

The "How To" Guide for Picking a Wedding Photographer...

Most wedding magazines will give you a list of questions to ask your wedding photographer. Stuff like: "Can you describe your style? What equipment do you shoot with?" Let's be real: Those questions are boring.

So I surveyed some brides and photography-friends, and put together a list of all those questions you really want to ask, and all those things we really want you to know.

1. How do I pick a good photographer when there are hundreds listed in my area?

Make sure you're meeting with the person who will be wielding the camera at your wedding, not a sales consultant or studio owner, or e-mailing all these people you find as you search. You have to, like, *trust* and get along with your photographer – that way you can leave the magic of photo making in the photographer's hands. Not only should you like their images, you should also like them! You'll be spending many hours with them during your wedding day.

2. How many photos do I get?

The wedding photographers I surveyed typically deliver 50+ photos for every hour of coverage they provide. Four hundred photos may seem like a lot, but your wedding photographer is preserving all those little details and the moments you missed while you were mingling. Something I also noticed is most photographers do not give you unlimited images; they have a set amount and you are able to purchase more if you are interested!

3. I love those photos with the blurry backgrounds. How do you get that look? You're talking about shallow depth of field. Photographers get that look by using professional lenses that are able to focus tightly on the subject.

4. I found one photographer whose images look soft and pastel, one whose images look clean, and one whose images look like they were shot on old film. What's the deal?

Every photographer has a different way of editing their images using computer software (the high-tech version of a darkroom). This is called "Post-Processing." Most photographers do some basic lighting and color adjustments, but you can

also use editing software to create a unique look. Three popular styles right now are:

- Clean: lightly processed to appear natural
- Matte: a low-contrast look with muted pastel colors, similar to vintage film
- High Contrast: a vibrant look with rich colors that pop

It doesn't matter which style you go with, as long as you love it!

5. Why is wedding photography so freakin' expensive?

This is the question I see most from brides on the interwebs. Wedding photography seems like easy money — work for one day and rake in the cash, right? But most full-time wedding photographers I know carry over \$20,000 worth of wedding gear and often work 60-hour weeks. (Remember those 400 images from question #2? It takes several full days, and weeks just to edit those.)

Add insurance, taxes, software, advertising, albums, repair, shipping, and studio expenses, and many photographers end up making less than minimum wage for the first few years of their career.

6. How can I make sure I look good in my photos?

If you're relaxed, it'll come through in your photos.

Leave some breathing room in your schedule so you don't feel rushed — I recommend a minimum 30 minutes for family AND wedding party photos, and an hour for the couple portraits.

Oh, and get plenty of sleep and drink lots of water the night before. Take it easy at the rehearsal dinner. Wedding-day hangovers are not fun.

7. I keep hearing about "shoot and burn" photography. Sounds painful. What is it?

Actually, yeah, it can be kind of painful. "Shoot and burn" is slang for photographing a wedding and burning it straight to CD without post-processing. It's usually super cheap — for a reason. Bad lighting isn't corrected, distracting elements aren't removed (hello, Speedo-clad photobomber!), and zits remain proudly on display.

Digital files may be important to you, but find a full-service photographer who will edit the images and print reference proofs before handing over the digis.

8. Should we do a "first look"? And, um, what the hell is a "first look"?

A first look is when the Bride and Groom see another for the first time on the wedding day (PRIOR TO THE WEDDING). This option is completely up to you. Some couples want to do this because they are close to one another, others do not want to spoil the surprise before the ceremony.

(Honestly, it's also a great way to avoid stress on your wedding day. (Some of my couples even choose to get ready together!) And many of my couples get to enjoy their whole cocktail hour because they got all of the photos out of the way before the wedding.)

9. Do I really need a second photographer?

No one *needs* a second photographer, but they can provide you with more images and a different perspective. Many of the top photographers only work with assistants who carry gear and help with professional lighting. The best thing is to ask your wedding photographer to see how they prefer to work. You can get good results either way.

10. How far in advance should I book a wedding photographer?

Many in-demand wedding photographers book weddings at over a year out. As it gets closer to your wedding date, it will be harder to book your first-choice photographer.

If your favorite photographer is unavailable on your date, don't panic. Ask them for recommendations — they may know someone with a similar style and a lighter schedule.

11. You can Photoshop that, right?

It depends. As a photographer, I want to get everything as perfect as possible in camera. Posing, location scouting, and camera settings can "fix" most things before I even click the shutter. If your uncle photobombs you, I'm going to retake the photo — it's much easier to get the photo right than to fix it with Photoshop. Many photographers charge for extensive editing in Photoshop, because it can be very time-consuming.

12. Should I tip my photographer?

There's so much conflicting information on the internet, it's no wonder tipping wedding vendors can be such a perplexing topic to so many couples. For photographers, "Tips are never expected but are always appreciated."

Hopefully this clears up some burning questions about wedding photography and makes it a little bit easier to find the perfect photographer for your wedding day, and CONGRATS- this will be one of the best days of your life!