

It's important to keep in mind that there are many variations to the ceremony order, and this guide was created using a traditional, nondenominational wedding ceremony. There are many variations as well as some common cultural, religious, and regional variations. We have many different types of couples and so there many different types of ceremonies. There are no real rules, so a custom ceremony that reflects your relationship while maybe inserting a few elements of a traditional wedding service is totally fine.

The order for the processional and recessional may be completely different than the setup we share, sometimes with the wedding party and couple entering together, or having no wedding party at all. We encourage you to be creative and work with your officiant to create something unique.

Who's in charge? At the rehearsal, you are not normally practicing the ceremony itself - you are only practicing walking in and walking out, and making sure everyone knows where to stand. It is normally the responsibility of the coordinator or the wedding planner if you have one, to "cue" each group and tell them when to start walking. Many couples will also ask a friend or family member to help run the rehearsal. You will want the same person who is running the rehearsal to be in charge of the ceremony on your wedding day as well. This continuity will really help ensure that there isn't any confusion on your big day.

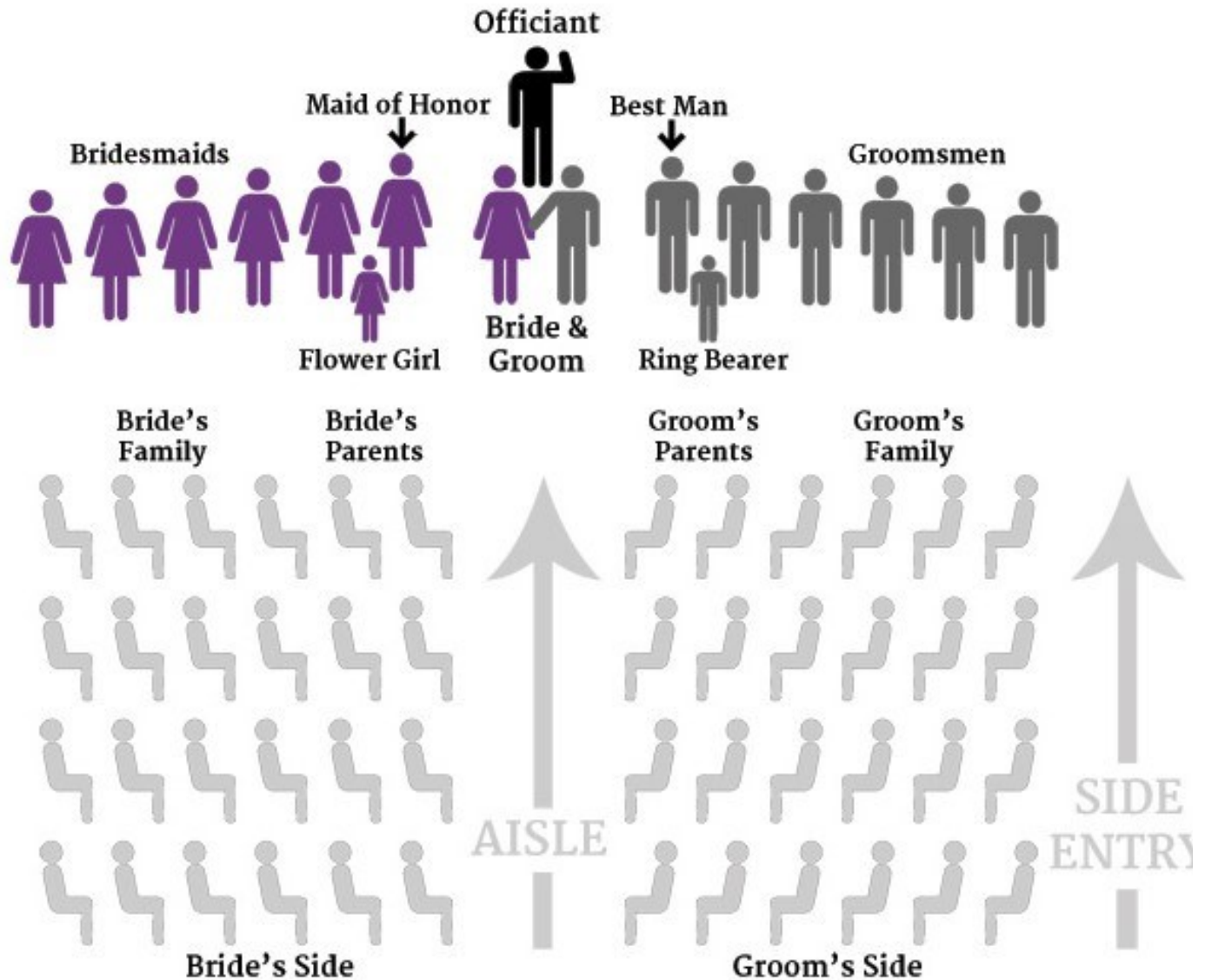
Your wedding rehearsal should be a quick, easy and straightforward process. We recommend you choose a friend or a family member to help you. The best person for this job is, quite frankly, someone who is a little bit bossy and also organized. They will need to be assertive enough to get your group to pay attention, but not so overbearing that it is off-putting to your families and guests. If you have any teachers in your group they can be a great choice as they are used to corralling groups of kids or people. Whoever you appoint, give them a copy of this Guide and a copy of your ceremony draft that you have finalized with your officiant. They will have all the information they need to run your rehearsal quickly and efficiently.

1. **Start in the middle.** Instead of starting with the processional (when you enter), start by getting everyone into place where they will be standing during the ceremony. Remember you are practicing walking in and out, so knowing where to stand is the first step. See the diagram below for the standard positions for your officiant, parents, and attendants. It's important to have your wedding party evenly spaced and standing at a slight angle in relation to your wedding guests, with the attendants at each end a little more forward than your Maid of Honor and Best Man. This looks better for pictures, and helps the guests see each person in your wedding party better. Bridesmaids should hold their bouquets in front of them with both hands, and groomsmen should decide on clasping their hands in the front or the back of their body. It's important that everyone do the same thing, if everyone is doing something different it looks awful in your wedding photos.
2. **Speak through the ceremony headings.** Take a look at the ceremony draft and read through the headings aloud, so everyone knows roughly the order of the ceremony. Don't read through the entire ceremony word-for-word or say the vows, save that excitement for your big day! Make a note of any wedding ceremony readings, candle lighting or sand ceremonies, and when the rings will need to be presented. Double check that any items needed in the ceremony like candles or tables will be there that day. No matter what, make sure that everyone (including the couple) do not have their backs to the wedding guests at any time (other than when they are walking down the aisle). Even if people need to move around during the ceremony, for example to do a candle lighting ceremony, make sure that they always end up standing in a position where they still face the guests (and the photographer). The last item on the list will be the kiss and, if the couple has chosen to do so, the presentation of the couple

3. **Practice walking out (the recessional)**. Since you have everyone in place already, practice the recessional as if the ceremony has just ended and you are walking out. Start with the kiss and/or the presentation of the couple, and exit in the proper order. The bride will take her bouquet from the Maid of Honor and exit with the Groom. Typically, the wedding party will exit in pairs even if they enter separately, followed by the Flower Girl and Ring Bearer and then the parents and grandparents. It is important to make sure that each couple that exits the ceremony leaves enough room between themselves and the couple in front of them. To do this, everyone should agree on a set distance they will wait for before walking. Most people choose to start walking when the couple in front of them is halfway back up the aisle. In general, it's best to leave at least 20 feet between each couple for the sake of pictures, but not much more than that. Once everyone has successfully exited the ceremony, it's finally time to practice walking in.
4. **Practice the Processional last**. Now that everyone knows where to stand when they enter the ceremony, practicing the entrance should be a piece of cake. Line everyone up in the order they will enter. The Officiant, Groom, Best Man, and Groomsmen enter first, typically for the side of the ceremony site but sometimes up the aisle depending on preference. Following them are Grandparents, the Parents of the Groom, and Mother of the Bride. Finally the Bridesmaids, Maid of Honor and the Flower Girl enter. While the Officiant, Groom, and Groomsmen typically enter together as a group together is a straight line, everyone needs to be evenly spaced. As with the recessional, it's important to agree upon how much space to leave between people leaving the ceremony - normally about 20 to 30 ft. The Bride and her escort (typically the father of the bride) should not enter until the entire wedding party has entered and is in place. Normally there is a separate piece of music for the Bride's processional, and the officiant will usually say: "*If everyone will please rise*", to invite your guests to stand.
5. **The hand-off**. The last item to practice is what happens when the Bride and her escort make it to the front of the ceremony and are standing in front of the Officiant and the Groom. If the escort is a parent of the Bride they should give her a kiss and congratulate her. The escort then typically shakes the Groom's hand, the Bride hands her bouquet to the Maid of Honor and steps forward next to the Groom, and the escort moves to where they will be seated. The Bride and Groom should then be standing facing one another, holding hands in front of the Officiant. At this point, the Maid of Honor can hand off both sets of flowers to one of the Bridesmaids and fix the Brides train, if necessary.
6. **Do it again**. Now that everyone is in place, practice walking back out and back in one more time to make sure everyone knows what to do, then you're done! The rehearsal should not last more than 20 to 30 minutes at most.

Following these steps will ensure that everyone knows exactly what to do on the wedding day, and that you aren't wasting a lot of time practicing unnecessary parts of the ceremony itself. Below is a helpful diagram of where everyone should stand.

Wedding Ceremony Rehearsal Guide



ENTRANCE ORDER (PROCESSIONAL)

1. Grandparents of the Groom
2. Grandparents of the Bride
3. Officiant, Groom, Best Man, and Groomsmen
(from side entry if desired)
4. Parents of the Groom
5. Mother of the Bride
6. Bridesmaids
7. Maid of Honor
8. Flower Girl and Ring Bearer
9. Bride / Father of the Bride

EXIT ORDER (RECESSIONAL)

1. Bride and Groom
2. Maid of Honor and Best Man
3. Bridesmaids and Groomsmen
(in pairs when exiting)
4. Flower Girl and Ring Bearer
5. Parents of the Bride
6. Parents of the Groom
7. Grandparents of the Bride
8. Grandparents of the Groom
9. Officiant
10. Wedding Guests