

CREATING THE PERFECT CEREMONY



A Few Storytelling Thoughts & Tips for Your Special Day & Beyond

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THE ART OF
ETIQUETTE®



It's time.
It's time to tell the story only you can tell.

The story of how two people met, fell in love and their public promise of deep commitment that their days from this day forward will be lived as one.

You are about to embark on an incredible experience of capturing your promises on paper. It's a creative act that you'll cherish for a lifetime. Your vows are your chance to declare to the world all you hold sacred between the two of you and what you will abide by in your marriage. While it may feel tough, you won't regret it. All vows are as different as the couples who write them, but we do know that one thing is common: writing personalized wedding vows will be something you won't regret. In fact, like a fine wine, they will get better with age. Years from now, you'll be so glad you took the time to craft something bespoke to you.

Enclosed are a few curated thoughts and tips to help you avoid writer's block and to cultivate a rich, meaningful expression of your love to one another in only a way you can tell it.

So, find a quiet spot, grab a glass of champagne or your favorite wine and let your story unfold®.





GETTING STARTED



When to Start

We recommend that you allow yourself one to two months before your wedding to capture your thoughts. While it's easy to get caught up in the final countdown of seating arrangements, playlists and mailing invitations, vows are the heart of your wedding and come out best when not saved until the last minute when emotions are running high.

Length of Vows

While these promises are the heart of the occasion, vows should be kept to one to two minutes each. This timing will ensure guests stay engaged during the ceremony and helps take the pressure off of you as well! Your vows should be the most important points of what this person means to you. If you have more that you wish to say publicly, save them for toasting at the reception or at welcome and rehearsal dinners. Alternatively, write more intimate, personal thoughts in a letter (our vow books are also perfect for documenting this!).

Preparing To Tell Your Story

First, decide how you want your vows to come across. Do you envision them as humorous? Poetic and romantic? Consider the logistics too. Will you write them separately or together? Will they be completely different or will you make the same promises to each other as you would with traditional vows? Or, a little of each? Finally, will you share them with each other or keep them a secret until the wedding day? Will your vows share the same tone? Have a romantic date to discuss these questions.

When it's time to put pen to paper, it is important to find a place where you can steal away and center yourself for the task at hand. The art of storytelling is best unrushed, in a quiet space with the right frame of mind to focus. Some find the hum of a nearby coffee shop relaxing. Others enjoy the solitude and peace when traveling to capture those heartfelt emotions. Or, perhaps you will schedule a date night to write your vows together over a quiet dinner at home. Wherever that quiet place may be, give yourself ample time to gather your thoughts. An initial draft is a great way to test the waters to ensure your story is clearly stated and succinct. It may take a few drafts to get your vows just right, and that's ok!



MATCHING VOWS TO VALUES

Your vows are the most sacred promise you'll ever make, and writing your own vows gives you an opportunity to infuse them with what you hold most dear and fill your vows with value.



Family Centered Vows

If you or your partner have children prior to the marriage, then the vows are an opportunity to for the two of you to publicly declare your intent to blend your families and the commitment that comes with that. The marriage in this case becomes about more than becoming a new married couple, it involves becoming a new larger family, and your vows are a way to reflect on and celebrate that choice.



Faith Centered Vows

If your faith is important to you, you may choose to weave lines of scripture into your vows. Speak with your officiant about the context and meaning of the scripture you choose. Most faiths have scripture describing the nature of intimate love, and it's often poetic and lovely. If you're not sure where to start, ask your officiant for recommendations and see what resonates with you.



Culturally Centered Vows

You may elect to incorporate wedding traditions from your family heritage, or that of your partner. Every culture has developed lovely, meaningful customs for weddings, and you may find one that expresses exactly what you want to communicate. We especially love. A note: talk with your parents about traditions they used during their ceremony. You may discover something you didn't know, and the conversation is likely to be a bright spot in the wedding planning process.



TELLING YOUR STORY

1. Building the Framework

With the format agreed upon and a quiet moment ahead of you, think about how you felt when you first met, what made you fall in love and when you knew you wanted to spend the rest of your lives together. On the following pages are few thought starters to get the creative juices flowing for your initial draft. These are just a few ideas to help you build a unique story. Feel free to use what resonates and skip those that don't.

In addition to the prompts, borrow freely from poetry, songs, films, love stories, and scripture for further ways to spark your imagination. Just one word of caution - don't let someone else's words overpower your own. You want your vows to sound like you and pertain to your relationship, and that won't happen if every word is borrowed from other sources.

And don't forget the love letters you have written along your journey together thus far. They too can serve as a wonderful place for inspiration and help you recall the little details of your love story and why you are making this commitment.

In the Beginning...Think Back to How You Met.

- In what month of the year and on which day of the week did you meet?
- Where did you meet exactly?
- Did someone introduce you? Who?
- What talking points, laughs, or commonalities do you remember from your first conversation?
- Describe the feeling and impression you had after parting ways.
- Do you remember sharing the encounter with a close friend?
How did you tell the story?
- And how would you re-tell the story today?

Capture Your Unique Partner-to-Be.

- What do you admire most about your fiancé or fiancée?
- What trait(s) do you respect most about him or her?
- What makes him or her laugh, time after time, without fail?
- When is your spouse-to-be at his or her best—and worst?
- List the most important people in his or her life.

Recall Your Favorite Memories.

- Describe your first date from start to finish. Did you feel confident—and excited for—a second date? Why or why not?
- What was the first holiday you spent together?
- How did you celebrate, with whom, and where?
- When did you each first say, "I love you?"
- How did you feel when you said it? Heard it?
- How long had you been together?
- At what point in your relationship did you meet each other's parents? Where? What do you remember about the introduction?
- Recount the proposal and both of your reactions following the question.
- What are you looking forward to most about being married?
- Describe your favorite trip you took together. What was the occasion, and what was your favorite—or most memorable part of the adventure?
- How do you most like to spend time together?
- Who are the people who have helped you write your love story along the way?



TELLING YOUR STORY



2. Creating the Initial Draft

Use the provided blank pages to capture your initial draft and set a goal for a first draft to be done two to three weeks prior to the wedding. Be kind to yourself as you put your initial thoughts on paper. You may find that a few attempts are needed to get it just right.

Given you invited all your friends and family to witness this public bond, limit inside jokes, deeply personal anecdotes, obscure nicknames and code words to ensure all feel included. If you're okay with sharing your vows beforehand, have a friend or family member read it over for feedback. You want to be sure the words you wrote today will have just as much meaning ten years from now. Consider asking a friend whose marriage you admire for this favor.

If you are having a religious ceremony, ask your officiant if he or she will want to review your vows. He or she may have some faith-based questions, have thoughts on how best to clarify your feelings or make recommendations on other passages to consider to further state your commitment to one another.

Speech writing expert Robert Lehrman suggests a four-part outline:

- Affirm your love**
- Praise your partner**
- Offer promises**
- Close with a final vow**

In Other Words:

1. Tell your partner how much you admire and respect him/her.
2. What qualities does your beloved have that you find particularly special, that made you want to bind your life to theirs?
3. What lifelong promises do you want to make?
4. What is the final vow you want to close with? Consider faithfulness, lifelong commitment, and cherishing as your "big finish." If your ceremony is faith-based, perhaps include a line related to that as you close.

And another helpful tip to help minimize the pressure – your vows should be just 3 minutes, tops. 3 minutes is approximately 400 words. That might sound short, but that time frame gives you enough room to express everything, keep your guests engaged and makes your writing task easier..

After your initial draft is completed, take a moment to pause. Set aside your vows and revisit them in a few days. This will allow you a fresh set of eyes and reaffirm that your vows say what you most want, and sound like you.



TELLING YOUR STORY



“ When planning our wedding we fully expected the day to fly by in a whirlwind and wanted to capture the memories in every way that we could. Our Art of Etiquette vow books were a simply gorgeous addition to our ceremony and a way to preserve our vows forever.”

3. Finalizing Your Vows

Your vows should be completely finished at least a week before the big day. Once you're done, transfer your final version into your vow book (free of cross outs, arrows and notes). It's a keepsake in the making.

4. Practice & Project

Practicing out loud, in advance, is a must to keep your nerves at bay. By saying your vows out loud, you'll discover any tongue twisters and long sentences, check if your vows are easy to say, and deliver the meaning you were looking to capture. Find the right places to pause, breathe, and look up as you practice.

Projection is also important. You want to be sure everyone can hear your story. Consider microphones if your wedding is large or hosted in an outdoor setting. If your guests can't hear you, they will disconnect and the most sacred part of your day will be lost for your guests. If you elect to forgo microphones, be sure to speak loudly and clearly.

5. Have a Backup Plan Too.

Wedding celebrant and author Maureen Pollinger points out that some couples find themselves too emotional to speak (it happens!). As a precaution, provide a copy of your vows to officiant so that they can prompt you by quietly saying the vows first or read the vows on your behalf.



BEYOND “I DO.”



The First-Year Anniversary Love Note

Your big day has come and gone and you are left with so many wonderful memories. As you begin to frame & hang your favorite wedding photos and pack away all of those special mementos, there are two special books that need to be kept in a safe place - your vow books. Vows are meant to be remembered, and with each passing year, your anniversary creates a beautiful space to recite them once again, or to use them as you renew your vows in the years to come.

The Art of Etiquette Vow Book Keepsake is meant to be a treasure you revisit on your first anniversary and beyond. The first anniversary is most special and is the anniversary of paper. Paper signifies a new chapter as a married couple on which to preserve your love story. The first-year anniversary love note is designed to be written

the week leading up to your wedding, preferably the evening before, to capture the excitement and nerves you feel just before you walk down the aisle and your most heartfelt wishes and dreams for the year ahead. Opened in celebration of your first year together, your love notes to each other serve as a wonderful affirmation of the promises you made one year ago on the eve of your new chapter together.

Consider writing your partner a love note each year on your anniversary, building on the previous year's hopes and reflections. Over time, you'll have a collection of meaningful love notes to each other, all collected in one spot. It's an heirloom you and your family will treasure for generations.

“ I especially love the inclusion of an envelope in the back for our anniversary notes to each other- I can't think of a more special way to unlock the magic of the day all over again in celebration as our love story continues. Our vow books were easily the most sentimental gift we received for our wedding.”





Melissa Trojak creates custom vow books for heart-centered couples through her company, The Art of Etiquette. Her vow books are the perfect place to document your personalized vows, and become a treasure for years to come. She discovered bookbinding while preparing for her own wedding, and continues to perfect her talent at the Center of Book Arts in NYC. She's a romantic at heart, and her own vows read like poetry: "To say that you took me by surprise is an understatement." Her vow books have been featured on outlets such as *Aisle Chicks*, *Aisle Perfect* and *Wedding Perfect*.



BROWSE OUR VOW BOOKS AND LET YOUR STORY UNFOLD.



Customized collections with beauty and soul.

Available in 3 styled themes with 6 color options to preserve your most sacred commitments.

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