

How to Get Great Wedding Pictures with Less Stress - and More Fun

[By Robert London](#)

As I mentioned in my previous wedding photography articles which you can download on my website [Robert London Photography](#), I approach each wedding as a storyteller. This is unlike my commercial work where I am the director, controlling every action and emotion, with weddings I position myself to capture the decisive moments, not to create them. I tell all brides the best way for you to help me is to let everything go, experience and relish all the moments and express all your emotions. Now if you become stressed that is the emotion that will be captured. A little preparation, planning, and communicating will help for you to not only have the best wedding images possible, but to enjoy yourself so that you can cut loose and have a great time.

Communicate all your thoughts to your photographer before the wedding day; do not feel as though he is some artistic prima donna who is unapproachable. It is better to have more information and not use it than to miss something that would have helped. If you see a certain style or styles of images that you love in a magazine or elsewhere or perhaps just thought up, let the photographer know in advance. Keep in mind to plan pictures that reflect who you are; if you are both stand up comedians, then keep the side by side formals to a minimum and think of something more creative. Another idea that can be fun is to plan a special picture for your thank you notes. Maybe hold up posters you made that say “thank you,” or just blow a kiss into the camera, whatever you creatively come up with. My only advice is to make sure you can accomplish the shot quickly.

When speaking with your caterer **insist** that the photographers are served in the same room and at the same time as yourself. Caterers often try to treat photographers as a second-class citizen, feeding them what is leftover at the very end of the meal and in a back room. If the photographer is not to miss any moments he needs to be in sync with you. I have foregone many meals, for the caterer would feed me when the dancing started and/or then insisted I eat far away where I could not see or hear.

The photographer may or may not be familiar with your location, so when you are meeting with the caterer scope the place out and see where you think would be a nice background for portraits. Ask the caterer for suggestions; from experience they will have a better feel for how the site will look on the wedding day. Share this information with the photographer. While planning where to do the formals I always suggest to couples to keep the travel time to the shortest possible, it always adds up to be more than you estimate and you do not want to be spending your wedding day driving around in traffic. Besides, the pictures are about you, not the landscape. I always show couples that in most of my formal shots you really see very little background, it is analogous to traveling to the Grand Canyon then only seeing a few rocks behind the group in the pictures. Keep in mind that the backgrounds are part of your canvas, which is telling your story. It is nice to have something elegant or pretty behind you, but also think about how to express where your wedding occurred and the environment you established. If you are having a very stylish New York City wedding, pick a location that expresses that emotion and shows off New York City in some form. I have seen too many portraits or group pictures where the background is a banquet hall. Think of it like this, if someone were to look at your pictures ten years from now – would they know when and where the wedding was? Also, if you plan on doing portraits outside, have a rain plan already worked out; you do not want to think about how to change everything on the wedding day.

It is always difficult to decide when to take the formal portraits. Many couples shy away from taking the images before the wedding because of the old tradition of not letting the groom see the bride before the ceremony. There is more to this concept than just tradition. Stress is one of the many emotions being felt at any wedding, and the final hours before the wedding can be the most stressful. Keeping the bride and groom apart can prevent any last minute misunderstandings. Also, everyone would have to be ready that much

earlier, which can add additional stress. If one family member does not arrive on time, a whole set of family portraits cannot be taken. On a less practical aspect many brides would rather hangout with their friends, helping to stay in emotional check and have some fun, before they have to walk down the aisle.

All these concerns aside, there is no more logical time to photograph the formal images than before the ceremony. Everyone is freshly dressed – no shine on the face, no wilted curls or flowers, and your dress is spotless. You will not miss a moment of your wedding, having to leave to have pictures done, and you will have sufficient time to get all the portraits you want. I have shot many weddings where portraits were either rushed or just never taken, for the bride was unwilling or truly did not have any time to leave the reception. A nice approach to pre-ceremony pictures is instead of just meeting somewhere, arrange for a quiet pre-wedding rendezvous. This way you still experience that “moment” of seeing each other, and I am able to capture that decisive moment as he sees her and she him. Plan a private five to ten minutes after you meet that includes no photographer, it is nice to collect your thoughts together before the hectic pace of a wedding. Now, we have time to capture images of the bride and groom without any distractions from family and guests.

Each wedding and every family is unique; you will know what will work best at your wedding. However, think beyond superstition, it is not bad luck to see each other before the wedding. Pre-ceremony formals are one of the ways to get the most out of your photographic experience.

If you hired an experienced wedding photographer, they will know to get the basic wedding imagery like the cake and first dance etc... so there will be no need to list every picture you want from the wedding. If you hired someone with little or no wedding experience or an amateur, a complete list may be appropriate. However, even if it seems obvious to you it is a good idea, for many reasons, to create a shot list of all the formal images. For one, it is not something you want to be thinking about at the moment. Having a list on paper helps the formal shots run smoother and faster which in turn helps them look their best. It also assures that you do not miss a portrait of someone important to you, and it gives you a written list of all the people you should contact.

Most people fall into two camps, ones who love to have their picture taken and the rest of us. When doing formals I have found that most people think that they are posing for myself – as if I personally want the portraits. Therefore, they can be very uncooperative, not looking in the camera, hiding behind others, wandering off, refusing direction etc. This can all be very frustrating for everybody, and that will show in the portraits; also it considerably extends the time it takes to get the shots done. When I mention to people that it is the bride and groom who have requested the portraits of them, it can dramatically change people’s attitude from dark to light.

If you communicate before the wedding, with each person that you and your groom would like in your wedding portraits, it can really help to get everybody motivated to create some memorable family portraits; all within the shortest amount of time and least amount of stress. Let them know how important this is to you, and how you cannot wait to see the images of all the family together. Express to them to be timely, patient and not wander off until excused, that this will help to make the process take the least amount of time and enables **everyone** to return to the cocktail hour promptly. If Aunt Pat is always late, you may want to tell her to be ready 15 minutes earlier than everyone else.

This brings us to the thought process in creating your list. It is of extreme help if the list is written in the order that we wish to take the pictures. First, item of thought - are there any elderly or frail individuals, put all the pictures with them in the beginning so they can finish early and proceed to the cocktail hour. Next, place the largest groups and work down from there in a logical sequence so people do not have to get up and

down numerous times and when finished can leave to enjoy the cocktail hour. This will take some time to figure everything out if you have a large family, and a divorce, or two can complicate things tremendously. I will help by providing some typical scenarios. Use this as a guide to help determine which pictures you desire, remember there is no “norm” it is whatever you want, but be realistic (it is not only about you). Family and friends make a huge effort to attend, and often they would like to get certain pictures also. I have photographed more than one wedding where the parents have ordered a larger album than the couple. And remember you do not want your relatives bringing up that “missed” portrait at your wedding for the rest of your life.

Bride’s extended family with bride and/or groom

Now decide if you want to break the extended family down to smaller parts, say all the cousins

Bride’s immediate family with bride and/or groom

Bride with siblings, group/individual

Bride with grandparents

Bride with parents, group/individual

Repeat this procedure with the groom’s side, then after the groom’s parents bring in the bride’s parents and you can have a portrait of both sets of parents. Now, most family and guests should be back at the cocktail hour, and it is time to motivate the bridal party. Get some creative and fun shots with them, think rock & roll album cover, both group and individual and then everyone is back at your cocktail hour having a great time and talking about your talented photographer. Now, that you are alone with your new husband you can relax regroup a little and then take some formal and fun shots together. I like to move to a different location when possible so that your portraits look different from the family portraits.

Now if you have any other important people in your life, godparents, college or high school friends, go to them directly, I call these the “informal formals” greet other people only briefly along the way; you want all the formal pictures behind you before going to the reception. You should make a separate list for these shots. If you do not do these group shots right away they tend to never get done sometimes, people leave or you just never get a chance. Also, it is time to let loose, celebrate and party - setting up a group shot can distract from having fun.

Now, you have organized your thoughts, you created a list, composed a short thoughtful note to communicate with family members but there is one last item to make the system work; it is helpful to have one or two liaisons that can connect a face to the names for the photographer. The liaisons can really help to get everybody together. It is best to have someone who is not shy and has a strong voice; your sister who can be annoying for these same reasons would be perfect. When cousin Chloe is no where to be found there will be someone to go find her. While the photographer is composing one group the liaison can be actively gathering the next. When grandma has to go to the bathroom, the liaison will help her and know where she is, they really can make a big difference. Remember great pictures are a team effort, extra communication, a little planning and cooperation from your family and guests will assure you of getting the most out of each image.

Back to you now, it really is your day so when taking pictures if the photographer is asking you to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable, or is cheesy in your vocabulary then stand your ground and politely say no. If you are not enjoying yourself it will show in the pictures and this is all about getting great pictures!! Remember to read my [Last Minute Wedding Thoughts](#) before you tie the knot.