

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF WEDDING OFFICIANTS



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."

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!