

Just about any event in which an individual requests the services of a professional photographer is special in nature. The birth of a child, an engagement, special moments, and family events come to mind. Each gives even the most experienced photographer the opportunity to experiment with new physical settings, landscapes, positions, and directions for action. However, the shooting of a wedding requires perhaps the utmost preparation and professionalism from its photographer. In what will likely be one of the most memorable days to any given couple, a wedding day is full of photographic potential. It is a photographer's opportunity to showcase his or her talents and adaptability as one works with new clients, locations, and preferences each time. Because there is no standard operating procedure, it's crucial to be incredibly prepared for each wedding shoot, particularly as you consider the abundance of other concerns swarming the minds of your special couple that day! Follow some of these tips to ensure the day goes smoothly and your couple is beyond pleased with your work and approach.

<h1> Meet With Your Couple</h1>

Yes, communication via e-mail and over the phone is simple and convenient, but tone can be lost through these channels. Consider offering a complimentary engagement shoot to meet the couple, discuss the big day, and get to know how they act in front of the camera. Getting a feel for their reaction to the engagement shots will help influence your style for their wedding day. Also, take this meeting as an opportunity to discuss a timeline and schedule of events for the big day. Additionally, ensure their expectations are realistic. For example, if your couple wants your window of time to end after the cake is cut, remind them that dancing shots will be limited. Also, will your couple be including "routine" wedding day events such as throwing the bouquet, or will this be excluded? Will there be a "reveal" to the Father of the Bride or Groom prior to the ceremony? Knowing such will affect your shot list.

<h1> Know Your Client</h1>

Your couple's satisfaction with the shots you someday share with them will encourage their album package purchase, as well as their desire to recommend your services to others. To ensure the utmost satisfaction, get to know your client's preferences. Would they prefer a majority of candid shots, or would more stylized shots of direct smiles at the camera be preferred? Would they encourage you to be more experimental on the big day? Do they take risks? Or would they prefer that you stick to a certain style of the photographs they maybe saw on your website? What attracted them to your services in the first place? Remember, it's likely that your couple is marrying for the first time. Use your expertise to help them make decisions about the big day. For example, some couples opt for dim lighting without realizing the negative impact it will have on their photographs. Spare them the future disappointment by questioning and offering this information ahead of time.

<h1> Research Your Venue</h1>

Perhaps you've shot at the same location in the past, but, more than likely, you'll be in a new venue almost each time. Take some time to research the venue's website and social media outlets. It's

probable that they feature shots of their property and even professional shots that have been shared with them by their previous event holders. If you have the opportunity, visit it in person. Get an idea of the potential locations, backdrops, and props that would be assets to your shoot on the big day. Approaching your couple with this information is not only helpful, but impressive.

<h1>Create a Shot List</h1>

First and foremost, have your couple provide you with a list of mandatory shots for the big day. It's not generally a good idea to create this list on your own without knowing the inner webbing and, dare I say, dramatics, of any given family. Perhaps the bride does not get along with her stepmother and would prefer not to be photographed with her. Encouraging photographs on the big day that could be uncomfortable for any given individual, *especially* your client, is the last thing you'll want to do, aside from not showing up altogether! Have your couple spell out exactly which positioned photographs are required (i.e. Mother of the Bride+Bride, Bride+Groom+MOB+FOB+MOG+FOG) to avoid this situation. Beyond the required shots, use the locations you've scouted and the preferences your couple noted during your meeting to fill in the rest of your list (i.e. Bride+Groom Along Lake, Father of the Bride+Bride First Reveal Under Gazebo). Use your expertise to fill in the remaining "standard" shots, such as first dances.

<h1>Obtain Wedding Day Schedule</h1>

Show up and don't be late! This goes beyond having a copy of the schedule of events. If your couple approves, you will want to capture moments that happen much earlier than when your bride walks down the aisle, such as make-up application, hair styling, the dressing of the groomsmen, the opening of sentimental gifts, etc. Ensure you know exactly when each of these events are scheduled to occur so you can help capture all of the special moments of the day. Based on the shot list you've prepared and discussed, ask your bride to reserve a special window of time for positional photos to be taken with the family and bridal party, and ask that this slot be shared with those who will be included.

<h1>Hire Help</h1>

Why miss a great photo of the groom's family ready and smiling in the corner of the reception hall because the couple is about to cut the cake near the dance floor? Why miss the guests doing "The Wobble" because your couple wanted a quick nighttime shot by the lake? If your clients are expecting enough guests and the venue is larger in size, consider hiring an assistant that will maximize your moment-capturing potential. Remember, you'll have an album to fill with memories, so why miss any? As a bonus, an assistant will be able to help carry gear and can even put your camera in two places at the same time. For example, you can be shooting the bride having her make-up applied in one room while your assistant captures the groom putting on his cufflinks and toasting his groomsmen in another.

<h1>Be Invisible. Be Cool.</h1>

Ask all questions of your couple ahead of time so that you have nearly no need to say much more than “Congratulations” on the big day. Your couple has likely spent months overwhelmed with plans, financial concerns, and decisions, and the last thing they will want to do is answer questions and worry about any issue you may be experiencing. Ensure that you have the means to contact, perhaps, the Maid of Honor or Best Man for any important issues that may arise. Also, although your role that day is pivotal, don’t forget to consider the guests that have traveled for and longed for witnessing this moment. Take quick, skilled shots as necessary and then keep yourself from becoming an obstruction to the view of others.

Being entrusted to capture a couple’s special day is quite the honor and it has the potential to truly give your photography business a reputable name in the industry. The couple’s nerves will be calmed by your confident approach from the moment you arrive on location, so keep in mind the influence you have on others that day. Being prepared will be evident in the photographs you take, and your couple will praise you for the expertise and experience you’re able to share with them ahead of time. Above all, have fun! You may be working, but the event is a celebration for all those around you. Stay positive and dependable even in the midst of error and who knows, maybe you’ll be asked to hand out a business card or two.