

# The wedding day timeline

Sample timings for a 4.00pm ceremony with a first look and a five-hour reception. Blank column for your own times.

SAMPLE	YOURS	MOMENT	NOTE
11.00am		Hair and makeup begin	5 hours for a party of four to six — the day's most common overrun; schedule the couple to finish first, well before the first look
1.00pm		Lunch arrives in the getting-ready rooms	30 min — order it the day before and assign a runner; nobody remembers to eat
2.00pm		Photographer arrives	15 min of details first — dress, rings, invitation suite — while the room is still tidy
2.15pm		Into the dress and suits	15 min — buttons and corset backs take three times as long as a zip; start earlier if you have either
2.30pm		First look and couple's portraits	15 min — a private moment before the guests; the photographer works from a distance
2.45pm		Wedding party and family photos	45 min — done now so you attend your own cocktail hour; hand the photographer a family shot list with names
3.30pm		Guests arrive and are seated	30 min — doors open and ushers seat the front rows; the couple stays out of sight from here
3.55pm		Processional lines up	5 min — phones handed off, boutonnieres straightened, order confirmed one last time
4.00pm		Ceremony begins	30 min — processional to recessional; add 15–30 min for full religious rites
4.30pm		Ceremony ends; cocktail hour begins	60 min — drinks and canapés while the room is turned; do not trim this to save time elsewhere
5.20pm		Wedding party staged for entrances	10 min — the bandleader or DJ confirms name pronunciations now, not on the mic
5.30pm		Grand entrance; guests find their tables	15 min — introductions, then everyone is seated; longer with more than 150 guests
5.45pm		Dinner is served	45 min for plated service — toasts land better once mains are cleared, not during them
6.30pm		Toasts	20 min — three speakers at five minutes each; give them the limit in writing
6.50pm		First dance	10 min — then straight into the night; momentum matters more than choreography
7.00pm		Parent dances	15 min — optional; many couples fold both into ninety seconds each
7.15pm		The dance floor opens	45 min of open floor before the next interruption — keep the lights low and the bar close
7.45pm		Sunset portraits	15 min — golden hour for a summer date; check sunset for yours and slip out quietly
8.00pm		Cake cutting	15 min — a natural lull; older guests often say goodnight after this, so aim cameras accordingly
9.00pm		Last call at the bar	30 min before the end — the caterer announces it so you do not have to
9.30pm		Last dance and send-off	Sparklers, a getaway car, or simply the lights up — have someone staging it 15 min early