

THE OFFICIANT ACADEMY



WEDDING CEREMONY BASICS

Please keep in mind that a marriage ceremony represents a legally-binding commitment between two people, and that it must be treated with dignity, sincerity and respect. To solemnize a marriage, you should follow this general procedure:

- ❖ The parties to the marriage must themselves obtain a valid marriage license from the office of the county clerk (or from the designated issuing authority within their jurisdiction) and present it to the Wedding Officiant *before* the marriage ceremony.
- ❖ The Wedding Officiant performs the marriage ceremony; an example of a standard ceremony is included on the back of this page. The ceremony may be personalized to meet the bridal couple's preferences, and they may even write and exchange their own vows as long as those vows reflect their intentions to enter into a legally-binding commitment to each other.
- ❖ The Wedding Officiant is responsible for completing the certificate portion of the marriage license and returning it to the proper issuing authority within the legally stipulated timeframe after solemnizing the marriage. *Please read the marriage license instructions before the ceremony.*

SAMPLE MARRIAGE VOWS

At minimum by law in nearly every jurisdiction, the ceremony must include language spoken (or repeated, or agreed to) by the parties to the marriage through which they acknowledge their binding mutual commitment to each other. The following is a sample of commonly-used wording that meets this requirement.

EXCHANGE OF VOWS

Officiant asks SPOUSE 1, "[SPOUSE 1'S NAME], do you take [SPOUSE 2] to be your partner in marriage, to live together in [holy] matrimony, to love, honor, comfort and keep in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, for as long as you both shall live?" (SPOUSE 1 responds, "I do.")

Officiant asks SPOUSE 2, "[SPOUSE 2'S NAME], do you take [SPOUSE 1] to be your partner in marriage, to live together in [holy] matrimony, to love, honor, comfort and keep in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, for as long as you both shall live?" (SPOUSE 2 responds, "I do.")

Officiant states to SPOUSE 1, "Please repeat after me: I, [SPOUSE 1], take you [SPOUSE 2], to be my partner in marriage, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, for as long as we shall live."

Officiant states to SPOUSE 2, "I, [SPOUSE 2], take you [SPOUSE 1], to be my partner in marriage, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, for as long as we shall live."

EXCHANGE OF RINGS

Officiant asks SPOUSE 1 to place the ring on SPOUSE 2's finger and to repeat the following, "I give you this ring as a token and pledge of our constant faith and abiding love." (Repeat the same for SPOUSE 2.)

PRONOUNCEMENT

Officiant asks the couple to join hands, then declares, "By virtue of the authority vested in me, and in accordance with the laws of the state of [STATE NAME], it is my honor to now pronounce that you are married to each other. You may now kiss each other to seal your vows."

THE WEDDING CEREMONY CHEAT SHEET

*The Common Marriage Ceremony Format generally follows these basic steps.
Each ceremony is unique, so feel free to adapt the format to fit your situation.*

PROCESSIONAL

The Groom, Best Man, Groomsmen and Officiant will generally assemble first at the altar, after which the Maid of Honor and Bridesmaids enter up the aisle, followed by the Flower Girl and Ring Bearer. Finally, the Officiant invites the guests to rise as the Wedding March is played and the Bride is escorted to the altar.

WELCOMING

The Officiant invites the guests to be seated, then welcomes everyone and announces the purpose of this gathering, which is to unite the Bride and Groom in matrimony.

OPENING READING OR PRAYER

The Officiant or a guest may read a passage from a favorite poem, story, prayer or sacred tract that has been chosen by the Bride and Groom. A favorite musical selection may also be performed or substituted for the reading.

DECLARATION OF INTENTIONS

The Officiant explains that marriage is a legally binding commitment that both parties enter into with mutual consent, and that entering into a marriage changes the legal status of both parties and gives each new rights and obligations. The Officiant then asks the Bride and Groom, in turn, if it is their intention to be married to each other at this time. If each answers affirmatively, the Ceremony proceeds.

EXCHANGE OF VOWS AND RINGS

The Officiant invites the couple to face each other and join hands with each other, then leads them through the exchange of vows. A sample script with standard vows is included on the other side of this document. (The Bride and Groom may also, at this point, read or recite their own personal vows or expression of love to each other.) The Bride and Groom exchange rings, repeating "I give you this ring as a token and pledge of my constant faith and abiding love" as they place the ring on the other's finger.

PRONOUNCEMENT AND INTRODUCTION

The Officiant makes the official public pronouncement of marriage, then introduces the couple to the guests for the first time as Husband and Wife. A sample script with the standard pronouncement is included on the other side of this document.

RECESSIONAL

Following their introduction, the married couple exits down the aisle, followed by the Best Man and Maid of Honor, and the other members of the bridal party, generally in the reverse order of their entrance.

LEGAL PROCESS

The Marriage is not legal and cannot be registered unless the Marriage License is signed by the Bride and Groom and witnesses (if required), and completed and returned to the issuing authority in a timely manner.

Do not leave the wedding ceremony venue without making certain that the Marriage License is completed!

Wedding Ceremony Basics: The Marriage License

The marriage license – the official, legal contract that “marries” two people together – can be a very confusing piece of paper. As the Marriage Officiant, it is *not your responsibility* to obtain the marriage license; that is 100% the responsibility of the bridal couple. They must go on their own to their local county courthouse or city hall,¹ usually together² in person, to fill out the marriage license application, present their legal identification (such as a driver’s license or passport) and sign the form before the issuing clerk.

Again, it is *not your responsibility* to obtain the marriage license for your couple.

On the other hand, it is *absolutely your responsibility* to make sure that they have their marriage license with them on their wedding day!



*Always remember this:
No marriage license? No marriage ceremony!*

Easy enough? If your couple hasn’t gone down to the county courthouse or city hall to pick up their marriage license before the wedding, you cannot legally perform the marriage ceremony. *Period.*

If it’s the wedding day, and they don’t have their marriage license with them at the ceremony – that is, if you have not physically reviewed it with them – then you cannot legally perform the marriage ceremony.

Period. Don’t even think about doing it.

Don’t say, “We’ll do the ceremony, and you can get your marriage license later.” It doesn’t work that way!

When you get to the ceremony planning stage with your couple, ask them immediately what their plans are for obtaining their marriage license. If they haven’t made plans yet, please stress to them how important this step is in the process – without their marriage license, there can be no wedding ceremony, and they *cannot* be legally married.

Usually, the couple will obtain their marriage license in the county where they live. If they are getting married in another state, they must obtain their marriage license in that state; marriage licenses cannot “travel” over state lines.³ In most states, however, if you obtain a marriage license in one county within the state, it can be used in any county within the same state.

Some states have a waiting period before a marriage license can be solemnized – a “cooling off” period of time, ranging from one to three days, that gives one or the other parties to the marriage the chance to bail out in case they get what is known classically as “cold feet.” This is meant to preclude those situations in which a couple, in the throes of romantic exhilaration, decides to tie the knot on the spur of the moment; if the marriage license can’t be solemnized for a day or two (or three) and that passion wanes, it’s a built-in “out” that can save the couple a lifetime of regret and misery by simply tearing up or returning the license.

¹ — In some states, county clerks issue marriage licenses, while some states issue marriage licenses through county courts or town clerks. Not sure who issues them in your state? Enter “marriage license” and your state or county’s name into your favorite search engine for a quick answer.

² — There are exceptions to this in some cases. Depending on their situation – usually due to military service – a few states permit just one member of the bridal couple to appear. The couple should contact the issuing clerk’s office for information if they are both unable to appear in person.

³ — But your couple *should not worry!* Even though they are getting married in another state, using that state’s marriage license, their marriage will be recognized throughout the United States – as long as they obtained it legally. Every state recognizes and accepts marriage licenses that are properly certified in other states.

If your state has a waiting period, keep in mind that you may apply for your marriage license on Thursday, but with a three-day waiting period (meaning three business days, not including Saturdays, Sundays and holidays) the marriage license can't be "used" until the following Tuesday – so there goes your weekend wedding!

You may move on to other parts of the ceremony planning process, but always – *always* – keep the marriage license in the back of your mind. If your couple doesn't obtain their marriage license in a timely manner, and if they don't have it in their possession at the ceremony, the entire process of conducting the ceremony is meaningless.



Flash Quiz Time!

Don't worry – it's an open-book test, so you can refer back to the information we've presented in case you haven't memorized everything yet. That will come with time and experience.

Here's the scenario: you are the Wedding Officiant. You live in Kansas. Your bridal couple lives in Iowa. They are going to have their marriage ceremony in Nebraska.

QUESTION 1: Where must your couple obtain their marriage license?

- A. In Nebraska, where they are getting married.
- B. In Kansas, where you live.
- C. In Iowa, where they live.
- D. It doesn't matter.

QUESTION 2: In order to perform this ceremony, your ordination must comply with the laws of:

- A. Your home state.
- B. The state the bridal couple lives in.
- C. The state where the marriage ceremony takes place.
- D. It doesn't matter.

QUESTION 3: After the marriage ceremony, the completed marriage license must be returned to:

- A. The bridal couple.
- B. The Social Security Administration in Washington, D.C.
- C. The clerk's office in the city or county where it was issued.
- D. It doesn't matter.

Ready for the answers? In each case, there's actually quite a bit of common sense involved, so you should have eliminated "D" in every instance – it actually *does* matter!

Question 1 asks where the bridal couple must obtain their marriage license. Since the ceremony is taking place in Nebraska, the only logical answer is (A) Nebraska. The marriage license must be issued in the state where the ceremony takes place.

Question 2 takes into account your ordination. You live in Kansas, and you may have performed marriage ceremonies not only in your home state, but throughout the Midwest. However, since the wedding is taking place in Nebraska, the correct answer is (C), the state where the marriage ceremony takes place. If you are not sure if your ordination permits you to serve outside your home state, please contact us.

Question 3 was actually a trick question. If the completed marriage license is not returned in a timely manner to the office that issued it, it may be voided – which means, by law, that the wedding never took place, and your couple is *not legally married*. That makes (C) the logical choice here.