

How To Choose a Wedding Photographer

Without a doubt, selecting your wedding photographer is one of the most important planning decisions you will make, and unfortunately often one of the most frustrating decisions. Sifting through all the various photography styles, options, approaches and personalities can turn the mellowest bride into a three-alarm bridezilla.

Don't stress, instead just boil it down to the basics of the four P's of photography: **Pictures, personality, price and professionalism.** Whatever photographer does the best job of combining the four P's is the one for you.

- **Pictures** – Are the photos featured on the photographer's website what you have always wanted your wedding photos to look like? Do you see a solid mix of photojournalism (unposed candid photos) and posed portraiture? Today's couples don't settle for coverage that consists primarily of hundreds of posed photos. Yet because photojournalistic wedding coverage is still relatively new, very few wedding photographers have the talent and energy required to take true photojournalistic style, spur-of-the-moment photos. Look at several *entire* weddings, not a "greatest hits" mix of many weddings.
- **Personality** – Great personality is every bit as important as great photos. All good photographers radiate a special energy, a vibe that pulls you in and lets you know that you and your wedding are important to them. Until you feel that vibe, keep looking. Keep asking yourself, "will we and our guests enjoy this person all day?" If you don't like your photographer, it will show in your photos.
- **Price** – *Exactly* what are you getting for your money? Do you have the freedom to buy exactly what you want and only what you want? (See "Packages" below). Are reprint prices reasonable? Never feel that you had to buy something, or had to settle for something less than exactly what you wanted. Make all your special requests before signing a contract, and if the photographer is inflexible, walk away.
- **Professionalism** – Can you visit a great website with *lots* of photos, flair and information, including prices? Most over-priced photographers don't list their prices on their websites. Are there *lots* of testimonials from happy customers? In many ways these days, wedding photographers can be judged largely by the quality of their websites. Does the photographer have a studio where you can meet to consult and see more work? Does the studio reflect current tastes or take you back to 1975? Is this photographer promoting great photography or hooking you with some goofy special promotion of the month like free champagne glasses or a free iPod? Free merchandise won't matter when your photos turn out crummy or aren't ready for six months or longer after your wedding.

If you found the four P's helpful, here are some more important tips for finding your ideal wedding photographer.

- **Packages** – in a word, why? Why should you have to commit to a reprint package, album or anything else before you see the results? What if you don't like the results? You should have the freedom to make your decisions based on the results, with no time restrictions for ordering after the wedding. Discounts for big buyers are great, while being forced to buy reprints or albums before the wedding is absurd.
- **Who *exactly* will cover your day?** Ask to see work by the person who will cover your day – work done by any other photographer simply doesn't matter. Meet with that person *before* signing a contract. If you can't meet your photographer at the consult, walk away. That's like buying a car without driving it.

- **Copyrights** – Are the full copyrights and high-resolution images included in the coverage, or do you have to buy the copyrights separately? These days most couples want control of the high-resolution images, meaning you can make your own prints or albums.
- **Speed** – How fast will your proofs and CDs etc. be ready after the wedding? Less than one month turnaround time is excellent, whereas two months or longer is simply lazy customer service. One of the greatest joys of your wedding photography is enjoying your professional images while you are still basking in the “honeymoon glow.”

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