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I've Selected some of the best information from my expereince as well as extra research frommany sites. The pourpose of this PDF is to help you make the best decision on hiring a professional Photographer for your wedding day. I have put together some great information both as a 10 step view and understanding of hiring and working with a professional photographer as well as some amazing questions and answers. Enjoy.

Step 1:

Settle on a Style Before you begin researching photographers, you'll need to first decide what type of photography style you prefer, as that will help determine which kind of photographer you'll want shooting your wedding. Get inspired! Spend time pouring over any kind of imagery you love, from décor shots to a fashion blogger's Instagram feed. Once you have a good collection of inspiring photographs, try to narrow in on what draws you to them specifically and dissect what feels most authentic to you and your partner. Maybe that's formal-posed portraits, a classic photography style or a lifestyle, photojournalistic feel. If you love sharp and contrast-y shots, perhaps a photographer with a flair for the dramatic is the right choice for you. Remember that you don't necessarily need to narrow in on one style in particular, since many wedding photographers can do a blend of portraiture and documentary-style shots, a mix of black-and-white and color images and so on. But if there's a special style you love, make sure to focus on photographers who specialize in it.



Step 2:

Do Your Homework! Start your search by reading reviews from recent newlyweds and browsing local listings, like the ones on The Knot Marketplace. Carefully review potential photographers' websites and blogs to check out photos of other weddings they've shot, which will give you an idea of their style. How do they capture the moments important to you, like a mother bustling her daughter's gown or an emotional first look? The design of the website may also have clues about the photographer's personality and sensibility. Check out their Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages too, if possible. Is the feedback from clients positive? How does the photographer respond? How do they interact with their Instagram followers, do they seem friendly and personable? You get the idea.

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Step 3:

Set Up Interviews. This is not a decision that can be made on looks alone—you must meet your potential photographers in person. If you like what you see on their site—and their fees are in your ballpark range—call to see if they're available for your wedding date. If available, go ahead and send an introductory email with a bit about you and your soon-to-be spouse, your event and the vision for your day, and feel free to attach five or so of your very favorite photos from your research so they know what you love. If the photographer is already booked on your date, you may want to see if they have an associate or can recommend another shooter with a similar style. Set up in-person meetings with three to five potential photographers who are available on your wedding date to look at more of their work and assess whether your personalities mesh. Be prepared to talk about your venue, wedding style and what you envision for your photos.

Step 4:

See a Few Full Wedding Albums. Don't base your decision solely on what you see in a photographer's highlights gallery or album. For good reason, photographers show prospective clients a portfolio of their best pictures, all from different weddings, so you're seeing the best of the best. The problem with that is you won't get a well-rounded idea of their work. Ask to see two or three full galleries from real weddings they've shot (not someone else at their company) so you can get a better idea of what your complete collection of photos might look like after the wedding. If you see that the full gallery photos are just about as good as the ones chosen in the highlight gallery (that is, they're all so good it's impossible to choose!), you're on the right track. And ask to see at least one or two complete albums of weddings that are in similar settings to yours. For example, if you're planning an indoor affair with dark lighting, don't just look at weddings shot outdoors in natural sunlight. And if you're planning to say "I do" on a beach at sunset, you'll want to see examples of that.

Step 5:

Review Albums With a Critical Eye

When reviewing a photographer's album, look for the key moments you want captured: Did they get photos of both the bride and the groom when they locked eyes for the first time? Also look for crispness of images, thoughtful compositions (does a shot look good the way it was framed, or is there too much clutter in the frame?) and good lighting (beware of washed-out pictures where small details are blurred—unless that's the style you're after). It's also very important that you detect sensitivity in capturing people's emotions; make sure the photographer's subjects look relaxed, not like deer caught in headlights. While you two are important, of course, you want to see smiling shots of your friends too.



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Step 6:

Make Sure Your Personalities Mesh

Don't underestimate the importance of liking and bonding with your photographer. Is the photographer excited by your vision when you describe it? When they make suggestions, do they present them in a clear and respectful way, or are they timid? Are their mannerisms off-putting? In order to get the best photos, go with a pro who has a firm grasp of social graces but is bold enough to go out hunting for great images and who, above all, puts you at ease and doesn't irritate you in any way. Remember: They'll be shadowing your every move, and the more comfortable both of you are with the photographer, the better the photos will turn out. Likewise, you don't want the photographer to offend or annoy any guests, but to shoot them in their best light in an unobtrusive way. To get the best photos, your photographer needs to be assertive enough to seek out great moments, cajoling enough to coax relaxed smiles and natural stances from guests, and calm enough to be a positive force. They should ask lots of questions and be a good listener.



Step 7: Compare Packages

You won't be able to nail down an exact dollar amount until you're sure of what you want, how many albums you need and where your photographer is based, and packages range from \$2,500 all the way up to \$15,000-plus on the higher end of the spectrum. When interviewing candidates, ask for a general range based on the photographer's standard "shooting fee" and package, plus their standard rates for the type of album you think you'll want and the amount of coverage you're hoping to book them for (day of, full weekend). It's important to find out what's included in the standard package, plus the basic range for any extras you may want, like an engagement shoot, special effects or additional coverage, so you can compare rates. In particular, find out exactly how many hours of coverage are included. Ideally, you want your photographer to be there for your full wedding day—from when you start getting ready until after you make your grand exit from the reception. While packages vary, most include about 6 to 12 hours to cover everything from preceremony events (getting ready with your bridesmaids or first-look photos) to the end of the reception. It's usually better to pay for more coverage if there's a chance you'll run over and you definitely want your photographer there until the end (overtime is usually charged at a higher hourly rate). Also consider whether you'll want to do an engagement shoot or have your photographer shoot other events during your wedding weekend (the guys' golf outing, the bridesmaid lunch).

Also, check if there's a second shooter included in the contract, and if there's not, ask about the possibility. It's likely the second shooter can be confirmed later on, but the main benefit to having two shooters is, of course, you get twice as much coverage. For example, during your formal photo session, one photographer can capture the formal photos, while the second one can get behind-the-scenes, photojournalistic photos, like your guests mingling. If you're having a larger wedding (250 guests or more), you might even want to ask about

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Step 8:

Ask About Your Rights! Most contracts stipulate that the photographer owns the rights to all photos taken at the wedding, even the ones of you. In other words, the photographer can use them promotionally (on their website or blog, submit them for publication and even place them in ads). That also means you can't just post the digital proofs they send you—most photographers have a policy that you can only share watermarked images or images with their credit on them. Also, unless you negotiate otherwise, if you want to print the images yourselves or order an album from another source, you'll have to buy the rights to the images.

Step 9:

Get the Postproduction Details! It usually takes at least a month to get all those photo proofs back from your photographer. Why? Your photographer is shooting enormous raw files far bigger than your typical JPG. Shooting raw files gives your photographer greater ability to correct the photo, but it also takes a longer time to upload, process and edit all those files (in order to correct color levels and so on). It varies, but many photographers say they spend an additional 40 hours editing images from a single wedding, so it can take up to six to eight weeks (or longer, depending on the photographer and how busy they are) to get proofs back. Here's what to ask: How many images should I expect? Will they be high resolution or low resolution? Will I be able to get prints made myself, or does the photographer retain the rights to the images? Will the proofs I see be the retouched versions, or does that happen after I select the photos I want? Speaking of retouching, ask about retouching options and special effects (which can range from simple white balancing to beauty retouching and stylized art effects like super-saturated colors) and



Step 10:

Prep Together for the Day-Of! Remember that your photographer is the pro, so—while it's helpful—you shouldn't spend too much time putting together a detailed shot list for them. Instead, pass along your day-of timeline, give them an idea of what images you'd like captured (like a shot with each of your bridesmaids in addition to wedding party portraits) and let them do their thing. This is also the perfect moment to give them a heads up on any familial or friendship intricacies they should be aware of, like divorced parents, a grandmother that needs to remain sitting for portraits or a groomsman and bridesmaid that don't get along (hey, it happens!). If you're hoping to get your wedding day published online or in a magazine down the road, be sure to relay that to your photographer. This way, they'll put extra emphasis on snapping shots of all your amazing details and will likely come armed with gorgeous styling accessories, like ribbons, linens and more, with the goal of helping your wedding aesthetic truly stand out.

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Wedding photographer prices in the U.S. can be anywhere between \$1,000 - \$8,000, with the average couple spending \$2,783. The cost depends on the photographer's experience, number of photographers, hours of coverage, and what's included in the package. Usually, packages cover 8 hours.

Q: How much of the average wedding budget covers wedding photography?

A: Wedding photography is the 3rd most expensive cost in the average couple's wedding. The only things that cost more are the engagement ring and the venue. Many couples spend 10% of their wedding budget on their photograph package.

Q: What do wedding photographers include in their package?

A: Shopping for a wedding photographer is almost as hard as shopping for a car. There are so many options! You probably won't find two photographers with the same package. Generally, you can expect the following in a standard package:

- 6-10 hours of a photographer with you throughout the day
- 1-2 photographers
- Digital proofs with retouching
- Rights to reprint your pictures

Q: How many hours do you need a wedding photographer?

A: Every couple will have a different answer here. First, think about what you need. Do you want shots of everyone getting ready? Do you want shots of everyone dancing? These two things add the most time. Everything else occurs between the ceremony and the start of the reception. You can cut the time down to a few hours if you limit your shots.

If your budget is larger, you can hire the photographer for as much as 8-10 hours.

Discuss your shot list with your photographer first. Then you can decide how much time you need.

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Q: What "extras" aren't included in wedding photography packages?

A: If you want anything above the standard offerings, you'll likely pay a la carte. The most common things couples look for include:

- Engagement photo session
- Canvas print of their favorite wedding picture
- Specialty albums
- Specialty prints
- Specific type of photo shoot

Q: How far in advance should you book a wedding photographer?

A: Photographers are usually the second thing couples book. The first is the venue. In general, try booking your photographer at least 8 months in advance. But, if your wedding is during a popular time, you may even want to go as far as 12 months early. The last thing you want to hear is "Sorry, I'm booked."

Q: Should you have 1 or 2 photographers?

A: Having two wedding photographers is a personal decision. But there are many practical reasons you might want to consider it:

- Ensuring you have pictures of the bride and groom getting ready in separate places
- Obtaining two different views of the ceremony, one traditional and one more candid
- Capturing more creative opportunities
- Capturing more intense details rather than focusing strictly on the traditional photos
- Providing backup because you never know what can happen

Q: How can you cut down the time that you need the second shooter?

A: You might not need a second photographer the entire 8 hours of your wedding day. Instead, choose the important times you want that "backup." Stagger the "getting ready time" so one photographer can be at both places. Hire the second photographer for a specific period. Maybe you want candid photos of the ceremony alone. Some couples want more pictures of the reception.

Choose what's important to you. Then you can cut down on the hours you need that second photographer.

Q: What does the photographer do after the wedding?

A: The photographer's job just begins when the wedding is finished. Yes, he spent the day with you taking pictures. But now he has to develop, edit, and perfect those pictures. He probably took thousands of pictures at your wedding. You won't see every single picture though. One perfect picture may have 20 others that look just like it. It's the hours the photographer puts in afterwards that matter. He finds the perfect picture out of those 20 shots.



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Q: How can you save money on a wedding photographer?

A: There are small ways to save on wedding photography without sacrificing too much. Here are a few of our favorite ways:

- Plan your wedding during off-peak months (November and March are great choices)
- Plan your wedding on off-peak days (Fridays are great for this)
- Hire a photographer and videographer from the same company

Q: What are some must-have photos?

Every couple has a different idea of their perfect wedding pictures. But here are some unique photos you might want:

- Pictures of the inside and outside of the church and venue (before people arrive)
- Bride getting ready
- Bride's gown before she puts it on
- Bride's mom helping her dress for the last time
- Shots of the wedding bands
- Groom getting ready
- Couple hugging friends and family after the ceremony
- Friends and family dancing
- Couple leaving the reception

Q:How many proofs does a typical couple receive?

A: Wedding photographers often take thousands of pictures at a wedding. But you won't receive thousands. It may take 20 pictures just to capture the one look they wanted. We discovered that the average photographer delivers between 300 and 400 wedding photos.

Of course, this can change based on your photographer. If you want a specific amount of shots, ask this question before hiring a photographer.

Q:How long does it take to get wedding proofs after your wedding?

A: On average, you'll wait at least a month to see your wedding proofs. Every photographer works on a different timeline, though. This is an important question to ask any photographer you consider using.

Q: How will you receive your wedding proofs after the wedding?

A: This is another important question to ask your photographer. Also, read the fine print in the contract. Most photographers today provide a digital online gallery. This allows you to easily share the proofs with friends and family.

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Q: How many photos does a typical wedding album hold?

A: The average wedding album will hold between 60 and 160 wedding photos. The actual amount depends on the size of the album. The layout also plays a role, though.

Q: What are the different album cover options?

A: If there's one thing you splurge on for wedding photography, make it the wedding album. It's something you'll treasure for the rest of your life. You'll want to pick a cover that will stand the test of time. But you also want one you'll proudly display even 30 years down the road. Here are the most common options:

- Leather
- Premium leather
- Distressed leather
- Linen

Q: What is a first look photograph?

A: It's no longer considered bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the ceremony. You can set up what they call a "first look photo." The photographer sets this meeting up ahead of time. While the groom looks at the photographer, the bride walks up and gets his attention. As the groom turns around, the photographer is there to catch the reactions on film.

Q: What photos should you include in the wedding album?

A: Your wedding album is extremely personal. But there are some commonalities between the pictures various couples choose. Here are a few of our favorite tips:

- Focus on your favorite photos, not the ones others tell you your album must have.
- Pick a variety of photos from the ceremony as well as the reception.
- Make sure each layout on a page tells a story, rather than throwing pictures on a page.
- Pick at least a few photos from the most important parts of the day (vows, first dance).

Q: What do you do with the extra wedding photos not in the album?

A: Don't be afraid to have some of your proofs made into portraits for your wall! They are pictures you'll treasure for the rest of your life. The pictures that didn't make it into the album still deserve a special spot in your life.

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Q: What does it mean to retouch and color balance photos?

A: Have you ever drooled over a gorgeous picture of a woman in a magazine? Chances are the picture was retouched and color balanced. In other words, it looked perfect.

Your photographer can do the same for your wedding photos. He'll make sure everything looks perfect in the pictures you receive. This may not be in the proofs, but will be in the actual photos you purchase.

Q: What is the average cost of wedding videographer?

A: Many couples want to capture the live moments of their wedding. On average, this service costs \$1,995. It seems like a lot of money, but it provides a lifetime of memories. You'll see things you weren't able to see while you said your vows. Your mother's tears, the flower girl's sweet reactions, and the cheer of the crowd are just a few special moments you'll relive.

Q: Why should you hire a videographer and photographer who work together?

A: You want your photographer and videographer to capture every special moment. But, if they get in each other's way, it can turn into a nightmare. Choosing professionals who have a good relationship can sidestep this issue.

Make choosing your wedding photographer a top priority. Next to the venue and dress, you'll be glad you budgeted accordingly for this service. Working closely with your photographer can help you create the memories you really want.



Sources: The Knot, Wedding Wire, U.S. Census Bureau

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