary engagement session, a photo booth during the reception, 6-hours of coverage, digital images and a small print photo album for the same price. Seems like a great deal, right? On the day of the wedding, the photographer and her assistant arrived late, looked sloppy and unprofessional and most importantly, the photos were a complete and total disappointment. I always recommend hiring the best photographer you can afford and curate your shot list to the hours available in that package.

Videographers also vary in price point and skill. If your budget is limited, this is a service that I consider a "nice to have" vs "must have". I thought long and hard about this for my own wedding. My husband and I are filmmakers. On one hand, it seemed crazy that we wouldn't have a video of our wedding! But we also knew that we would be disappointed if we couldn't afford a high-quality film and there were other reception components that were ultimately more important to us.

## Attire

Our society puts a lot of emphasis on “saying yes to the dress”. Many girls grow up dreaming about what their wedding gown will look like. And for most of us, it’s the most expensive piece of clothing we’ll ever own.

Not only do you need to budget for the dress, but all the accoutrement that goes with it – veil, undergarments, shoes, handbag etc – as well as alterations which can add up.

Depending on their style, grooms may want to purchase a suit vs renting. In our case, my husband wanted to wear a kilt in his clan’s tartan which wasn’t available as a rental. We decided that it made the most sense for the long term to go ahead and purchase his complete dress kilt. The purchase vs a rental added \$1k to our budget.

If being dressed to the nines is a priority for you, it’s important to talk about that early on so you can budget other elements of your wedding accordingly.

## Guest List

In addition to your priorities, the number of guests you invite will be the deciding factor in your spend. It’s not rocket science. The more guests you invite, the more the costs will add up - particularly for catering and décor. In my experience, your wedding budget will ebb and flow before it’s finalized. While having lots of friends and family with you to celebrate may be one of your priorities, it’s good to have options. By using my 3-step method, you’ll have 3 versions of your guest list

that give you flexibility and peace of mind as you prioritize elements for your wedding.

### Step 1

- Set up the master guest list spreadsheet that you will use to manage your guests moving forward. My clients receive a master guest list template as a part of their program. If you don’t have Excel, you can create one for FREE using Google Sheets. Simply go to Google and sign up for an account in the top right corner of the page. This will give you access to a wealth of free tools including Google Drive (cloud storage), Google Docs (Word) and Google Sheets (Excel).

Include the following columns on your guest list –

oName  
oNumber of Adults  
oNumber of Kids

- Add everyone you would invite if money was no object, including if they will have a plus one.
- Use the Autosum feature to tally how many adults and how many kids. To use Autosum, highlight the cells you want to add, then click on the Autosum symbol.
- Save this list with the count included in the file name, ie: masterguestlist\_150.



## Step 2

- Save a new version of your master guest list. I like to use the date in the file name, so I know it's my work in progress and the date I worked on it, ie: masterguestlist\_7.24.19.
- Ask yourself these questions –
  - Have I talked to this person in the past few years?
  - Do I have a close relationship with this person?
  - If they are a co-worker, do I spend time with them outside of work
  - Would I have hurt feelings if I wasn't invited to their wedding?
  - Can I imagine my wedding day without them?

### **Note:**

If your family is helping to pay for the wedding, you should also ask yourself if they will insist on specific family members or friends being invited. While they don't have the final say, it's worth giving these guests consideration for the sake of saving family stress if nothing else.

- Refine your list based on your answers and save it with the updated count, ie: masterguestlist\_100.

## Step 3

- Save a new version of your master guest list with the current date.
- If kids are on the guest list, discuss if this is an added expense you can afford. In addition to being a part of the guest count, having kid-friendly food and activities add to your budget and day-of logistics. If you want to include some but not all kids, consider making them a part of the wedding party. Tweens and teens are perfect for handing out programs, acting as candle lighters or even being junior bridesmaids or groomsmen. Younger children can be flower children, ring bearers or banner wavers. If a guest calls you and asks if their kid(s) can come, you can gracefully say that the only kids invited are in the wedding party and you appreciate their understanding.
- You should give a "plus one" to couples who are married, engaged or live together. If your budget allows, it's lovely to give a plus one to all members of your bridal party, those in a serious relationship or guests who won't know anyone else. You're not obligated to give anyone else a plus one.
- Refine your list based on these updates and save it with your final count, ie: masterguestlist\_80.

Now you have three versions of your guest list in hand to use as a guide as you prioritize the other key elements for your wedding and create your draft budget.

# The System

Now that you have your priorities and guest list in hand, it's time to pick a system and create a draft budget. Let's talk options on how best to manage your money.

## Spreadsheet Central

My clients receive an Excel-based budget template as well as multiple reference budgets to help guide them through the process. I've always loved spreadsheets since they give you an opportunity to include as much – or as little – data as you want. I, for one, am a #freakinthespreadsheets lol.

The other bonus to using a spreadsheet system is capturing your spend and your inventory in one place. I list every item that will be at the ceremony and reception in my budget. Even if there is no dollar amount attached to it. This gives me an easy way to see at a glance that I've covered everything.

I also color code my budget as I go. This way I know exactly where I am in the planning process. Red for elements where the pricing could be in question, blue once the pricing is firm and I have both signed and returned the contract and green once the vendor has signed and returned the contract to me.

## Websites

If you prefer a broad-brush approach, both [The Knot](#) and [WeddingWire](#) (both owned by the same company, btw) have an online budgeting tool that you can use.

[The Knot](#) provides a basic list of categories as well as a column for cost/estimate and a column for paid. They also have a helpful pop-up for each category that shows the average amount brides in your area have spent in years past. It also auto-generates an editable to-do list. The program is accessible both on your laptop and as an app.

[WeddingWire](#) is a bit more detailed. When you click into each category, it breaks down individual components. For example, under Venue, you have sub-categories for Ceremony Venue Fee, Ceremony Venue Decorations, Reception Venue and Rehearsal Dinner Venue. You can also add new sub-categories and remove those that aren't relevant to your budget. Like [The Knot](#), it also auto-generates an editable to-do list and is accessible both on your laptop and as an app.

[WeddingWire](#) goes one step further with the budgeting process. Once you enter your investment, it uses an algorithm to auto-generate the amount you should spend by category. For budgets upwards of \$25k, this can be a useful guide. However, if you have a smaller budget, I find this both impractical and misleading. Not only are the numbers inaccurate for any kind of actual spend, the WAY you make that spend will also be based on your priorities and your venue type. And the algorithm can't account for that.

This is the reason why I give my clients three reference budgets based on different venue types to start their budgeting process. And each includes line items for the unique elements for each venue/wedding type.

Want the best of both worlds? I've got you. The categories in the [Savvy Weddings](#) budget template mirror the [WeddingWire](#) budget for an easy crossover. This way you can combine our realistic estimated spend with the convenience of an online tool.

### Apps

In addition to [The Knot](#) and [WeddingWire](#), there are an abundance of wedding budgeting and planning apps out there. Here are a few others to consider -

WeddingHappy  
Wedding Planner!  
Wedding Planner by Wedbox

## Your Budget

Once you pick the budgeting method that will work best for your planning type, it's time to create a draft budget. You'll need a ballpark of how much you might spend before getting quotes from your "fab 4" core vendors – venue, caterer, florist and photographer.

A few pointers –

- Start with the mid-range estimate for your guest count. For example, if your range is 100-150, use 125.
- If there are elements that you don't think you'll use (like a videographer), zero them out but leave the line item. You can always delete these later, but until you settle in on a firm budget, it's good to know your options.
- Give yourself permission to play! I know numbers can feel stressful, but this is a time to try different combinations of elements to see what feels good to you.

Now that you have a draft budget ready to rock, it's time to reach out to vendors to get quotes.

### Location, location, location...

...just as important for your wedding day as it is buying real estate. Your venue will drive everything from your confirmed wedding date, to the vibe and logistics of your wedding, to the best vendors to meet your needs and budget.

### Preferred Vendors

Once you've booked your venue, ask them for a list of preferred vendors as well as for their personal recommendations for a florist, photographer and caterer based on your estimated budget. This will save you HOURS of research and give you peace of mind knowing that these vendors have a proven reputation and know what works best in your venue!

If your venue doesn't have a list of preferred vendors, [The Knot](#), [WeddingWire](#) and [Wedding Chicks](#) all have an extensive list of vendors searchable by city. Narrow it down to three vendors from each of these categories and request quotes.

### Negotiate

If you get quotes that are higher than your budget allows, but you're absolutely in love with their work, ask for a revision. Quality over quantity is always my rule of thumb. For example, if your budget for flowers is \$1,000 and the florist you are obsessed with comes back with a quote for \$1,500, ask them what they would recommend modifying to work with your existing budget.

## Finalize It

Once you have your core vendor quotes in hand, it's time to plug those numbers into your budget and adjust your other budget elements accordingly. If your budget is higher than you can afford, take a look at [Ways to Save](#) on page 22.

## The Fine Print

First and foremost, a SUPER big caveat!!

I'm not a lawyer and as such, can't give you legal advice. That being said, I have 20 years of reading contracts and have some pointers that have served me well that should help you avoid some common pitfalls.

### Ask Questions

Go through every detail on your contracts with a fine-toothed comb. If you don't understand what something means, ask your salesperson. You will be legally bound to the contracts you sign. It's important that you understand them

### As-Is

Many venues will have a clause that stipulates that you are renting the property as-is. Plan on doing a walk-through of the venue before you sign the contract to see if any element is in disrepair. If so, ask if those can be fixed at least 2-weeks before your wedding and have that commitment added to your contract. Plan on another walk-through once the repairs have been completed. If it's a destination venue, ask your salesperson to send you photos.

## Payment Terms

Some deposits can be non-refundable. If you're not 100% sold on the venue or service, wait until you can commit to the deposit, otherwise you'll be out some cold hard cash if you change your mind.

Make sure you can honor the due dates for your deposits. For example, if you know you won't have the cash flow to pay for something until April, and the payment is due in March, ask for flexibility before you sign the contract. Otherwise you'll be locked into payment terms that may put you in a financial bind.

It's also important to ask if they charge administrative fees for credit card charges. If so, be sure to add that administrative fee to your budget if you plan on paying by card. Those fees can add up fast!

### Cancellation

Read cancellation clauses carefully. This applies whether you OR the vendor cancels. For example, if the cancellation clause for the venue says that if they cancel, they'll offer you another date, that's clearly not acceptable! The cancellation policy should work for you both.

### Guarantees

This will apply mainly to your caterer, florist and rental goods. A guarantee is the minimum number of goods you are committing to. That might be 100 guests at \$40 per person for your caterer or the quantity of bouquets and arrangements you are purchasing from your florist. Make sure your guarantee is realistic for your budget.



## Scope of Services

Every detail should be included – timing, inclusions, pricing, etc. Assumptions can be a killer on your budget. For example, when one of my besties was getting married, her mom was paying most of the vendors and as such was also signing the contracts and managing payment on the same. She didn't read the contract carefully and assumed that cocktails would only be served during "cocktail hour". Needless to say, she was horrified when she got the final bill for cocktails on consumption for 4-hours – approximately \$8,000 instead of the \$2,000 she was expecting. Yikes! Fortunately, she was in the position to pay for it. If that had been me, I would have been in a serious bind!

## Due Dates

This applies both to your payment terms and guarantees. Add all payment due dates to your calendar so they won't be missed.

## Final Counts

General rule of thumb is that once the final count is due, you can INCREASE but not DECREASE. And any increases are based on availability.

## Insurance

Many venues will require special event insurance. If so, get a quote based on your contract before you sign. Most coverages should only be around \$100-\$200, but I've had to purchase much more extensive policies for events in the past.

Here are a few insurance providers to consider –

### Markel Event Insurance

Best Overall Coverage

### Travelers Wedding Protector Plan

Best for Destination Weddings

### WedSafe

Best for Liability Coverage

### Wedsure

Most Customizable

## Ways to Save

There are a million ways to save and still have a totally beautiful wedding. Here are my top tips by category.

### Timing

The most expensive time of year to get married is in the summer (#helloweddingseason) and in December (due to holiday parties being added to the mix). Venue rentals will be at a premium and vendors can be booked up to a year or more in advance. Saturday weddings are the most popular and evening is the most preferred time. Opting for a Sunday brunch in the fall, for example, will get you more bang for your buck.

## Venue

My personal favorite for maximizing your spend is a restaurant reception. Some restaurants have private rooms. Others may rent their patios, their main dining room or even offer a full restaurant buy-out.

Banquet halls that will allow you to bring in your own catering and/or bar is another big way to save.

Some brides think having a wedding at home or in a garden can be a real \$\$\$ saver. But once you add in the cost for the tent, lighting, tables, chairs, dance floor, bathroom trailer, etc, those costs add up in a flash.

For example, one of my brides chose to get married in the garden in her hometown. The cost of the garden was only \$450 but the cost for the rentals, including the tent, was another \$3,700 – and this was only for 75 guests! She was more than happy to pay the cost since the location was so meaningful. If sentiment isn't a factor in selecting your location, you'll likely save by selecting a venue that caters to weddings and special events.

## Catering

If your venue will allow you to self-cater, this is a huge way to save as long as you have some dedicated help. Grazing tables are in vogue right now and you can pick up most if not all the ingredients at Costco. Invest a little in pretty platters for an artful presentation. I'm particularly fond of grazing tables since nothing needs to be heated which gives you more flexibility when selecting your venue.

Potlucks are also a great option. You can choose to host a main dish or have all dishes gifted by your guests.

If you decide to opt for a fully catered affair, limiting the number of courses and buffet items or opting for a beer and wine only bar, are great ways to save.

## Photography/Videography

I often see blog posts that suggest that you rely on your friends to take photos or hire someone from a local art school. While this is fine for capturing some fun candids, if quality is important to you, hire a professional to take the photos that are most meaningful. This might mean a smaller package, but with photos you'll treasure for a lifetime.

When it comes to capturing those candids, consider an app from the list below and share the info with your guests in advance of the wedding so they'll be ready to shoot and share!

### Eversnap

Voted the #1 wedding photo app by Huffington Post. Cost ranges from \$99-\$399.

### The Guest

Linked to your account on The Knot. Instantly get all the photos your guests take without relying on hashtags. And best of all, it's free!

### Wedbox

Offers a stylish way for guests to upload their photos. Free with in app purchases for higher quality downloads.

If your budget is limited, either ditch the videography element or consider a service like [WeddingMix](#). The cost ranges from \$199-\$799 and the video is assembled with footage captured by your guests. Of course, the quality of the images themselves will only be as good as what your friends can take!

### Flowers

If you love the idea of naturally arranged wildflowers, consider buying them from your local farmer's market. Many will take advance orders and accept payment via credit card. This is best for brides that like a natural, boho look and have volunteers to help arrange them in cost-saving, thrift store vases the night before the wedding.

While you can always order loose stems and arrange them yourself, [FiftyFlowers](#) also offers a wedding collection with pre-made bouquets, corsages, boutonnieres and centerpieces that are as beautiful as they are cost-effective.

You can also opt for non-floral bouquets for your maids. Lanterns, parasols and lace tambourines are all a gorgeous and will save a bundle.

### Cake & Sweets

If you're in love with the idea of a traditional cake, consider buying your cake from the grocery store vs a bakery. Even Walmart has a simple but elegant cake collection. My niece went this route and it was beautiful! You can also consider getting a petite display cake and get sheet cakes to serve.

You may think cupcakes are a good way to save, but if you go to a specialty bakery the cost can still be \$4-5 per person.

If you order from a grocery store, you'll save at least half the cost. Or better yet, if you have a friend who is a wiz in the kitchen, see if they will gift you with making cupcakes for your wedding.

Another option is to go with a dessert bar vs cake. You can mix up your options and save money in the process. If you have anyone with food sensitivities, be sure to set those items off to the side and label them accordingly to avoid cross-contamination.

### Dress & Attire

Many of us have been fantasizing about our wedding dress since we were little girls. Pick up any wedding magazine and at least 1/3 is full of ads from designers and boutiques. And dresses can carry a hefty price tag. So, what's a Savvy Bride to do?

In year's past, it was tradition to save your gown and pass it onto the next generation... but that's a pricey gamble. Not only do you have the cost of your gown and alterations, but also add the cost to clean and preserve your gown...which adds hundreds of dollars. Yikes!

At [Rent the Runway](#), you (or your bridesmaids) can rent designer gowns for a fraction of the cost. This option is best for brides that easily fit into off-the-rack dresses since alterations aren't allowed.

Sample sales and consignment stores are an amazing way to save a bundle! Sample dresses have only been worn in the store and consignment dresses have typically only been worn once. I bought my dress for \$700 as a sample from a high-end boutique and it retailed for \$1,500. Yay!

If you're open to finding your dress off the rack, so to speak, there are fabulous gowns for under \$200! [Modcloth](#) has a fab selection for every size. I personally love the Chi Chi London Gilded Grace Lace Dress in Blush! [eShakti](#) is another super fab resource for custom dresses. They often have discounts for 20-40% off your first order and will make the dress to your measurements. With a hassle-free return policy, it's a win-win!

For your accessories and undergarments, these are great items to be gifted. Your friends and family will leap at the chance to give you something so meaningful for your big day.

And for the gents, renting in quantity is the best way to save. Both [Men's Wearhouse](#) and [The Blk Tux](#) offer a free tux with at least 6 paid packages.

### Music

I have three words for you – ditch the DJ. You can easily rent speakers from a local event rental company. Be sure to talk to a salesperson about the size of the venue and let them know what playback system you are using (iPod, laptop etc.) so they can provide the correct connecting cables between your system and the speakers. If your venue has a built-in sound system, this will be even more cost-effective. And a playlist will work for both your ceremony and reception. If you go this route, be sure to ask someone to oversee ceremony music that can be there at the rehearsal – practice makes perfect and you want the timing to be on point! For your reception, ask a charismatic friend to read announcements to move your schedule along, ie: first dance, cake cutting, etc.

### Invitations & Paper Goods

If you're anything like me, you can easily obsess over pretty paper goods. And boy can those costs add up! One of my favorite ways to save is to use a wedding website in lieu of paper invites. This can easily save you hundreds of dollars. If you absolutely must have a paper invite, consider purchasing a small batch that coordinates with your wedding website. Keep one for yourself to use for photos and send the rest to family. On your big day itself, the biggest costs for paper goods will be in programs, signage and table numbers. Instead of printing programs for every guest, consider making a program poster that can be displayed on an easel. There are also abundant options for beautifully designed signs for digital download for at-home printing ... or at Staples!

### Favors & Gifts

In lieu of giving individual favors, consider donating to your favorite charity in honor of your guests. The amount can be for whatever works for your budget and can be taken as a tax write-off for even bigger savings!

The cost of gifts for your wedding party can add up in a flash. Instead of an elaborate bridesmaid proposal box, consider writing your besties a sweet note or creating a playlist of your favorite tunes paired with an iTunes gift card for \$5 or \$10. Honestly, a good mix tape is still my favorite gift. And believe it or not, Dollar Tree has some great finds from trinket boxes for your gal pals to teddy bears for the kiddos.

For the gents, I love leather key fobs, novelty socks and personalized bottle openers, all under \$10 on Etsy.

## Beauty

Up-dos, make-up and mani/pedis, oh my! Doing these yourself is an obvious way to save. But if you want to go to a professional, consider asking to have these services gifted to you.

## Jewelry

Let's talk bling! Ring costs can definitely add up. And as a Savvy Bride, you want to make your budget stretch as far as possible. I have three tips to help:

#1 Use your engagement ring in the ceremony instead of adding a wedding band. If you love a layered look, you can always add another ring on your anniversary. We have friends that buy new rings once a year to keep things fresh and to re-energize their commitment to each other.

#2 Opt for a family heirloom. As something borrowed or as a gift. Commitment and love passed down through the generations will make your vows that much more meaningful.

#3 Beautiful bling on a budget. Personally, I'm OBSESSED with the handmade, ethically sourced rings at [Love Audry Rose](#). They have gorgeous rings starting at around \$390. Free US shipping and returns paired with a 10% discount on your first order makes it effortless to #putaringonit.

## Rentals & Décor

I believe 100% in this dynamic duo - a floor length linen and candlelight. Anything else is a bonus. See if your venue or caterer can provide these for low or no cost. If not, I highly recommend [BBJ](#) for linen rentals and purchasing [votives](#) from Amazon.

If you know someone with a truck, you can save on delivery fees by picking up rental items yourself.

And last but not least, always feel empowered to ask for a discount. If the product you want to rent isn't in high demand on your date, they may offer you a deal.





A goal without a plan is just a wish, and no one wants that gamble on their big day! Let's talk proven techniques that simplify the wedding planning process while keeping you effortlessly organized.

## Check it off

The first thing you'll need is a system to track your to-do's. Choose a checklist platform that will work best based on the time you have available, the amount of detail you want at your fingertips and what will make the process the most enjoyable for YOU!

### Apps

If you want to plan on the go, consider tracking your to-do's through either [The Knot](#) or [WeddingWire](#). The account you create for these sites will effortlessly integrate with both the website and app. Both generate editable checklists leading up to your big day. #winning

### Printables & Hardcopy Planners

Prefer to have something tangible in hand? I find physically checking something off my list to be enormously satisfying! There are oodles of free printables on [Pinterest](#). And for a small investment (around \$55), you can purchase a beautiful, customized [Erin Condren](#) wedding planner. Replete with monthly spreads (for 12 or 24 months), 36 pages of to-do's, scrapbook section, lined pages, 40 dot pages and sticker sheets #allthestickersplease.

## The Savvy Select System

Want the best of both worlds? I've got you. My exclusive **Savvy Select** system has been designed based on my 20 years of experience managing events of every shape and size. You can view all of your documents on your computer, via Office or Google Docs apps or by printing them out so you have a hard copy in hand. You also have ALL THE DATA you need at a glance to make choices that work for your budget and your vision.

## Milestones

The system you use will include all the major milestones, so you don't need to worry about what to do next. Here's a snapshot of the biggies, including a few important insights as a jumping off point -

### Engagement - 12 Months

- Assess your resources and determine your investment
- Create your budget
- Draft your guest list
- Select your wedding party
- Set the date
- Research and book the fab four: venue, caterer, florist, photographer

When it comes to vendors, booking your fab four ASAP should be your top priority. However, if you have the time, I recommend researching additional vendors - such as DJ, officiant and hair/make-up artist - during this time frame as well. And if you have the funds available to pay deposits, I'd book them too. The earlier you can book your vendors, the more selection you'll have available. And it will feel FANTASTIC to get this to-do crossed off your list!!

### 9 - 12 Months

- Create wedding website
- Send save-the-dates
- Reserve a hotel block for out-of-town guests
- Research and book all remaining vendors
- Begin registry
- Order your wedding attire
- Select day-of attendants

Wedding websites are a great way to share info with your wedding party and guests from your engagement to your big day. To save money on save-the-dates, you can simply send guests an email with a link to the website. Your website will also give you an opportunity to share your registry info which is a big help for everyone!

### 6 - 9 Months

- Determine if you want to have a honeymoon
- If so, plan honeymoon
- Order rings

Although it's been a tradition for couples to go on a honeymoon immediately following their wedding, that isn't always affordable or practical. My hubby and I decided to take a few days after our wedding as a "mini-moon" and will be taking a romantic trip together when it makes sense for us logistically and financially.

To help offset costs, you can register at **Honeyfund**, and guests can either gift you with experiences or cash to put toward your honeymoon.

#### 4 - 6 Months

- Finalize menu with caterer
- Make rehearsal dinner/celebration plans
- Order wedding party attire

While hosting rehearsal “dinners” may be status quo, you can also consider hosting a cocktail reception, bbq, pizza party or even a potluck to minimize costs.

#### 2 - 4 Months

- Plan ceremony readings, music and flow
- Consider a floral mock-up
- Order or make wedding party gifts
- Order or make favors
- Order finishing touches (guest book, cake knife, etc)

If florals are a major investment for your wedding, consider doing a mock-up of one of the centerpieces or even the bouquet. This will give you an opportunity to make a shift if they don't match your vision. To maximize your spend, have the mock-up made on the day of your shower and it can double as décor!

#### 6 Weeks

- Mail invitations (earlier for destination or holiday weddings)
- Attend tasting if offered by your caterer
- Schedule test-run for hair and make-up
- Final walk-through of ceremony and reception venues
- Order or print all paper goods and signage

If you're not mailing hardcopy invitations, you can also send another email to your guests with the link to the wedding website. Having a refresher always helps!

#### 4 Weeks

- Begin seating chart
- Get marriage license (check state requirements)
- Create day-of timeline and send to vendors and attendants
- Send rehearsal dinner/celebration invitations
- Write vows and/or finalize ceremony

Assigning tables to your guests will put everyone at ease. If you want to go the extra step and assign seats, you can do that as well. This can be particularly helpful if you have challenging family dynamics.

We'll be taking a deep dive into your day-of timeline later in this chapter. It's important to send it to your vendors and attendants a month out so if there are any challenges with timing, you have plenty of time to adjust.

#### 2 Weeks

- Discuss shot list with photographer
- Discuss playlist with DJ, band, or program your iPod
- Finalize alterations and pick up wedding attire
- Meet with day-of attendants to review schedule
- Provide caterer guest count

It's very important to go over your shot list with your photographer to ensure that they know your priorities and to set expectations for what can be done. Consider both “must have” and “nice to have” shots so your photographer can effortlessly prioritize accordingly on your big day.

### Week Of

- Pick up rings
- Assemble emergency kits
- Prep tip envelopes for vendors (if appropriate)
- Re-confirm schedule with all vendors and day-of attendants
- Email guests with day-of point person info

Your final day-of timeline should be locked in at this point, so your vendors and attendants are ready to rock.

### Day Before

- Hold rehearsal dinner/celebration
- Prep wedding attire
- Treat yo' self!

Meditate or take some quiet time for yourself today. Enjoy a mani/pedi. Spend quality time with your friends and family at the rehearsal. Get some zzz's. And last but not least, stay hydrated for that perfect bridal glow.

### Day Of

- Enjoy!!

With your dynamic team of attendants in place, you'll be able to relax and enjoy your family and friends for your #bestdayever! So, without further ado ...

## *The A-Team*

We've all heard the term, "it takes a village...". That certainly applies to weddings! As a DIY bride, one of the most important ways your tribe can help you is by gifting you with their time on your wedding day. These attendants will essentially be sharing the role of a day-of wedding planner. They should be friends or family members that are not in the wedding party otherwise they will be pulled in too many directions. Trust me, I know from experience!

Ask people that are responsible, organized, excel under pressure and are clear communicators. If someone wants to manage more than one category, and you feel 100% confident in their capability to do so, by all means, let them! The point in breaking up these responsibilities is so your attendants can both help you and enjoy the wedding at the same time.

You will need one attendant for each of your major vendors, so they don't come to you or your beloved for any questions that pop-up on your wedding day. These MVPs will also make sure that your day-of timeline is on schedule. In addition to making sure your vendors arrive on-time.

General responsibilities for attendants follow below.

### Venue Attendant

- Contact for the venue
- Confirms venue has set-up everything per the contract
- Manages the flow of the ceremony and reception
- Confirms clean-up has been followed per the contract with the help of additional volunteers or hired help

If you are having your ceremony and reception in different locations, you will want to have one person responsible for the ceremony venue and one person responsible for the reception venue

### Food & Beverage Attendant

- Contact for the caterer or banquet manager
- Confirms all food and beverage has been provided per the contract
- If self-catered or a potluck, set-up bar and buffet stations and help direct guests on where to place their dishes
- Keeps an eye on buffet and bar throughout the evening, if anything is running low, advises the banquet manager; if you are self-catering, refresh with the help of additional volunteers or hired help

### Photography Attendant

- Contact for the photographer
- Helps gather wedding party for photos
- Checks off photos from shot list to ensure everything is captured

### Flowers & Décor Attendant

- Contact for the florist and any rental companies
- Confirms all florals and rentals have been provided per the contract
- Oversees set-up; if flowers and décor are DIY, set-up with the help of additional volunteers or hired help

### Music & Entertainment Attendant

- Contact for all entertainers
- Confirms all entertainment has been provided per the contract or agreement if entertainers are friends
- Queue start times for performances if needed
- Manages the playlist and makes announcements if not hiring a DJ

### Guest Liaison

- Main contact for guests on the day of the wedding
- Their number can be included on your wedding website, sent via email or even included on your personal outbound voicemail message – for example on my wedding day, people got this message when they called my cell phone –

“Hi, you’ve reached Jenn  
and I’m getting married today!”

If you have a question about the wedding,  
please call Nathan at xxx.xxx.xxxx.

Otherwise, I’ll call you back  
when I’m Mrs. Hunter!”



# Practice Makes Perfect

All eyes will be on you, your beloved and your wedding party during the ceremony, so it's important that everyone is comfortable in their roles. The best way to do that is to give everyone plenty of time to practice at the rehearsal.

## The Players

The rehearsal should include everyone that is a part of the ceremony from start to finish. This includes family members who will be escorted down the aisle as a part of the processional as well as all of your Attendants.

## Who's the Boss?

Technically, your officiant will be running the show. However, your Venue Attendant should plan on assisting. They'll help make sure people are in their proper places when it's go time.

## Music Maestro

It's important that all music is well rehearsed in advance of the wedding. If you're planning on pre-recorded music, this is the perfect time to ensure all the equipment is working and that sound levels are correct.

If you're having live music, the musicians should plan on arriving early to practice before the rest of the wedding party arrives.

## Plan B

If there are potential variables to consider, make sure you have a Plan B. If you know your flower girl can be shy, for example, you may want to plan on having her walk

in with the bridesmaids. Or if your father has been ill, know who will walk you down the aisle if he is unable to attend the ceremony.

## The Schedule

Your actual schedule for your rehearsal will vary based on what you have planned. The pointers below are a broad-brush of the elements you should plan on covering.

- If you haven't had time for a final meeting with your Attendants, you can plan on doing so before the official rehearsal starts.
- Musicians and/or your Entertainment Attendant should arrive at least 30-minutes prior to the wedding party for a final rehearsal and sound check.
- Be sure to do a round of intros if this is the first time some people are meeting.
- Introduce groomsmen/ushers to family members they will be escorting.
- Position everyone the way they will be standing at the altar before the full run through.
- Make sure everyone is standing the same way and decide how their hands will be positioned and/or how they will be holding bouquets.
- Practice the recessional first and then run through the entire ceremony from top to bottom including readings, candle lighting and music.
- Once the rehearsal is wrapped, make sure everyone has the schedule for the big day. If there are any particular rules for your venue, this is a great time to go over them as well.

# Your Day of Timeline

Your Day-Of Timeline will be the playbook for your big day. While this document will take time to prepare, it's worth its weight in gold. You'll know every detail has been accounted for. Your vendors and wedding party will know exactly where and when to be. And most importantly, great expectations will be set for everyone. The first thing you'll need is to decide on the format that works best for you.

## Day-Of Format

[The Knot](#) offers a Day-Of timeline that can be fully customized and includes pro-tips for each category. I'm a HUGE fan of this system! You can tag each event with the people that it applies to and print timeline copies that are unique to them.

My clients receive a custom timeline template in Excel and Google Sheets as well as three completed versions for insight into realistic timing on the big day. One for a wedding at a venue, one for a wedding at a restaurant, and one for a wedding at home. They can use this template for timeline or simply use it as a guide while creating a timeline via [The Knot](#).

## Getting Ready

This applies to both you and the venue! The most important advice I can give you is to allow at least one more hour than you think you need to get yourself and your venue ready to rock. If you're done on time – huzzah! In addition, my rule of thumb is that the venue is ready to receive guests one hour before “doors open”. Some guests will ALWAYS arrive early which can put a crimp on things if you're still in the middle of set-up.

## Ceremony

No two ceremonies are alike. Even if they follow the same format. Isn't that beautiful? Every ceremony has a unique rhythm and flow. Your officiant will have a sample ceremony that they typically perform. You can always use that as a guide. Another resource is [Into the Garden: A Wedding Anthology, Poetry and Prose on Love and Marriage](#). It includes sample ceremonies as well as beautiful readings. Feel free to improvise and make your ceremony as special as you are.

## Reception

Now that you're hitched, it's time to party! Your Venue Attendant will give queues throughout the reception when it's time to shift from one activity to the next. A sample timeline for a reception from 6:00pm-10:00pm is shown below.

### 6:00pm-7:00pm

Cocktail or Mocktail “Hour”

### 7:00pm-8:00pm

Dinner

### 8:00pm-8:30pm

Toasts

### 8:30pm

Cake Cutting

### 8:40pm

First Dance

### 9:30pm

Last Call

### 9:45pm

Last Dance

### 10:00

Send-Off



# Design & Decor

Not only is picking the right theme for your wedding the fun part, but it will seriously streamline your decision-making process. So, where's a Savvy Bride to start?

## Choosing a Theme

Sometimes themes can have a bad rap. In years past, it meant being hard-core matchy-matchy or a novelty concept – like Disney or Harry Potter. Keeping it real, there are times that I wish we had an HP themed wedding (#gryffindor4ever), but I digress...

These days your theme can be as simple or as detailed as you would like it to be. If you're anything like me, you were pinning away long before your beloved popped the question. Seriously, I can spend hours on [Pinterest](#) or going down the [Insta](#) rabbit hole looking at gorgeous, stylized photos of weddings. We live in a day and age where inspiration is only a click away.

But it can be overwhelming to say the least. We are bombarded with images and expectations of what our day should look like. I call BS! Nothing annoys me more than seeing industry headlines like "It's Official- Every Wedding Needs a Baby Alpaca Like This One" or "5 Reasons You'll Regret Not Hiring a Videographer". No one needs this kind of pressure, particularly when trying to manage their budget effectively and efficiently.

The pages that follow include my top tips to creatively curate the theme for your big day in a way that resonates with your vision and your budget.

### Location, Location, Location

Just as important for your wedding day as it is buying real estate. Whether you're a boho, beachy or modern bride, selecting a venue that naturally lends itself to your style is the first step.

### A Perfect Palette

Pay attention to the color scheme throughout your venue. If the carpet is green, burgundy and gold and your dream wedding color combo or palette is blue and orange, you might be in for some disappointment if you're not willing to be flexible.

### The Cult of Personality

Talk to your beloved about what elements of your individual personalities and your personality as a couple you can incorporate into your wedding. For example, we selected a Scottish theme based on my husband's heritage, our reception menu was designed to celebrate my foodie inclinations and we wrote our wedding program as a film script since film making is a shared passion. Most importantly, have fun!

### Tis the Season

From color combos, to florals to textiles, the time of year you choose to get married can lend itself to your vision and fine-tune resources. A great example of this is December weddings. Many venues will naturally have décor out to celebrate the season saving you both time and money.

### Share and Share Alike

Do you have a friend that is getting married that has a similar style? You may be able to share design resources. One of my besties and I shared a set of custom table numbers for our big days. We got the look we both loved at half the cost.

### Just Keep Pinning

Once you have your style, palette and season, refine your vision board - whether that's on [Pinterest](#), [Instagram](#) or a scrapbook. Stay focused on the core elements you've selected to avoid getting overwhelmed by the millions of ideas out there.

## *A Guided Visualization*

Confession time. I'm a little woo-woo. I love meditating, yoga, affirmations, the power of positive prayer and tbh, I'm a little bit of a crystal junkie #blingsmything. I believe that taking time to center yourself and visualize your next steps provides focus, clarity and well-being.

With that in mind, I created a visualization to help you plan the look and feel of your special day. Plan on taking notes as images come to you. And know that this is only an exercise. Your vision will evolve along with your wedding plans. This is simply a good place to start.



Take a moment to relax and get comfortable. Take a deep breath and then another. Let's begin. Today is your wedding day. All is well. Your family and friends will be joining you in a few short hours to bear witness as you marry your beloved...

Right now, you're in a very special room taking a few moments to yourself before you walk down the aisle. There is a mirror in front of you.

- What color is your dress? Is it a traditional white or ivory, or perhaps another color? Maybe a soft peach or pink? Vibrant green? Dazzling red? Or sophisticated black?
- Take in the shape and design. Is it long or short? Fitted or flowing? Strapless or with sleeves? Perhaps something in between?
- Your shoes are peeking out. What color are they?
- Are they heels or flats? Maybe boots?
- Your jewelry is a perfect finishing touch. Do you see traditional pearls or sparkling gems?
- Is the design elegant and refined or fun and fancy free?

Your best friend pops their head into the room to help you with any finishing touches.

- What are you wearing in your hair?
- A veil, flower crown, vintage combs
- What does it look like?

Your best friend is in your wedding party.

- What are they wearing? A dress or something else?
- What color is it?
- Is it long or short?

Before the two of you leave the room, you pick up your bouquet.

- What colors do you see?
- What shape is it? Round and composed? Loose and flowing?
- Do you see wildflowers, tropical blooms or more something more traditional like roses or peonies?

You leave the room and walk to your ceremony location. As you arrive, you take a deep breath and look around you. It's a perfect day.

- What season is it?
- What time of day is it?
- Are you inside or outside?
- If you're inside, is it a house of worship? A private home, a ballroom? A barn? Or somewhere else?
- If you're outside, are you in a field, on a beach, in the mountains? Or somewhere else?

It's time to take your place with the rest of your bridal party.

- Who is with you?
- Are there flower girls or ring bearers?
- Who is walking you down the aisle? Your father? Your mother? Both of your parents? Or perhaps a beloved family friend?

You see your beloved waiting for you at the altar. The music begins to play as you begin to walk down the aisle.

- Are there musicians or is it a pre-recorded track being played from a sound system?
- What is playing? A classical piece or something more contemporary?



As you walk down the aisle, your heart is full.

- Who are the guests that have joined you?
- Is it an intimate gathering or overflowing with friends and family?

You are at the altar with your beloved.

- Who is officiating your wedding?
- Is it a religious ceremony or does it have a more spiritual feeling-tone?
- Does the service have readings or music?

And now you're married! You walk back down the aisle together hand in hand.

- What music is playing?
- How do you feel? You arrive at your reception.
- Is it in the same location as the ceremony?
- Are you inside or outside?
- What does the venue look like?

You look around at the tables.

- Are they round, square or long, family-style tables?
- What do the chairs look like?
- What color are the linens?
- What do the centerpieces look like? Are there flowers or candles? Or maybe something else?
- Are there table numbers and/or assigned seats?
- What does the style feel like to you? Modern, classic, rustic, boho?

Music starts to play.

- Are there musicians, a DJ or is it a playlist you've curated?
- What's playing? Is it light background music like classical or jazz? Or something more upbeat?

The celebration has just begun.

- What are people drinking?
- Are hors d'oeuvres being passed or are there stations?
- Are people mingling, dancing or playing games?
- Is there a photo station for selfies?

It's time to share a meal together.

- Is this a formally served meal or a buffet?
- Is it catered or potluck?
- What are you serving? Is it a more formal menu like steak and salmon, or more casual like a taco food truck or bbq?
- How is the food presented?

It's time to cut the cake.

- Do you have a cake or a dessert station? What does it look like?
- What does it taste like?

Toasts begin.

- Who is presenting toasts?
- Is it a limited list or is the floor open to anyone?

After the toasts, it's time for other wedding traditions.

- Do you have a garter toss?
- Do you have a bouquet toss?
- Do you start the first dance?

Now the only thing left is to enjoy your beloved, your guests and celebrate your marriage.

- Are you mingling and having conversations? Are you dancing?
- Are you playing games?
- What does the reception feel like? High energy, relaxing or somewhere in between?

It's time to bid your guests a fond farewell.  
You take one final look at your reception.

- What do you see?
- Are guests receiving a favor as they leave? If so, what is it?
- How do you feel?

It has been a perfect day. You married your best friend and dearest love. You made your commitment to one another in the presence of your friends and family. Your wedding honored your budget and celebrated your vision seamlessly. And now your next adventure begins with your beloved.



This is a visualization you can use all the way throughout your planning process. As you make decisions, your vision will become more and more refined.

## Beautiful Basics

No matter what theme you select, there are basic décor concepts and components that I recommend for every style and budget.

### Ceremony

To minimize your spend, select elements that can be used in multiple ways. If your ceremony and reception are in two separate locations, select altar arrangements that are easily transportable so you can use them in both places. I like to use “breakaway” arrangements. These are arrangements that look great together as set and then can also be used individually.

This way you have a bigger impact for your ceremony, and they can be used throughout your reception on buffets, bars, cake table, etc.

If your ceremony and reception are in the same location, you can also use this approach. Alternately, if you love the idea of something more dramatic like a floral arch, consider re-staging it as a selfie station during the reception. Another big way to save is to use the same chairs for both your ceremony and reception. See if the venue is willing to move them for you, and if not, ask your attendants to move the chairs immediately following the ceremony.

### Linens

I am a hardcore #textilesnerd. I stay on top of the trends, and love nothing more than poring over my new linen swatches on a Sunday morning with a latté in hand. I believe 100% that a floor length classic linen transforms the look of your reception.

If your venue doesn't offer a linen, your caterer may offer a basic black, white or ivory for a minimal charge. If they don't, I recommend [BBJ Linen](#). They have a beautiful line of classic poly cotton linens in a wide range of colors that you can mix and match with specialty runners or napkins. I love using a specialty linen for the cake table and adding a coordinating runner for the bars and buffets.

There are companies out there like [Tablecloths Factory](#) that offer a screaming deal on both renting and purchasing linens. A word of warning. These do NOT come event ready. If you go this route, you'll need to have steamers ready to knock out the wrinkles and it takes A LOT of time.

For my client Amber's wedding, they had a total of (16) linens for the dining tables, bars, buffets etc. They had (3) steamers and worked in teams of two to get most (not all) of the wrinkles out. It took 4-HOURS! Holy guacamole! That's (4) linens per hour – with six people working on the process at the same time. Thankfully it got done in time, but in the end, Amber said she wished she had spent the extra on renting event ready linens.

My recommendation would be to get your linens from your venue, caterer or a rental company like, [BBJ](#) to save yourself time and hassle. That being said, Tablecloth Factory is great for napkins (which don't need to be steamed) or runners (that can be easily steamed in advance).

### Tables & Chairs

Most of the time these will be provided by your venue. If not, rental options are readily available in most markets.

A basic folding garden chair is typically \$3 to rent whereas specialty chairs can be upwards of \$10 or \$15 a piece. Folding chairs come in a variety of colors and are typically made from wood or resin. Definitely ask about the material. The wooden chairs get damaged over time and for that reason I prefer resin. If you ask about the condition, the rental company will likely tell you that the chairs are subject to "normal wear and tear". Mmm hmm. Let me tell you from experience, that I can't count the number of times my team and I have had to take a Sharpie to dinged wooden folding chairs to hide the damage #notgoodgoose.

Another easy and cost-effective way to create a stylish look at your wedding is to use a variety of table types. Consider a combination of rounds and squares or tall tables and low tables.

### Centerpieces

If you spend money on one element for your centerpieces, let it be candlelight. Candles will make the biggest impact on ambiance, hands down. For under \$10, you can create a candlescape using a combination of vases and candles in staggered heights. Simple, elegant and beautiful.

One important caveat – ask your venue what their restrictions are for live flame. Some won't allow it at all, and some require a specific type of vessel to contain the flame – for example, the candle holder might need to be 3" taller than the flame.

**"SIMPLICITY IS THE KEYNOTE  
OF ALL TRUE ELEGANCE"**

*- Coco Chanel*

If you want to focus on flowers, talk to your florist about what's in season to maximize your spend. You can also ask if there is a cost savings if you provide your own vases. This personally saved me \$10 per arrangement for my wedding.

You can also consider going the DIY route. If so, you'll need to have ample hands on board to create arrangements the day before your wedding and a cool place to store them. I'll share my favorite DIY floral companies in the [Resource Guide](#) on page 39.

And last but not least, prop-based arrangements or bouquet alternatives are fabulous ways to save. Consider vintage books and love letters, framed photos or items from a collection. One of my clients had a huge Godzilla collection and brought a selection of toys to intersperse throughout the reception décor. It was a huge hit and didn't cost a dime.

Some beautiful bouquet alternatives include paper parasols, pinwheels, lanterns and lace tambourines.

## Resource Guide

Girl, I love to shop. And regardless of my client's budget, I've always wanted to get the biggest bang for their buck. So, I've spent oodles of time scouring the interwebs for the best deals out there. Here are a few of my favorite places to shop -

### Amazon

Two words for you - Prime Shipping. The combination of speedy and mostly free shipping makes a world of difference, particularly for brides on a budget! My favorite items to order here are battery operated candles and mercury votive candle holders. [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

### Beaucoup

Wedding favors HQ! Huge selection including an entire section dedicated to favors under \$2. They also carry paper goods and decorations. [beau-coup.com](https://beau-coup.com)

### Dollar Tree

There is so much to love at Dollar Tree! You can have your shipment delivered to the store for pick-up for no additional cost.

My fave finds are 7" and 9" glass cylinder vases (normally these range anywhere from \$6-10 each!) and floating candles. They also have a wide range of frames you can use for signage. [dollartree.com](https://www.dollartree.com)

### FiftyFlowers

Every floral resource you could need for DIY wedding flowers including combination boxes with popular flowers, filler and greens packaged together. [fiftyflowers.com](https://www.fiftyflowers.com)

### Local Thrift Shop

If time is on your side, you can find décor galore at your local thrift shop! Vases and candleholders for under \$1, mix and match vintage china and glassware, prop-based décor – you name it, they have it ... as long as you have the time to look.

### Luna Bazaar

A fabulous resource for paper lanterns, fans, parasols and pinwheels as well as gorgeous tabletop décor. They often offer discounts and free shipping. [lunabazaar.com](https://www.lunabazaar.com)

### Save-on-Crafts

Perfect for one-stop shopping! They literally have everything you could think of for wedding décor. Shipping is always extra though, so before you finalize your order, run the estimated shipping cost so you're not unpleasantly surprised. [saveoncrafts.com](https://www.saveoncrafts.com)

### Shop Wild Things

If bling is your thing, welcome home! Faux crystal curtains, candle holders, vases and more. [shopwildthings.com](https://www.shopwildthings.com)

### Smarty Had a Party

All the high-end disposable goods! And if you find a lower price on the same item elsewhere, they'll beat it by 5%. [smartyhadaparty.com](https://www.smartyhadaparty.com)

A soft-focus photograph of a pink glass, a book, and some crystals on a white surface, serving as a background for the title.

# Living Well

I won't lie, wedding planning can be very stressful. On top of that, women are inundated by crappy messaging that makes us feel like we need to juggle #allthethings while killing ourselves to have the perfect body before we can say yes to the dress. I give that a big fat NOPE!

Let's talk about the importance of **self-care**, **nutrition** and **movement** and how that will make a meaningful impact while planning your wedding.

## Self-Care

Self-care is something that refuels us, rather than takes from us. Many of us feel guilty about taking care of ourselves and as a result, it's the very last thing on our agendas. But prioritizing self-care is vital to a life well-lived while planning your wedding. Let's talk strategy.

### Plan It

One of my favorite lines from **The Matrix** is when Morpheus says to Neo - "there's a difference between knowing the path and walking the path." That would be me with self-care unless I plan it and commit to it. Walk that path, lovelies! Put it on your calendar and make it as big a priority as booking your venue.

### Enjoy It

What gives you total and complete blissed out, over the top, joy and relaxation? What will actually make a difference in your day and re-energize your personal batteries? For me that's "white space" on my calendar EVERY day. I love having an hour or two where I know I can do WHATEVER I want.



Sometimes that's a bath, going for walk or being a #gamergirl. I also go to the Korean spa 2-3 times a year for an afternoon of total relaxation. I schedule those strategically after months that are super busy, giving me something to look forward to... and time to save for it!

### Balance It

Although baths, spa days and chocolate cake are fine ways to indulge in self-care, I often find that it's also taking care of the sh\*t I don't want to do. Like paying bills or getting ahead on laundry so I'm not scrambling during the week. Recasting that time as self-care, changes my mindset and instead of loathing it, I look forward to it. Although I still struggle a bit with the laundry...

### Terrific Tips

Tiny Buddha has a great list of self-care ideas. Here are a few they shared that I find particularly helpful when planning your wedding:

**Get down and boogie.** Put on your favorite upbeat playlist and shake your booty. Use this as an opportunity to test drive it for your reception!

**Inhale an upbeat smell.** Try peppermint to suppress food cravings while boosting mood and motivation. Rub a little peppermint essential oil on your temples and wrists while working on your budget.

**Get 15 minutes of sun,** especially if you're in a cold climate. Don't forget your sunscreen. Imagine you're on your honeymoon and completely relaxed.

**Be selfish.** Do one thing today just because it makes you happy. I have a sign that I look at across from my desk that says "Choose Happy" so even when I'm overwhelmed, I have an awesome reminder daily.

**Edit your social media feeds and take out any negative people.** You can just "mute" them; you don't have to delete them. Great practice for muting people who can't, ahem, keep their opinions about your wedding to themselves.

**Goof around for a bit.** Schedule in 5 minutes of play (non-directed activity) several times throughout your day. Taking time to unplug from your wedding to-do list even for 5 minutes will help you be more productive in the long term.

**Imagine you're your best friend.** If you were, what would you tell yourself right now? Look in the mirror and say it. What would your Maid of Honor say?

**Ask for help-** big or small but reach out. Delegate an item from your wedding planning to-do list to a member of your family or wedding party.

**Write out your thoughts.** Go for 15 minutes on anything bothering you. Then let it go as you burn or bin the paper. My favorite affirmation to say during this process is "You have no power over me." (Thank you, [Labyrinth!](#)).

## Nutrition

It's so important to keep your body nourished while you're planning your wedding. And if you're insecure about your size and shape, it's easy to go off the deep end with extreme dieting which will only hurt you in the long run, even if it helps you shed a few pounds. I know I did.

### My Story

I was desperate to be the perfect size on my wedding day. Not a size 16 with arms so disproportionately large that it made me want to cry. Once we got engaged, I hit the gym like a fiend. At least 3 miles on the treadmill and 3 miles on the elliptical every day. I lost about 5 lbs... and developed plantar fasciitis. I could barely walk to the bathroom, let alone hit the gym.

Needless to say, the 5 lbs came back along with another 5 to keep them company. Over the course of the next year I was slowly able to move again... but my feet were still maxing out after 1 mile. Since I couldn't work the weight off, I tried every diet under the sun, including MediFast. In the year and a half that we were engaged, I was barely able to get 10 lbs off. I now know that the primary reason I couldn't lose weight at the time was because I have Hashimoto's, an autoimmune thyroid condition which can have a major impact on your weight loss. But I didn't know that then, and I was absolutely miserable and felt like a failure.

I was so ashamed of my body that I refused to go wedding dress shopping. I couldn't bear to look at myself in the mirror. I decided to order a two-piece set

from an Etsy shop that was similar to a flattering outfit I had worn in the past - a huge layered tulle skirt and a fitted top with three-quarter sleeves. I waited until the eleventh hour to send my measurements to the seamstress hoping to lose as much weight as possible before it was made.

There was a mix-up when the pieces were packed, and I received the skirt first. It was gorgeous and fit like a charm. The bodice however was delayed, and due to a holiday weekend, I received it just 8-days before my wedding. When I tried the entire ensemble on, I was so upset I literally cried until I threw up. It was a complete disaster. I thought I looked like the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. Sigh.

I called one of my maids of honor in hysterics. She started researching gowns online while I was able to snag the last appointment available at a bridal salon the following day. I also consulted with a local seamstress to see if the top could be fixed or a new one made, but since the fabric in the skirt was custom dyed, that wasn't meant to be. So, there I was, 7-days before my wedding, facing down the one thing that I was terrified of - trying on dresses in a bridal salon.

And do you know what? It wasn't terrible. In fact, despite the extreme stress of the situation, I actually had FUN! There were tons of dresses to try on. My bestie couldn't have been more supportive. The gals that worked there were ridiculously kind and accommodating. To top it all off, I found a stunning dress that needed minimal alterations and made me feel beautiful. Since it was a sample dress for sale, I was able to take it home that day and get alterations started. Phew!!!

Looking back on all of this, I wish I had been able to get out of my own way. Lord knows it would have saved an enormous amount of time, stress and money (#hello2ndweddingdress). But sometimes that can be hard to do when you're internalizing everything as a bride

So, what's a Savvy Bride to do? In retrospect I would have been much happier throughout my engagement if I focused on making healthy choices instead of on obsessing over the PERCEPTION that my body wasn't good enough to be a bride and causing myself nothing but grief in the process. If this is an issue that is coming up for you, know that your beloved loves every ounce of you. You will be beautiful and radiant on your big day no matter what.

### Healthy Weight Loss Plans

If losing weight before your wedding is important to you, I've listed two of my favorite nutrition and weight-loss resources at the end of this chapter - PNP Tribe and Muse. Both focus on health and wellness while helping you shake that booty and lose a few pounds while keeping you nourished body, mind and soul.

### Water World

On top of a balanced meal plan, you also need to stay hydrated. Girl, you're smart. You know you're supposed to drink water daily, but if you're like me, it can fall by the wayside as a priority if you don't have a plan of action. It can be intimidating when "experts" start telling us to drink half our weight in water (um, not happening) or give us formulas to calculate exactly what we need based on our activity level.

The best advice I can give you is start where you are and grow from there. My wellness and weight loss coach, Corinne Crabtree founder of the PNP Tribe, is a genius at cutting through the BS and getting to the heart of the matter. Sustainable changes are the only ones that last. Didn't drink any water yesterday? Start with one glass today. Boom- you're already doing better! Work your way up from there. Make 8 glasses your goal. More if it's hot or you're exercising.

Personally, I fill a 64 oz bottle every day and I make a point to finish it by 5:00pm so I'm not up all night with trips to the potty! If I go to the gym or on a walk, I take a separate bottle with me, so I know I'm getting the extra hydration I need.

And one of the best perks about staying hydrated? Gorgeous, glowing skin! Here are a few other awesome benefits to drinking your daily agua:

- Increases energy and reduces fatigue
- Flushes out toxins
- Reduces joint pain
- Helps maintain regularity
- Promotes weight loss
- Boosts your immune system

## Movement

The best advice I ever received on this was to pick what you can honestly do and enjoy for 30-minutes a day and grow from there. My hubby and I get up together each morning and walk for a mile while setting our intentions for the day. It energizes us and gets us moving! 3-5 days a week I also add in a trip to the gym or shake my booty to "Just Dance" at home.

Ready to turn up the heat? Here are some great options from [My Fitness Pal](#) that can burn some crazy calories! Of course, check with your doctor before starting a new fitness routine ...

### Swimming

The resistance of the water challenges your muscles to work hard, while simultaneously reducing the impact on your joints. But that's not the best part: swimming involves your entire body, so while improving your levels of aerobic fitness, you'll also be building muscle from head to toe. Increase the intensity by challenging yourself to use a variety of strokes.

### Cycling

Riding a bike - indoors or out - is one of the best low-impact cardiovascular workouts you can do. If you're short on time, you can increase the intensity by using a varied selection of intervals. For example, try pedaling as hard as you can for 40 seconds in an all-out effort, followed by 20 seconds of gentle pedaling; repeat for 6 to 8 rounds. Alternatively, you can look for hills to race up before returning to the bottom and going again.

### Rowing

Either in a boat or using a machine, rowing is a powerful and fun way to workout your arms, back, legs, and core muscles. It's easy to let your form deteriorate as you get tired, so make sure you are pushing with your legs first and allowing your arms and back to follow - not the other way around. Not only will this ensure you stay safe, it's more efficient and will result in a bigger calorie burn.

### Yoga

When you think of burning calories, yoga might not be the first thing that comes to mind. Perhaps it should be, though, as it's an amazingly effective, low-impact way to stay strong and lean. Yoga offers a total-body workout that builds strength, flexibility, and overall fitness. It's so effective because it uses your entire body, as opposed to isolating small muscles groups, which leads to a huge calorie burn. To ensure you're always challenging yourself, slightly increase the depth of each pose, add time to your workout, or try new, more advanced poses.

### Stair Climbing

Finding a set of stairs can make for a great workout. The motion strengthens the same muscles used for lunges and squats, and taxes your lungs and heart as you power your way to the top. A quick, challenging workout to try: Find a set of stairs that takes 30 seconds to ascend, run (or walk briskly) up each step, and then walk back down to the bottom. Repeat 6 to 8 times

## Resource Guide

These are my go-to experts for health and wellness that have made a personal difference in my life. Enjoy!

### PNP Tribe

If you want to lose weight for the last time, join PNP. I've been a member since May 2018, and it has helped me stop the bs thinking that was holding me back from being my best self. The founder, Corinne Crabtree, has lost 100 lbs and has kept it off for over 14 years. She blows my mind and inspires me each and every day. [pnp411.com](http://pnp411.com)

### Muse

Jennifer Jordan is as infectious as she is knowledgeable. Her nutrition plans helped me fall in love with salads again and stop the madness of counting calories and macros. Now I listen to my body and fuel it with delicious foods that nourish me. Jenn also offers amazing virtual workouts and comprehensive courses to energize your body, mind and soul. [bodybymuse.com](http://bodybymuse.com)

### The Sensitive Badass

Amber is an Intuitive Life Coach who helps Highly Sensitive women looking to maximize the benefits and minimize the challenges of their gift so they can gain confidence, fulfill their purpose and find their own inner badass. Amber has changed my life and empowered me to fulfill my dreams while honoring my sensitivity. [amberrochelle.com](http://amberrochelle.com)

### Gabrielle Bernstein

Gabby is a #1 New York Times Best Selling Author, International Speaker and Spirit Junkie. Her mission is to help you crack open to a spiritual relationship of your own understanding so that you can live in alignment with your true purpose. She lifts me up, fills me with joy and inspires my business to thrive. [gabbybernstein.com](http://gabbybernstein.com)



## APPENDIX

### Wedding Expenses: The Traditional Division [Emilypost.com](http://Emilypost.com)

#### Bride and Her Family

- Services of a wedding consultant
- Invitations, enclosures, and announcements
- The bride's wedding gown and accessories
- Floral decorations for the ceremony and reception, bridesmaids' flowers
- The bride's bouquet (unless it is customary for the groom to pay for it)
- Tent, awning, aisle runner
- Music for church and reception
- Transportation of bridal party to ceremony and to reception
- All reception expenses
- Services of a traffic officer or security, if necessary
- Photographer, wedding photographs, wedding albums
- Videographer and finished DVD
- Transportation and lodging expenses for the officiant if from another town and if invited to officiate by the bride's family
- Accommodations for bride's attendants
- Bridesmaids' luncheon, if hosted by the bride or her family
- Bride's gifts to her attendants
- Bride's gift to groom
- Groom's wedding ring

#### Groom and His Family

- Bride's engagement and wedding rings
- Groom's attire
- Ties and gloves for the groomsmen, if not part of their clothing rental package
- Accommodations for the groom's attendants
- Accommodations for the groom's parents and siblings
- Bachelor dinner, if the groom wishes to give one
- All costs for the rehearsal dinner
- Officiant's fee or donation
- Transportation and lodging expenses for the officiant, if from another town and if invited to officiate by the groom's family
- The marriage license
- Transportation for the groom and best man to the ceremony
- The bride's bouquet (when it is local custom for the groom to pay for it)
- The bride's going away corsage, if wearing one
- Boutonnieres for groom's attendants
- Corsages for immediate members of both families (unless the bride has included them in her florist's order)
- Groom's gift to bride
- Gifts for groom's attendants
- Honeymoon expenses

#### Maid of Honor's/Bridesmaids' Expenses

- Purchase of apparel and all accessories
- Transportation to and from the wedding location
- A contribution to a gift from all the bridesmaids to the bride
- An individual gift or a group gift from the attendants to the couple (if being in the wedding is not the gift)
- **Optionally**, a shower, luncheon, or bachelorette party for the bride

### Best Man's/Groomsmen's/Ushers' Expenses

- Rental or purchase of wedding attire
- Transportation to and from the wedding location
- A bachelor dinner, if given by the groom's attendants
- A contribution to a gift from all the groomsmen to the groom
- An individual gift or a group gift from the attendants to the couple (if being in the wedding is not the gift)

### Guests' Expenses

- Transportation to and from the wedding
- Lodging expenses and meals
- Wedding gift



hello@savvyweddings.com



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