

*Essential reading if you're thinking of getting married by Jon von Goes. If you'd like to print it out and keep it in a safe place it's also available in printable PDF version by clicking the link below.*

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

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

## **THE ENTRY, MUSIC AND STRESS**

You can start a wedding however you want. One of you walking in, the both of you walking in. With parents, or not, with friends, or not, with dogs, or not. Limitless choices. Think about what best suits you. Remember it's your wedding, it's all about you.

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

If you use recorded music make sure you know how long the piece of music will run for and do some basic choreography to ensure the music doesn't finish before your saunter is complete. It's not a good look having the track run out before you're both standing up there.

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

Live music is great. If you have a musical family member or friend, get them to play. To ask someone to perform one song at your wedding is not a great imposition. In fact your buddy

may well be honoured by the request. To ask guests to perform a set at the party is a huge imposition. I reckon you should be paying them for that.

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

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

You're going to be a bag of nerves before your wedding. Even if you've got it into your head that it's going to be a relaxed affair. Getting married is a big deal. You can't get around that one. If it's not gonna be a serious life statement then you shouldn't be getting married. And just before the ceremony you'll be at your most nervous. If you're hanging with your guests all you can really do is dabble in small talk. And small talk when you're toey is excruciating.

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

Having said that, the whole stress thing is important. Without your stress there's no theatrical tension, no vibe. Your guests will love the tension, the adrenalin. Your guests are counting on you being beside yourselves with nerves. They're there to watch you suffer in the nicest possible way.

## **MY INTRO**

All about you, the couple. I'll meet with you two weeks before the wedding and do an investigative journo job on you. If you don't want your story to be told, tell me your take on what it all means to you. I will write this up and email it to you before the wedding so there won't be any unpleasant surprises.

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

## **THE INTERLUDE**

This usually takes the form of a reading or a song by a family member or friend. Perhaps some interpretive dance?

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

And a tip - if you do choose to have someone read something make sure they can read and project. Sometimes a microphone will be necessary for a reader. I don't need a mic because I have a big voice. I've found it's much better for me to work without one. The theatre and energy of a room of hushed people and a clearly audible unamplified voice is quite powerful.

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

## **THE MONITUM FROM THE MARRIAGE ACT OF 1961 -**

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

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

*Marriage, according to the law in Australia,  
is the union of TWO PEOPLE\**

*to the exclusion of all others and is voluntarily entered into for life.*

\*The carry on that went on for years leading up to changing these words to “two people” was bewildering. The sky hasn’t fallen in. It’s so nice to be able to recite these words. The novelty hasn’t worn off yet. I pause a little after I say two people for effect and usually spontaneous applause erupts. Having said that it’ll be good when it’ll no longer be novel.

## **HONOURING YOUR PARENTS**

I suppose if your dad really wants to walk you down the aisle let him if it’s gonna make him really happy. I won’t draw any attention to the antiquated patriarchal custom.

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

*“Who raised this woman/man/person?”* I then congratulate the parents referring to them by name and they’ll get a round of applause.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some couples have also expressed a wish to have all the guests promise to do all they can to make sure the couple in question remain happy. I can ask something like –  
*“Are you willing now and always to support and strengthen this marriage by upholding both XXXX and XXXX with your love and support?”*

Response — *“We are”*, or preferably, a spontaneous *“Yeeeeeah”*.

## **THE ASKING**

These are the precursory questions I ask you before you recite your vows. Vows are required by law, askings are not. But an asking will make your guests feel like they are at a wedding, a fairly informal wedding, but still undeniably a wedding.

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

These examples are written as questions delivered to a straight male. You can work it out from here.

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

**1.**XXXX, will you take XXXX to be your lawful\* wife

Will you love her, comfort her,  
Honour and keep her, in sickness and in health,  
And, forsaking all others, keep only unto her,  
So long as you both shall live?  
(\*Some couples choose to do away with the “lawful”)

2.XXXX, will you take XXXX to be your wife,  
Will you love and cherish her,  
Stand by her whatever may come,  
Will you give your relationship all it requires and deserves,  
So that you can live the rest of your lives together in love and happiness?

3.XXXX, will you take XXXX to be your wife,  
Will you love & respect her,  
Be honest with her, and stand by her through whatever may come,  
So you can genuinely share your life together?

4.Will you XXXX take XXXX to be your wife?  
Will you make the daily effort to relate to her and listen to her  
Will you be gracious and generous in your giving of yourself  
Will you work for what is best for her for the rest of your life?

5.Will you XXXX promise to be a fabulous husband?

## **THE VOWS**

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

What to say? It has become law to begin your vows with the words —  
I, XXXX, call on the people here  
To witness that I take you,  
XXXX, to be my wife/husband/partner/spouse.....

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

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

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

This is by no means an exhaustive list. You can go on the [www](#) to get many more examples.

It is required by law to begin your vows with -

I, XXXX, call on the people here  
To witness that I take you,  
XXXX, to be my wife/husband/partner/spouse.....

**1....**To have and to hold  
From this day forward,  
For better for worse,  
For richer for poorer,  
In sickness and in health,  
For the rest of my life.

**2....** I want to be with you always  
I choose you above all others  
To share my life with me in marriage  
I love you as you are  
I promise to honour this pledge  
As long as I live

**3....** I will try to be a loving husband/wife/partner/spouse.  
I promise to respect you as an individual  
I intend to develop as a person in partnership with you

I want to love you  
Through good fortune and adversity  
For the rest of my life

**4...** I want to be with you always  
Just as you are.  
I choose you above all others,  
To share my life with me in marriage.  
I love you for yourself,  
And want you to become all that you can be.  
I promise to honour  
And tenderly care for you,  
To cherish and encourage  
Your own fulfilment as an individual  
For the rest of my life.

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

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

**7...** I pledge to share my life openly with you,  
To speak the truth to you in love.  
I promise to honour and tenderly care for you,  
To cherish and encourage your own fulfilment as an individual,  
For the rest of my life.

**8...** I pledge to share my life openly with you,  
To speak the truth to you in love.  
I promise to respect and tenderly care for you,  
To cherish and encourage you  
Through all the changes in our lives

## **THE RING CEREMONY**

Nearing the end of the ceremony now. It doesn't have to be the best people who get the ring gig. I've had mothers, fathers, grandparents, dogs, the barman, you name it. Sometimes when some people can't decide on one or two people, the rings get passed from person to person to include a few favourites.

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

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

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

**1.XXXX**, take this ring  
and wear it as a pledge of my love  
and as a symbol of all we share

**2.XXXX**, I give you this ring  
It is my personal promise  
Of love and trust  
And pride that you are my wife/husband/partner/spouse

**3.XXXX**, this ring I give to you,

It is my personal gift,  
My personal promise of love and trust,  
And pride that you are my wife/husband/partner/spouse.

4.XXXX, I thank you for this ring  
I accept it as a symbol of our love.  
This ring will remind me of you  
And I will wear it with love  
All my life

5.XXXX, with this ring, I thee wed.  
Wear it as a pledge of my love,  
and as a symbol of all we share.

6.XXXX, take this ring  
And try not to lose it

## **THE DECLARATION**

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

I'll come and drag you away to the sign the papers 15 - 20 minutes or so later, when I feel the time is right, depending on how many guests you have and other variables. To force your guests to sit quietly and watch you sign boring documents can be like forcing kids to watch their parents filling out application forms. The party will be well underway by the time you do your paperwork. The three guests who will want to watch you sign your papers will be able to do so. When you have completed your papers I will make an announcement that you are legal. Then my work will be done.

Cheers

