

# Questions to Ask Potential Officiants

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by Catherine Jessee

Whether you want your ceremony to be led by a civil servant, a religious officiant or your best friend, here's everything you need to know—and ask—before you seal the deal.

No matter where your wedding ceremony takes place, it's important to make sure your officiant is someone who both you and your partner trust and mutually respect. If your nuptials will take place in a house of worship (like a church or synagogue), you may not need to book an officiant. But if your officiant doesn't already know you and your partner, they should be willing and able to get to know you as a couple. Even if you think they know everything about you, it's important to have a conversation about your and their expectations. Not only does it preclude any miscommunication on the wedding day, but it also leads to a more intimate, personalized ceremony. Whether your ceremony is civil, religious or somewhere in between, we've broken down all possible questions you should ask potential officiants.

Expect to spend a significant amount of time answering questions about your wedding dreams and how you came to this day. Officiants are typically caring and sensitive people who truly want to help make your special day a memory of a lifetime. For this they need to know you as a couple.

*Your Special Day:* We provide a three-page questionnaire to aid the process of getting acquainted. You can find it under the “Documents” menu on our web site: [www.Your-Special-Day.net](http://www.Your-Special-Day.net)

## **Civil Servant:**

### **Will you give a speech as part of the ceremony?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** Depending on the length of ceremony you want, a speech may or may not be in the cards for your officiant. Ask them what a typical ceremony looks like for them and how flexible they are.

*Your Special Day:* No speech! This is your day and your ceremony. We are completely flexible.

### **Will we have input and/or be able to read it beforehand?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** Your ceremony doesn't need to be a surprise. Ask your potential officiant whether you can have some input in the proceedings. They want you to be pleased and they'll be more than happy to work with you to make it perfect.

*Your Special Day:* Absolutely! We want you to review and approve every aspect of your ceremony.

### **Religious Officiant:**

#### **Will you give a sermon?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** If you plan on a ceremony of faith with a religious officiant, it's worth knowing whether they plan on giving a sermon. If so, talk to them about its length and subject or whether you can help them choose a subject or passage of text to draw from and review it together.

*Your Special Day:* There is a section of our standard ceremony titled "Homily." It is instructional and non-denominational; intended as much for the benefit of the guests as it is for the wedding party and couple. It's definitely part of what we ask you to review and approve as we develop your ceremony together.

#### **Will you perform an interfaith ceremony (if applicable)?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** If you and your partner have different religious backgrounds and want an interfaith ceremony, this is a vital question. It's important that your officiant respect your decision. Pastors, priests and rabbis who serve diverse communities might be more used to working with clergy from different faiths and willing to perform a flexible ceremony. Interfaith ministers strive to be flexible and accommodating to couples of different religions and to same-sex couples as well.

*Your Special Day:* Definitely! Yes.

#### **Are you willing to marry us at a nonreligious site (if applicable)?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** If you're interested in tying the knot outside of your house of worship, ask your religious officiant if they're willing to lead the ceremony elsewhere. As ceremonies in nonreligious venues get more popular, it's important to know if your religious officiant prefers to stick to tradition.

*Your Special Day:* Definitely! Yes.

## **Other questions to ask:**

### **What is the ceremony fee or required donation?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** Besides making sure they're available on the right date, confirming their fee for the service is also a must. If your officiant or civil servant only takes donations, ask what other couples have donated.

*Your Special Day:* Our base fee is \$125.00. Please review the "Rate Sheet" on our web site ([www.Your-Special-Day.net](http://www.Your-Special-Day.net)) for optional extras.

### **Are you open to personalized vows, readings, poems or music?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** If you want the personalization and flexibility of incorporating things like music, poems or literature into the ceremony, be sure your officiant is on board. This is also a good time to ask whether they have any rules, restrictions or customs you should know about. Chances are they're happy to accommodate your wishes but you'll want to be sure before getting into the nitty-gritty of planning.

*Your Special Day:* No "rules, restrictions or customs" beyond those of good taste and decorum. We will decline to participate in any activity that is illegal, immoral, unethical or not in good taste.

### **Will you help us work on our vows?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** If you and your partner want to write your own vows but don't know where to begin, talk it through with your officiant. See if they're willing to lead the charge on combining standard ceremony wording with your own written vows. If you're really stuck, they might have ideas or suggestions from past experiences.

*Your Special Day:* Our web site ([www.Your-Special-Day.net](http://www.Your-Special-Day.net)) offers a wealth of suggestions and ideas designed to be inspirational in planning your ceremony. We'll be pleased to help you arrive at what is perfect for your special day.

### **Can you help me deal with family conflicts connected to the ceremony?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** If there tends to be drama in your family, the officiant can act as a built-in mediator. Ask them if they'd be willing to take the heat when your relative has more than a few suggestions for your ceremony.

*Your Special Day:* Understanding we are not social workers or psychologists, as the saying goes, “We know a few things because we’ve seen a few things.” We fill the role of advisor and confidant traveling the road to your special day together.

### **Are there any pre-wedding requirements, such as counseling?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** Most Florida counties offer marriage license incentives to couples who have attended premarital counseling. Such guidance is always valuable. Some officiants insist upon it.

*Your Special Day:* We encourage you to consider premarital counseling but we are not licensed to offer same. The decision to seek counseling is yours.

### **Are there any ceremony site restrictions, such as flash photography, videography, music, dress code, décor, or tossing items?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** Do’s and Don’ts vary widely among wedding venues. These are serious questions to discuss with the wedding coordinator of your chosen venue.

*Your Special Day:* We have no such restrictions.

### **What items does the ceremony site/officiant provide, and what must you bring yourself? (Pews, aisle runners, microphone, speaker, etc.)**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** Again these are matters to research with the wedding coordinator of your chosen venue.

*Your Special Day:* We do offer the option to rent our public address system for a venue that presents audio challenges (e.g. beach, park, etc.). Seating, decorations and traditional items (e.g. Sand Ceremony, Unity Candle, etc.) are matters best handled by your wedding coordinator. We have acquired some amenities over the years. Don’t be afraid to ask.

### **What will officiant wear?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** The officiant is an integral part of your special day. They will be an element of everyone’s attention for one of the most personal events in your life. Furthermore, they will appear in many of the keepsake photographs and videos of your ceremony. The officiant’s attire should harmonize with your wedding party but not compete with them or you.

*Your Special Day:* We make a point of asking you what you want us to wear. We typically arrive in a dark, subtly-pinstriped suit with a dress shirt and tie chosen to coordinate with the wedding party. This is why we ask about the colors you have selected for your wedding.

**What time will he/she be available for rehearsal?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** Major life events can be stressful enough without adding the uncertainty of tardy participants. Choose vendors you believe will respect the “sanctity” of your schedule.

*Your Special Day:* Punctuality is a hallmark of our business model. We would rather be an hour early than have you waiting a minute for us. You can always expect us to arrive forty-five to sixty minutes before the scheduled event time.

**Should you bring your marriage license to the ceremony, or will you sign it beforehand?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** There aren't many legally “mandatory” elements of a wedding ceremony, but endorsement and filing of your marriage license is one of them. Improperly completed, your marriage could be invalidated.

*Your Special Day:* The State of Florida requires an engaged couple to obtain a marriage license a minimum of three (3) days prior to the date of the ceremony. Most counties adjust this and their license fee for couples presenting proof of completed pre-nuptial counseling or coming in from out of state. It is illegal for anyone to officiate at a wedding ceremony in the absence of a valid marriage license. A valid marriage license remains in force for a period of sixty (60) days from the issue date until the expiration printed on its face.

*Your Special Day:* We recommend you obtain your marriage license ten to twenty days before your wedding date. We request you transmit a copy of the license to us as soon as you get it to verify it is in your possession. You must surrender the original license to the officiant before the ceremony begins. It is the responsibility of the officiant to properly file the license with the issuing county.

**Should we invite our officiant to the rehearsal dinner or even the reception?**

**WHY YOU WANT TO KNOW:** Caterers need to know how many places to set and how much food to prepare. Wedding coordinators often want you to help them create a seating plan putting compatible folks together at the table.

*Your Special Day:* Inviting your officiant to your rehearsal dinner is a nice gesture that will be appreciated. Unless the officiant has close ties to the family they usually decline an invitation to the reception.

## ***Other Things To Consider Before Hiring an Officiant***

His or her personal demeanor should reflect the mood you envision for your reception. Some are light and jovial, often interjecting sermons/speeches with bits of humor. If you envision a more formal and solemn affair, you may object to this style.

If you don't already have a relationship with this person, consider whether you like his/her style and whether you would enjoy working with this person. Remember, your officiant performs the most important service at the wedding. He or she is the one who will officially pronounce you husband and wife, which is the sole reason for the big event in the first place (don't lose sight of this!). You should feel comfortable inviting this person to share such an intimate moment in your life.

Your officiant can offer guidance along the way – spiritual and non-spiritual, such as resolving family conflicts, etc. Don't hesitate to speak with your officiant regarding these personal matters.

# 11 Questions a Wedding Officiant is Going to Ask You

By Jaimie Mackey  
June 7, 2018

***Just as you have lots of questions for your wedding officiant—they're also going to have questions for you! Make sure you're well-prepared and have your answers ready!***

If you're getting married, chances are [you'll need a wedding officiant](#)- and it turns out that wedding officiants usually have lots of questions for couples. Whether your wedding is religious or secular, your officiant will want to know what type of ceremony you want, as well as the story of you. It is, after all, [those personal details](#) that bring your loved ones to tears as you exchange vows. Getting ready to hire an officiant for your wedding day?

**Here are a few of the most common wedding officiant questions for couples.**

## **1. When, Where, and Who?**

This may be one of the most obvious wedding officiant questions for a couple. Says celebrant Robin Eisenberg of Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, *"The purpose of 'when' is to determine if I'm available on the date and time of their wedding and to see how far in advance the wedding is. The purpose of 'where' is to get a general idea about the formality of the wedding, determine how much travel is involved for me to get to the venue, and to know if I've worked at that venue before. The answers help me decide if this is a wedding I want to, and am able, to pursue. And the 'who' question is because generally one member of the couple contacts me but doesn't tell me who the other member is! Before I meet with the couple, it's helpful to know how to greet them."*

## **2. What role do your families play in your lives?**

*“I try to get a sense of how connected the couple is to their families, or how estranged,” says Eisenberg. “It also gives me a sense of how many family members are involved in the ceremony. Sometimes the couple was introduced by family members, which is a fun story to share. And I always like to acknowledge the parents in the ceremony by name, so this helps me properly express the couples’ appreciation for them.”*

## **3. How do you want to remember your ceremony? What do you want your friends and family to remember?**

*“My objective is to develop the ideal ceremony for a specific couple, so I ask a lot of different questions to figure out what that will look like. Perfect is different for each couple, and directly asking them to describe their perfect ceremony isn’t always effective, so this is a good way to work backwards into the ceremony,” says Rabbi Linda Portnoy Goldberg of White Plains, New York.*

## **4. What have you seen at other weddings that you liked or not liked?**

*Imitation is the highest form of flattery! “I watch carefully to see what couples casually toss out and what lights up their eyes. Was it elegant? Fun? Participative? Traditional? I learn a lot from these answers, and the better they can identify elements that they love, the better I can craft the details to meet their goals,” Rabbi Goldberg explains.*

## **5. How did you meet? When did you fall in love?**

An important wedding officiant question for couples is probably one you’ve answered many times before—how you met! *“Often, the way the couple met and later fell in love, and how they tell those stories, gives me both a way to begin telling their story and leads to the theme of their wedding ceremony. Who planned the first date? Who fell in love first? Is the location of the first date important? Is this a relationship built on surprise and adventure or one more focused on being at home with each other?”* Eisenberg explains.

## **6. How did you get engaged?**

*“Each half of the couple often has a slightly different recollection of the [engagement story](#),” says Eisenberg. “One may insist it was Wednesday, while the other might say it was Tuesday. I like to hear the differences. I also like to know if the proposer did something grand or simple. Was the proposé surprised? Was the proposal expected? Who chose the ring? All these elements are important in defining who the couple is, both as individuals and together. Retelling the engagement story can also add a touch of humor to the ceremony, or it might be so touching that everyone starts crying. Both are good!”*

## **7. How would you describe your partner?**

*“I ask each person to email me a description of their partner and what they like best about him or her - with specific examples,” says Rabbi Goldberg. “I want to know how they are different or similar, and often use the Positive Psychology list of 24 character traits (e.g., generosity, humor, humility, curiosity) and ask them for the other’s signature strengths.”*

## **8. Who are the best man and maid of honor?**

*“I ask my couples to ramble on about these people a little bit, telling me why they chose them,” says Dr. Rev. Cynthia Capaccio of Boynton Beach, Florida. After all, these people are standing next to you for a reason!*

## **9. Who are your guests? How do they fit into your lives?**

*“Are they friends, family members, or [work connections](#)?” asks Rabbi Goldberg. The relationship you have with your guests will impact how they relate back to the content of your ceremony.*

**10. Do you want your ceremony to include any traditional prayers?**

Says Eisenberg, *“I didn’t always ask this question but, having written a lovely contemporary ceremony for a couple who weren’t connected to their religions, they decided after reading the ceremony that they really did want to honor their Catholic traditions. We were able to have prayers and Biblical excerpts read by family members and we included God in their marriage vows. So now I ask as a way to include those aspects throughout the ceremony planning process.”*

**11. Are there any traditions or rituals you’d like to include? Any you want to leave out?**

Your ceremony should reflect you and your partner—so be prepared to answer these important wedding officiant questions as a couple. *“I want to be able to incorporate the rituals or traditions each half of the couple wants into their ceremony,”* says Eisenberg. *“This is particularly important for [interfaith couples](#), who want to create a unified ceremony that is connected to their pasts or to their families’ observances. Another reason for this question is that the couple may say they want a Unity Ritual, but aren’t sure what kind. I’ll work with them to design a ritual that is appropriate for them and that takes into consideration the location and theme of their wedding. The other reason for this question is to determine if there is some research I need to do to enable me to lead the activity they want. If the couple wants a ‘tie the knot’ ritual and I’ve never done that before, I need to learn how and practice.”*