

## *Wedding Day Timeline Sample + Guide*

### TO USE THIS SCHEDULE:

- Navigate to **File** (under “Caitlin Cooper’s Sample Wedding Schedule”)
- Google Users: Select **Make a Copy**
  - Sign in (if necessary)
  - Save to your Google Drive
- Non-Google Users: Select **Download As** (or get a Google Account for free!)
- Customize and delete highlighted portions in final schedule
- Share your final schedule with me through Drive or email

A schedule helps with the flow of a Wedding Day, eliminates any unexpected surprises, and keeps me from missing any key moments. Feel free to customize, omit, and rearrange this schedule as you see fit. Make sure to send me the final schedule **no fewer than two weeks** before the wedding date to give us time to make adjustments if necessary. It’s also a good idea to share the finalized schedule with the wedding party, family members, and other vendors.

Please feel free to refer to these articles in [BRIDES](#) and [A Practical Wedding](#)—both of which I utilized when assembling this—as you’re customizing the schedule.

## 9:30 a.m. Bridal Party Meets for Breakfast

*Location Name, Address, City, Zip*

This is a sample activity you may or may not have planned with your friends and family before the official activities of the day begin. This could also be a chance for you and your partner to share a few quiet moments before the craziness of the day sets in. (*I love this idea.*) Feel free to omit this section, if necessary.

## 10:30 a.m. Bridal Party + Hair/Makeup Arrive

*Location Name, Address, City, Zip*

I honestly have no idea exactly how long it will take you to get ready from start to finish. I only have this slotted in here to give you a jumping off point - make sure to check in with your hair/makeup artists to customize this time.

## 1:30 p.m. Photographer Arrives

*Location Name, Address, City, Zip*

I like to arrive a minimum of 30 minutes before you're ready to get dressed. This gives me time to photograph key details, such as your wardrobe, rings, perfume or cologne bottle, accessories, and invitations. Please try to have these items on hand before I arrive. If you would like to have both you and your partner's getting ready time photographed, this time will be earlier and something we need to plan for before the wedding day (*it may require me bringing along a second photographer*). I'll also be photographing everyone who is getting ready with you at this time - these images are meant to be candid, but it's a good idea to give your friends and family a heads up that they'll be appearing in casual photos.

## 2:15 p.m. Wedding Party is dressed, your hair/makeup is complete

Unless you want your bridal party photos all in matching robes/etc, the bridal party + key family should be dressed and ready by the time your hair and/or makeup is complete. This way, everyone can participate while you're getting dressed. Make sure your bridal party cleans up the area so no one is tripping and there are no neon duffle bags, garbage, or empty water bottles in the background of these photos.

## 2:15 p.m. Casual Bridal Party Photos (*optional*)

These photos are meant to be casual and fun, capturing the moments of celebration between you and your friends. If you want any special shots, such as toasting with champagne, jumping on a bed, etc. make sure we schedule these in and you have the props or area ready (*champagne flutes, a clean bed, etc*). There will be more 'traditional' group portraits later, too.

## 2:30 p.m. You Get Dressed

This is typically a candid activity; your friends or family are helping you get dressed, assisting with shoes and jewelry, hugging, and maybe tearing up a little bit.

## 2:45 p.m. Solo Portraits

Just you, at or near the place you just got ready, or at a designated location if time permits. It's great if you have the flowers at this point, but not required.

## 3:00 - 3:20 p.m. First Look + Portraits 01

*Location Name, Address, City, Zip*

The first look is a special moment where you see your partner for the first time, away from the dozens of eyes that will be watching during the ceremony. This time also helps ease the nerves you may be feeling. To keep this moment intimate, I recommend telling your family and wedding party to give you privacy. (*If they insist on joining and you'd rather they don't, just tell them that I requested it.*)

## 3:30 - 4:00 p.m. Bridal Party Photos

*Location Name, Address, City, Zip*

These are the group photos with all members of the wedding party, including individual portraits of you with each member of the wedding party, if you want them.

## 4:10 - 4:45 p.m. Wedding Party + Family Photos

*Location Name, Address, City, Zip - (Recommended: Ceremony Location)*

Family photos can be stressful for everyone involved, but I promise they won't be if you follow my lead. Make sure to supply me with a detailed family list ahead of time (*this is important!*) and if I don't have a second photographer, you designate your most responsible family member or friend (*typically not someone in a majority of the photos*) to help me identify and organize family. Please make sure they know about this ahead of time!

I also *highly* recommend scheduling all Family and Wedding Party Photos to take place during this time *before* the ceremony. Otherwise, it will be like herding cats trying to track people down after the ceremony when all of the other guests are also present and everyone just wants to socialize. Additionally, I prefer taking those precious, immediate post-ceremony minutes to grab some "We're MARRIED!" portraits of just the two of you, as you'll both be feeling a variety of emotions at that time.

## 5:00 p.m. Catch Your Breath Time

This is when you take a few minutes to relax, drink some water, and get excited.

## 5:30 p.m. Ceremony Start Time Listed on Wedding Invitation

*Location Name, Address, City, Zip*

Many weddings don't actually start right at the listed time on the invitation. This gives your habitually late cousin a chance to find their seat before the aisle is crowded with bridesmaids, or to make up for the fact that the President is in town and their motorcade is messing up traffic

*(this has actually happened)*. There's typically music playing at this time, and I keep hearing more and more about pre-ceremony cocktail hours *(which I think is an AMAZING idea!)*

## 5:40 p.m. Actual Start Time

## 5:45 - 6:15 p.m. Ceremony

This time is different for every wedding and entirely depends on the type of ceremony you're having. Typically, secular ceremonies last around 15-20 minutes, while religious ceremonies can last up to an hour or more. Once I photographed a secular wedding which included the couple's friend reading the monologue from "When Harry Met Sally" as well as other performances by friends, and that *definitely* lasted more than 20 minutes, so it's totally up to you two here.

## 6:15 - 7:15 p.m. Cocktail Hour + Portraits 02

*Location Name, Address, City, Zip*

Invite guests to cocktail hour while we head out for those "We're MARRIED!" photos I mentioned earlier. Depending on the timing of sunset and how many photos we take (typically no more than 10-15 minutes), we may cut this session a little short so you can rejoin cocktail hour and to save time to capture more photos at sunset.

## 7:15 p.m. Reception: Guests invited to Dinner

*Location Name, Address, City, Zip*

## 7:30 p.m. Grand Entrance

## 7:35 - 7:45 p.m. Welcome Toasts from Hosts *(optional)*

The first two toasts in the wedding reception timeline are considered welcome toasts or a prayer before dinner and they are typically offered by the parents, officiant, or a family member of the couple.

## 7:45 - 8:30 p.m. Dinner

## 8:15 - 8:35 p.m. Portraits 03 @ Sunset *(this time varies)*

These are those dreamy, romantic, golden-hued photos you've probably seen *(scroll ¾ of the way down [this blog post](#) to see what I mean)*. We can definitely chat more about these photos and where exactly we want them to take place, but I recommend at or near the reception location. I always check the time of sunset when we're planning the schedule, but you can do so, too, by Googling: "[city, state] sunset time [wedding date]"

## **8:40 - 8:55 p.m. Bridal Party Toasts**

As dinner is wrapping up (*a planner or coordinator could offer you the best advice on this, but it's typically right after the last table has been served*) any members of the wedding party or family can offer their toasts during this slot of the wedding schedule. Always give a time limit to these people; less than five minutes is a good rule of thumb.

## **8:55 - 9:05 p.m. Parent Dances + Open Dance Floor**

These dances typically take place immediately following toasts. If you or your partner don't wish to participate, I've seen many weddings start the open dance with a wedding party dance and a high energy song.

## **9:30 - 9:45 p.m. Cake Cutting, Bouquet/Garter, Night Portraits (*if desired*)**

Not everyone wants to do a Cake Cutting, Bouquet/Garter Toss, or Night Portraits and this is, obviously, totally up to you! And honestly, I salute you for doing whatever makes the most sense to you two.

As for the Night Portraits, they would take less than 5 minutes somewhere outside after the sun has set - don't worry, I'll figure this part out on the day and pull you aside at the most opportune moment. They're usually a great chance to catch your breath with your new spouse.

## **11:30 p.m. Grand Exit**

These are those sparkler photos you see on Pinterest, or any number of other creative exit ideas (*from experience: glow sticks do not work well for this*). Arrange for a final song with your DJ or band ahead of time, and also arrange to be cued that the final song is coming up. If you're having an exit with sparklers, make sure to plan ahead with the venue coordinator and ask their advice for best practices.