

THE FOLLOWING TIMELINES ARE MEANT TO ONLY BE SAMPLES. FEEL FREE TO CREATE YOUR OWN AND SHARE WITH THE PHOTOGRAPHER. IT IS A GREAT IDEA TO HAVE A TIME FRAME SCHEDULED, SO THAT EVERYONE INVOLVED IN YOUR SPECIAL DAY WILL HAVE A BETTER IDEA OF WHAT IS GOING ON.

WEDDING DAY TIMELINE WITH A 4PM START TIME

Because the 4pm ceremony time, 10pm reception end (with both ceremony and reception in the same venue), with secular ceremony and photos beforehand is one of the most common formats I work with, so I'm going to start with that.

- 10:00am—Hair and Makeup/Getting ready
- 12:00–2:00pm—Most vendors arrive for setup
- 2:00pm—Wedding party and family photos start
- 3:30pm—Doors open/Guests begin to arrive/Pre-ceremony music starts
- 4:00pm—Invite time
- 4:15pm—Ceremony starts
- 4:35pm—Ceremony ends
- 4:40pm—Cocktail hour starts
- 5:45pm—Move guests into dinner
- 6:00pm—Buffet opens/Dinner served
- 6:20pm—All guests have food
- 6:30pm—Toasts
- 7:30pm—First dance
- 7:35pm—General dancing music starts
- 8:00pm—Second set of pre-sunset portraits
- 8:26pm—Sunset
- 8:30pm—Dessert
- 9:45pm—Last call
- 9:55pm—Music off

- 10:00pm—Guests depart
- 11:00pm—Breakdown done, all staff departs

MORNING WEDDING TIMELINE

Morning weddings are lovely, and until recently were actually pretty much the norm. Also—who doesn't love brunch food? Or an excuse to drink champagne. Here's a sample morning wedding timeline:

- 7:00am—Hair and makeup starts
- 8:30am—Vendors arrive/Setup starts
- 9:00am—First look and couple's portraits
- 9:30am—Family pictures
- 9:30am—Guests begin to arrive
- 10:00am—Invite time
- 10:15 am—Ceremony starts
- 10:45am—Ceremony concludes
- 10:45am—Cocktail "hour" starts/Additional family photos
- 11:30am—Brunch starts
- 12:15pm—Toasts
- 1:00pm—First dance
- 1:30pm—Cake cutting/Dessert
- 2:45pm—Couple departs
- 3:00pm—Guests depart
- 3:00pm—Breakdown commences
- 4:00pm—All vendors out

EARLY AFTERNOON WEDDING TIMELINE

Afternoon weddings are a happy medium, and they can work especially well for all-outdoor events. Not only do you not have to get up super early, but afternoon weddings still leave enough time for just the two of you to go out for dinner. (Seriously, if your reception is a meal other than dinner, and you're not planning on hanging out with your guests later, please build room in your budget to take yourselves out to a lovely meal somewhere.) This is also a very kid-friendly timeline,

which may be important to you if there are lots of small people in your life:

- 9:00am—Hair and makeup starts
- 9:30am—Vendors arrive/Setup starts
- 9:30am—Getting ready photos start
- 10:00am—First look and couple’s portraits
- 10:45am—Family pictures
- 11:00am—Guests begin to arrive
- 1:00pm—Invite time
- 1:15pm—Ceremony starts
- 1:35pm—Ceremony concludes
- 1:40pm—Cocktail “hour” starts/Additional family photos
- 2:30pm—Lunch starts
- 3:00pm—Toasts
- 3:30pm—First dance
- 5:00pm—Cake cutting/Dessert
- 6:15pm—Couple departs
- 6:30pm—Guests depart
- 6:30pm—Breakdown commences
- 7:30pm—All vendors out

LATER EVENING WEDDING TIMELINE

I love a good evening party myself, so if you want people to party until midnight, then a later-in-the-evening wedding is a good bet. It should be noted that the evening wedding tends not to be particularly kid friendly, so if you have a large number of little ones you’d like to include in your festivities, then an evening wedding may not be the best option for you (few kids are going to make it to a dinner that’s past their bedtime without a meltdown...). Of course the biggest win from an evening wedding, as far as I’m concerned, is that you can start your wedding day off by sleeping in! Here’s how that would look:

- 1:00pm—Hair and makeup start

- 4:30pm—Vendors arrive for setup
- 4:30pm—Pre-ceremony photos
- 5:30pm—Guests begin to arrive/Couple arrives
- 6:30pm—Invite time
- 6:45pm—Ceremony starts
- 7:00pm—Ceremony ends/Guests move to cocktail hour
- 8:00pm—Guests move to dinner
- 9:30pm—Cake cutting/Dessert served/Toasts
- 9:45pm—Dancing
- 11:45pm—End time/Guests out
- 12:45am—Breakdown done/Vendors depart

OPEN HOUSE RECEPTION TIMELINE

Maybe you're having a small wedding, or a private religious ceremony, but still want to celebrate with your broader community. Or your wedding is far away from where you grew up, so you want to do a second reception for your childhood and family friends. Enter the open house reception. The beautiful thing about an open house reception is that it can kind of be anything you want. Some examples of what it can look like:

- 2:00pm–5:00pm—Cake, champagne, and punch. People will drop by, say hi, have some cake—done!
- 4:00pm–9:00pm—Hors d'oeuvres, wine and beer, cheese and fruit platters. People will come for a little longer, linger a little longer, but still not expect a full party or wedding.

The key is to call it an open house and put the end time (along with the start time) on the invitation. That way people know exactly what to expect, and they know that they should just plan on dropping by for an hour or so. “Please join us in celebrating the recent marriage of Maude and Pat at an open house reception. 4:00–9:00pm on Saturday, March 30, 2013, at the home of The Smiths, 123 Main Street, Oakland, California.”

COCKTAIL PARTY STYLE RECEPTION TIMELINE

I will admit that this is actually my favorite type of wedding reception, probably because cocktail parties are my favorite types of parties. For a cocktail style reception you don't need tables or seating for everyone, although you should have some scattered throughout, particularly if you're going to have older guests. The key is continuous rounds of food, with some heavier things around "dinner" time, and a menu that consists of food that can be eaten standing up (so, no knives, but forks are fine!) and served on smaller plates (because, big plates are awkward when you have to hold them standing up). A cocktail reception might look something like the following:

- 3:00pm—Vendors arrive for setup
- 4:30pm—Guests begin to arrive
- 5:00pm—Invite time
- 5:15pm—Ceremony starts
- 5:30pm—Ceremony ends
- 5:30pm—First round of food comes out/Bar opens
- 5:30pm—Music starts inside
- 6:30pm—Pre-sunset portraits
- 6:45pm—"Dinner" rounds of food come out
- 7:07pm—Sunset
- 7:15pm—Toasts
- 7:30pm—First dance
- 8:00pm—Couple's "Thank You" toast followed by cake cutting
- 9:00pm—Couple and guests depart
- 10:00pm—Breakdown done/Vendors out

SEPARATE CEREMONY AND RECEPTION TIMES

Sometimes having a time gap between the ceremony and reception is inevitable—the religious venue won't schedule ceremonies after a certain time of day, or you simply can't schedule back to back ceremonies and receptions at your two venues due to availability. While not always ideal, gaps aren't that uncommon, or even that difficult to deal with. The first thing to think about (as with most parts of your wedding) is guest comfort. Do most of your guests live within a

short driving distance? Or are they staying in nearby hotels? Are there things to do (coffee shops, museums, shopping) around one or both of your sites? Make sure your guests don't have to spend a "gap" sitting in their cars in the parking lot, or awkwardly hanging out in the lobby of your reception venue waiting for it to start.

In general, if you have to have a gap I think the ideal amount of time is about two to three hours, assuming that both venues and the hotels are within a half hour of each other. This actually gives people enough time to say, go and hang out and get some coffee, or go back to their hotel room to change/take a short nap, or check out some local galleries and stores. The one hour gap is the, I have to say it, worst. It's not enough time to actually do anything, but too much time to... not do anything. So, if your reason for a gap is that you want to do photos after the ceremony but not miss cocktail hour, the solution is to do a one and a half to two hour cocktail hour. Because asking guests to stand around with nothing to do and nothing to eat or drink is just not very hospitable.

Here's a sample of a wedding timeline with a two-hour gap between the ceremony and reception:

- 9:00am—Hair and Makeup/Getting ready
- 11:00am–1:00pm—Vendors arrive for ceremony setup
- 12:00pm—Wedding party and family photos start
- 1:30pm—Doors open/Guests begin to arrive/Pre-ceremony music starts
- 2:00pm—Ceremony invite time
- 2:15pm—Ceremony starts
- 3:00pm—Ceremony ends
- 3:00pm—Vendors start to arrive for reception set up
- 3:30pm—Guests gone from ceremony site
- 4:00pm—Ceremony site cleaned up/vendors depart
- 5:00pm—Reception invite time
- 5:00pm—Cocktail hour starts

- 5:30pm—All guests onsite
 - 6:30pm—Move guests into dinner
 - 6:45pm—Buffet opens/Dinner served
 - 7:00pm—All guests have food
 - 7:15pm—Toasts
 - 8:00pm—First dance
 - 8:05pm—General dancing music starts
 - 8:05pm—Second set of pre-sunset portraits
 - 8:26pm—Sunset
 - 8:45pm—Dessert
 - 9:45pm—Last call
 - 9:55pm—Music off
 - 10:00pm—Guests depart
 - 11:00pm—Breakdown done, all staff departs
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