

A photograph of a bride and groom walking away from the camera on a sandy beach towards the ocean. The bride is wearing a long white wedding dress with a long train and a long veil, carrying a bouquet of white flowers. The groom is wearing a dark suit. The ocean is in the background with waves breaking. A large magenta rectangle is on the right side of the image, containing text.

CREATE YOUR OWN

*Inspiring
Wedding
Ceremony*

WENDY HAYNES

Create Your Own Inspiring Wedding Ceremony

Wendy Haynes, JP
Civil Celebrant

First edition printed in 2005
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My gratitude to author Amy Bloom for her permission to use the extract on page 61

What Others Are Saying About Wendy Haynes and 'Create Your Own Inspiring Wedding Ceremony'

"The book flows beautifully and really does draw you in to exploring ideas and concepts. It also gives the reader a secure feeling that the author is guiding you along the way and won't allow you to miss out all the vital details."

Deborah Hoiles – NSW, Australia

"Perfection all round. This book was a gift to us both. Exploring what we wanted was made so easy and our ceremony was perfect."

Annabelle and Peter – NSW, Australia

"Wendy is a wonderful celebrant and her passion and joy is evident on every page. I was deeply touched and cried when I read some of the stories. We both felt excited about each and every chapter she covered. Our own wedding ceremony became so much more than we had ever imagined. Thank you for all of your ideas and inspiration."

Gareth and Trish – NSW, Australia

"Congratulations on a wonderful book – as a celebrant of many years it has given me inspiration and ideas to pass onto my couples. I read the book the day it arrived! Thanks again."

Jenny (celebrant) – Queensland

"My wedding celebrant loaned me a copy of your book. It has been fantastic. You made it so easy to understand and we loved the ideas and first hand stories. It inspired us to create a ceremony that was so meaningful and special – we loved it!"

Carol and Steve – Sydney, Australia

"We wouldn't have known where to start without your book. We were able to create a relaxed and intimate ceremony that everybody loved and talked about for a long time afterwards."

Vanessa and Rodney – Coffs Harbour, Australia

"We loved everything about your book! It not only assisted us in creating our ceremony it also taught us some new and exciting things about each other. We wrote the ceremony of our dreams!"

Katherine and Jason – Sydney, Australia

"It made putting feelings into words so much easier. It became an essential tool for writing our vows and choosing a format for our wedding. Our ceremony was suited to our individual needs and described our relationship perfectly."

Brett and Melissa – Guyra, Australia

"Your book walked us through writing our ceremony step by step. It had plenty of examples and we were able to include our own ideas. It is a great book for both couples who don't know where to start and also those (like us) who have both had traditional weddings before and wanted something different."

Trinity and Paul – Coffs Harbour, Australia

"I purchased your book 'Create Your Own Inspiring Wedding Ceremony' at the Celebrant Conference this year. I congratulate you on a good publication. It's the best one I have read yet."

Sarah (celebrant) – Sydney, Australia

"Thank you for your inspirational book. I lent it to one of my couples who vowed and declared (sorry about the pun) they could not write their own vows. Four days after lending them your book they arrived back with their own vows written and commented on how rewarding the exercise was. You have given me lots of ideas and inspiration. Congratulations and thank you."

Diane (celebrant) – NSW, Australia

"I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you for your excellent book. Congratulations!"

Steve (celebrant) – South Australia

"Thank you, Wendy, for making our wedding day so special. Your book took both of us on a journey that saw our wedding and indeed our relationship grow to a new level. A keepsake that we will treasure."

Chris and Linda – Queensland, Australia

"I really enjoyed your book and I know I will use it a lot with ceremonies. I found it to be creative and vibrant."

Christine (celebrant) – Victoria, Australia

Create Your Own Inspiring Wedding Ceremony is written by Wendy Haynes, JP & Civil Celebrant and is part of the “**Create Your Own Inspiring Ceremonies**” series of books and other resources:

Create Your Own Inspiring Name Giving Ceremony

Create Your Own Inspiring Funeral Ceremony

Create Your Own Inspiring Speech for Grooms (or Brides!)

How to be an Inspiring Godparent, Mentor or Guardian

Inspiring Readings and Blessings for a Wedding Ceremony

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The **Create Your Own Inspiring Ceremonies** series of books and other resources are available online at:

www.WendyHaynes.com

About Wendy Haynes

Wendy Haynes is registered as a Civil Celebrant in Australia. Having conducted over a thousand ceremonies, including weddings and commitments, funerals, name givings and birthday celebrations since 1995, Wendy is one of Australia's foremost experts in the craft of creating inspiring ceremonies and celebrations.

Based in the coastal holiday city of Coffs Harbour, Wendy regularly facilitates celebrations for clients from all over the world including Australia, United Kingdom and the United States. Wendy has been the recipient of many industry and small business accolades and awards including:

Winner

Coffs Coast Sunny's Business Awards – Professions and Services Award and the Judges Special Recognition Award – 2008

NSW Annual Bridal Industry Awards Every year – 2003 to 2008

Coffs Coast Small (Family) Business Award – 2006

Australian Federation of Civil Celebrants Startston Award – 2003

Coffs Coast Small Business Marketing Award – 2003

Finalist

NSW Annual Bridal Industry Awards – 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006

NSW Small Business Awards, Champion of Champions, Wedding Services – 2004, 2006

Coffs Coast Small Business Awards, Family Business – 2004

Wendy is also available as a public speaker on a range of topics including: The Art of Inspiration and Celebration, Marketing for Small Business, Women in Small Business and more.

*Dedicated to the hundreds of couples
who shared their insights, their stories and their love
and invited me to be a part of their
inspiring wedding ceremony.*

Acknowledgements

Being a celebrant is an extraordinary privilege. I have the pleasure to meet with couples and their families to celebrate and honour a very special moment in their lives. In a very short space of time I am invited to become a part of their community of family and friends, sometimes almost like a member of their family. This book has been a journey of working with many couples to create the perfect ceremony that is just right for them. Thank you to all the couples that I have worked with for sharing with me your intimate and personal thoughts on love and marriage. This has shaped and developed the many inspiring ceremonies that I have been honoured to create and share.

My gratitude to my editor Brett Jarman who, from our very first conversation, has embraced this work and supported and encouraged my writing. To Tim Learner, proofreading supremo, who does more than just dot the i's and cross the t's, thank you.

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A special thanks to all the couples, families and friends who have given me kind permission to share their ceremonies and poetry. Thank you.

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1 - Congratulations!!

Whether you have already set a date for the big day or whether you are just daydreaming about it – congratulate yourself either way, you have obviously made a decision to put some thought and effort into your ceremony and vows.

Often the ceremony is overshadowed by other details – how many guests and who to invite, wedding dress, flowers, rings, catering, wedding car, music, hair, make up...

Each of these is important in its own right but when it comes down to it, the jewel in the crown is the actual ceremony. One of the most powerful and unforgettable moments of your wedding day will be when you stand facing one another to share your vows of love and commitment. Taking the time to read this book and putting in some effort of your own is a step towards making this possible.

As a professional celebrant, I've had the pleasure of sharing in over 500 joyous and beautiful wedding ceremonies. Though each wedding is different in so many ways, there are some ways in which they are all the same. As well as being an expression of shared love, it's the creation of something new, a partnership in the journey of life.

To participate in such a creation is an enriching and rewarding experience. By sharing some of my experiences, thoughts and ideas through this book and other resources available on my website, hopefully I can also be a part of your 'creation of something new'.

Our goal is to create a ceremony based on truth. If you are after a romantic fairy tale for your wedding you can have that too but it will be based on a foundation of truth, honesty and heartfelt expression. We'll lay the foundation with the following questions and information and add a few trimmings to create a ceremony that will be unique and, most importantly, yours.

If you have a leaning towards 'traditional' weddings, then this book can support you in creating one. There is very little in this book that would be out of place in a traditional setting. In any case, treat the book as a smorgasbord – it's not an all or nothing deal so take what you like and leave behind what you don't.

Before we begin, let's lay the groundwork and set up (or dispel) some expectations.

1 - This is more than just a textbook. If you are looking for a collection of ceremonies with <insert female name here> and <insert male name here>, that option is available to you. You will find plenty of examples where you could just substitute your names for those in the example and you would have a ceremony. However, you can also go further than that and create a ceremony that is uniquely yours.

The purpose of the book is to inspire you, to give you ideas so you can shape the ceremony to fit your life and your commitment to each other. It will challenge you to ask the questions that need to be asked and show you how you can find honest and heartfelt answers.

2 - The book is more of an inspiration manual than an instruction manual. There are no rules or methods with weddings. (Actually, that's not quite true. There are a few small 'rules' but we'll cover them later.) Just as you can't tell a flower how it must or should

grow, you can't tell someone how they must or should have their wedding. The structure, the elements and even the order of events will vary according to your desires.

Take what you will from it, add some other ingredients, treat it like dough and shape it to make your ceremony.

3 - It is not my intention for this book to be a replacement for your celebrant or priest. You will have chosen, or will choose, your celebrant for what they can contribute to your ceremony and not just so they can recite or replay ceremonies that I share with you in this book. Of course, it's important to discover early on what requirements they have and if they are happy for you to write your own vows and content for the ceremony.

Most celebrants will be willing and delighted to help you in the creation of your wedding ceremony, so call upon them for support and advice.

4 - The ideas are not intended to be a replacement for your own customs and rituals, religious or otherwise. Earlier on I mentioned 'adding some other ingredients' – if you have traditions and rituals that are important to you, mix them in to give your ceremony a flavour that matches your preferences.

Though *Create Your Own Inspiring Wedding Ceremony* is about getting married we will also touch on what it means to **be** married. We'll clarify what marriage really means to you both, what you love about each other, and many other important aspects of being together on the journey you are about to share.

Be ready to challenge yourselves (and each other!) in this area. Look beyond the wedding and create a vision for the marriage itself. This will help you to shape the ceremony.

On your wedding day you will want a ceremony that will be a treasured memory for many years to come – a ceremony that inspires and deeply touches you both and everyone present. You can have a ceremony that honours your love, friendship and commitment to each other – a ceremony that is intimate, emotive, rich, fun and relaxed.

Whether you are having a small and intimate occasion or a gathering of the great clan, the simple prompts and great ideas in *Create Your Own Inspiring Wedding Ceremony* will make the creation of your celebration an easy and enjoyable journey. It will be lots of fun with plenty of laughter and a few tears of joy along the way!

Developing your ceremony is like watching a masterpiece unfold. A few ideas here, answers to questions there, a bit of research... then, as we bring it all together, suddenly it starts to take shape. You might write some ideas down and then come back to them a few days later to add some more thoughts or change something because you see it afresh.

The process itself is fairly simple and straightforward. While reading the book, you will be asked a series of questions. There are no right or wrong answers. The questions aren't to test you, they are simply to stimulate and inspire you.

Whatever the process is for you, make sure that you make time for it. Developing your ceremony is not something to do together in the car on the way to work, or in the ad break while watching television. It is worthy of your full and undivided attention, so set some time aside for it. Think of it as a small commitment on the way to your 'big' commitment.

If time is an issue for you, then you can take the 'Fast Track' on Page 147 to develop your ceremony. Fast Track is the barebones method for developing a ceremony but it contains all the essential ingredients nonetheless. Even with the Fast Track you will still need to dedicate some time to the process.

Developing a ceremony is powerful and enriching and will give you a deeper understanding of marriage and your relationship. Just like marriage, it does ask that you reveal yourself and allow yourself to be known – think of that as a bonus.

Marriage, Commitment, Commitment, Marriage

If your ceremony is a commitment ceremony rather than a marriage ceremony, the principles and process are the same. The only major difference is that a commitment ceremony is not legally recognised as a marriage and therefore does not require the legal paperwork or the inclusion of specific phrases in the ceremony.

Situations where a couple might choose commitment over marriage include:

- Same sex couples (In many countries, including Australia and New Zealand, couples of the same gender are not permitted to marry according to the law of the country);
- Couples who do not wish to comply with legal requirements of marriage; or
- Couples who simply object to the concept of marriage or the terminology of husband and wife.

The book will refer mostly to marriage. If your choice is commitment rather than marriage, simply replace the appropriate references as you read.

Same Sex Relationships

The basic principles of the ceremony can be applied equally to same sex or mixed gender couples. The book refers to male/female relationships but this is only for convenience and convention rather than to exclude same sex relationships. There are commitment ceremonies included in the examples.

Keeping with Tradition

If your religion is quite strict or if circumstances won't allow you to 'customise' the ceremony very much, you might like to consider integrating some of the suggestions or ideas in the book for use at your reception.

2 - Creating Your Ceremony

You will need to check that your celebrant or priest is happy for you to write your own vows and ceremony. If you haven't selected a celebrant yet, you can find a few tips on Page 137 to help with your selection process.

Find out as early as possible what requirements they have and what part they would like to play in the process. In some countries there will be parts that they must play in the process.

For example, in Australia, a registered civil celebrant must legally:

- consent to be present as the responsible authorised marriage celebrant
- identify themselves to the assembled parties, witnesses and guests as the celebrant authorised to solemnise the marriage
- be responsible for ensuring the validity of the marriage according to law
- say the words required by section 46 in the presence of the parties, the formal witnesses and the guests before the marriage is solemnised
- be in close proximity (i.e. nearby) when the vows required by section 45(2) are exchanged because it is the exchange of vows that constitutes the marriage and the authorised celebrant should ensure that they see and hear the vows exchanged

- be available to intervene (and exercise the responsibility to intervene) if events demonstrate the need for it elsewhere in the ceremony
- be part of the ceremonial group or in close proximity to it; and
- sign the papers required by the Act.

You can design a ceremony that includes the participation of your family and friends, however there must be no confusion about who the registered marriage celebrant is.

A few other things to consider include:

Begin as early as possible – The structure of the ceremony can be decided, or at least drafted, many months in advance. Writing the vows themselves can be started two or three months before the wedding. The two to three month period carries just the right amount of urgency but without the need for panic.

Gather raw material – keep an eye out for poems, quotes, songs, snippets, etc, that you think may be useful for your ceremony. A scrapbook or small journal for collecting these is ideal (but not essential).

Set time aside – I've said it already but I'll say it again. Even if you are taking the Fast Track option, set time aside for it. Your ceremony, and your marriage, deserves it!

Decide what tone or style you would like to set for the ceremony – Shakespearean? Fairytale? Humorous? Invariably, light and heartfelt works best. Though marriage is a serious matter, a warm and friendly ceremony will be infinitely more memorable than a solemn and serious affair or a raucous comedy fest (there will be plenty of time for that at the reception).

Don't try to get it right first time – Even Beethoven would have rewritten a few sonatas before he got it right so you can allow yourselves the same courtesy. Your first draft is likely to be too long or too short, too detailed or too brief, too emotional or too dry... and that's okay. A draft is a draft.

Practice – Whether you decide to repeat the vows after your celebrant or whether you choose to remember and recite them, make time to practise them. This will help you to be more relaxed on the day and to avoid stage fright or fits of giggles that arise out of nervousness.

Compromise but don't concede – Don't agree to include words or features in the ceremony just to please your partner (or anyone else). If you really don't want something, say so – there will always be a middle ground that you can both agree on and it's good practice for the actual marriage itself.

Marriage in the 21st Century – It's Not Always 50/50

Time constraints or a reluctance to express oneself in writing can sometimes mean one partner is not fully committed to developing the ceremony. Don't fret – you can still have a personal ceremony.

If your partner is not enthusiastic, the first thing to do is to accept the situation. Keep them informed of progress and ask questions as appropriate but don't badger or bargain, as this will be counter-productive. Nine times out of ten, the unenthusiastic partner will gradually warm to the idea and participate more actively.

In the meantime, you probably know your partner well enough to begin on your own. Share your early draft(s) with him or her, as well as the final copy for his or her okay. Though he or she may not be committed to the process, he or she will definitely be concerned with the outcome so it's important that he or she is comfortable with the final result.

Maree started getting her choices together for the ceremony as Jason wasn't able to spend the time working on it – his work as a fisherman kept him away from home. Maree kept him up to date with her ideas and choices and would often just ask him key questions – "What does getting married mean to you?" etc. She would note down his answers and the more she wrote, the more interested he became. In the last week, Jason wrote a poem for her that we were able to include in the ceremony.

"I enjoyed the fact that you encouraged us to do our 'homework' so that we could create our own vows. As much as Scott tried every possible way to get out of it, even he now agrees that without it, our vows would not have been so perfect."

Family Support, or Lack of...

All weddings, whether they are traditional or contemporary affairs, can strike problems with 'keeping everyone happy', particularly if there are differing religious beliefs and ideologies. You may find that you have different ideas from your parents, or your partner's parents or both sets of parents, or that your parents may have different ideas from your partner's parents. Whew! Tread respectfully, and honour the differences and, where possible, create a sense of inclusion. Using care and diplomacy and your best communication skills, you will get through it. Remember, after the wedding comes the marriage. This may not be the first time you have differences with, between and among parents and it certainly won't be the last. Handle things as they arise rather than ignore the problems and hope they will go away.

Rosina's grandmother was a devout Catholic. Whilst neither Rosina nor Bryan were religious and had chosen to have a civil ceremony, they were more than happy for her grandmother to read a short prayer they had chosen. This deeply touched both their parents and their grandparents.

Time Out

When you start, find a quiet space and some time where you can be together uninterrupted. Let it be a place and time that is relaxing and comfortable for you both. You may want to have soft music playing that you both enjoy. The important thing is for both of you to be able to give your full attention and energy to thinking about your ceremony.

Agree on how much time you would like to devote to discussing your ceremony, e.g. "Let's spend an hour this afternoon and then again in a fortnight".

Make sure it's a time where you are both feeling alert and ready to focus and concentrate on some very important questions. You will each need paper and a pen.

When John and Sarah answered the question, "What does marriage mean to you?" they knew they wanted to get married but realised that they hadn't really stopped to consider this in depth before. It helped them to feel 'warm and fuzzy' and also inspired them prior to putting the ceremony together.

Answering the Questions

When you are answering the questions in this book you can write the answers out fully or just brainstorm ideas in point form and flesh the points out afterwards if you wish. Leave any questions that you don't want to include in your ceremony, or just fill them out for interest's sake only, it's your choice.

Don't worry about correct grammar or English at this stage. This is purely an exploration of your heart, your relationship and marriage. We can dot the i's and cross the t's later.

In many cases, you will answer the questions separately and then come together to share them. When you do share them, allow each other to answer fully, without interruption. Listen carefully and respectfully without judgment. If any thoughts, questions or emotions arise as you listen to your beloved, set them aside. Be open to listening and really hearing what they have to share. If what they say makes you feel like jumping up and down with joy or makes you feel uncomfortable, if you want to add something or disagree with what they are saying, be aware of your responses and bring your attention back to your partner. Be quiet and listen – this is more good practice for the marriage.

These are important points for effective listening and this is a wonderful opportunity to share all the dreams, fears, hopes and aspirations you have for your wedding ceremony and marriage.

After you have both spoken and finished sharing, you may wish to jot down any new ideas or you may wish to discuss some things further. Keep your hearts and ears open. Take turns to listen and to speak.

Listen carefully.

“When you told us that answering all those questions would help us to create our vows, I must admit, I thought how on earth are we going to figure this out? But, yes, you were right. All of it just fell into place. We were able to create vows that came from our heart and showed very clearly and simply how we feel about each other and our life together.”

Answer the questions separately and then share your ideas and thoughts with each other. The following icons represent:



Time to ponder – thinking quietly and listening to your feelings. In some cases you may also need to make some notes.



Heart to heart – time for you to share your ideas, usually discussing them and writing them in the spaces provided in the book.

The aim is to clarify what you want – to get your ideas and thoughts from your heart onto paper and then bring it all together. We will also ensure your ideas will work in theory **and** in practice and, together, we will create a beautiful and inspiring ceremony.

If you do write notes and ideas in the book, you might like to consider keeping it, and any other notes you make, as a keepsake to look back on in the years ahead.

So, without further ado, let's get started...

3 - Creating the Vision

How do you imagine your wedding ceremony to look like? What kind of atmosphere do you want to create? How do you want to feel during the ceremony? Spend some time creating an overall vision for your wedding. It's likely that you've given this some thought already but the exercises below will help to solidify the vision and to clarify some of these ideas you might have.

Importantly, they will also ensure that you both have a common vision. However this doesn't mean you have to have the same ideas – if your ideas are different then obviously you need to work together to create a ceremony that works for you both.

Jane and Russell were both clear they wanted to be married but their ideas for the wedding were very different. Jane came from a large family and wanted a grand affair with all the trimmings. Russell was quite shy and most of his family was in his home state, 800 kilometres away – he wanted a quiet ceremony with a few close friends and family. After going through the following exercise, he gradually warmed to Jane's vision of the ceremony. He didn't feel badgered or cajoled but simply became excited as Jane shared her heartfelt ideas honestly and openly.



Sit comfortably and quietly facing one another and hold hands. You can be either on cushions on the floor or on chairs, but it is important to be comfortable. Close your eyes and imagine your wedding ceremony.

Imagine as much detail as possible, right down to background sights and sounds. Do you hear birds in the background? Is the air warm or does it have a fresh early morning feel to it? Can you feel the sun on your back or can you see it streaming through a stained glass window? Is it indoors or outdoors? How many people are gathered? Are they dressed formally or casually?

Try to conjure up an image of a celebrant or priest delivering your ceremony. Visualise looking into each other's eyes and holding hands as you are about to exchange your vows.

Allow any images or words to come into your mind, be aware of any sensations in your body and just be a witness to what you see, hear or feel. Don't rationalise anything at this stage or even consider if something might or might not be possible – there will be plenty of time for that later so, for now, just imagine your 'dream wedding'.

If your mind wanders just gently bring it back to this exercise. You may find it difficult to create a clear picture at this stage – that's okay. So long as you can describe the key features and feel the relevant sensations, you are doing the exercise correctly.

When you are finished (it may be one or two minutes or ten) gently squeeze your partner's hand to let them know you're finished.

When Shelley and Michael visualised their perfect wedding ceremony, they both saw their two families coming together – connected, laughing, sharing and having fun. They were both from large families and, except for the parents, many of the guests had not met each other.

Shelley and Michael knew that they wanted a wedding and a holiday combined with all of their family and friends present. They were organising to get married in a beautiful resort that had a

chapel on the grounds. After doing the exercise above they were inspired to create an event before the ceremony to give the guests an opportunity to meet. The guests were invited to stay for a few days before and after the wedding.

On the day before the wedding, a big lunchtime feast with over 100 people was organised. Two of their friends organised this pre-wedding gathering so the bride and groom could attend as guests. They delegated all the tasks, mixing everyone into different work groups so they would meet new people. The feast was spectacular and everyone had a ball. The next day at the wedding ceremony, the wedding guests were like old friends which gave the ceremony a strong sense of community and belonging – just like Shelley and Michael originally pictured.



Spend a few moments writing down your thoughts and ideas on separate sheets of paper. They do not have to be in great detail. Just use words that will remind you of the idea so you can share it more fully with your partner.



Then, one at a time, share with each other what you want for your wedding day (remember to do so without interrupting each other). At this stage, you do not need to select which of the ideas you will or won't use but write down the thoughts and ideas that appeal most.

The Stage

Nowadays there seem to be no limits to possible wedding venues. People are getting married in all sorts of weird and wonderful places – skydiving, hot air balloons, under water, even live on television! Whatever you choose for your wedding, make sure the novelty value doesn't overshadow the actual ceremony itself.

Perhaps your idea of the perfect wedding is in a helicopter over the Grand Canyon followed by a tandem bungee jump. It may sound exciting when you are planning it but, just to be sure, imagine yourselves in 30 years time, looking back at your wedding. What do you think you will remember most? The ceremony and the commitment you made together or the sheer panic at the thought of the impending bungee jump?

I have nothing against helicopters or bungee jumps and if that's what you choose for your ceremony, fantastic, in fact, send me a picture. What I am saying is, don't underestimate the richness of the moment that your ceremony will give you. It is powerful and exciting, in and of itself, and needs little in the way of embellishments to make it more so.

That's not to say you shouldn't consider creative alternatives for your wedding location. I've officiated at and attended many wonderful ceremonies in unique and memorable locations and with exotic and unusual themes. In every case the uniqueness of the setting enhanced rather than upstaged the ceremony.

If you are in doubt about whether your chosen venue or 'stage' is the right choice, try the thirty year memory test. You can always save the helicopter and bungee jump for the honeymoon anyway – that way you get two fantastic memories to look back on.



Expand on the ideas raised in the previous exercises and discuss and describe the ideal setting for your wedding. Is it a beach, church, home, park, forest?



Perhaps you have already decided on a venue. If so what, if anything, needs to be done to make it right for you? Any decorations and embellishments? Do you need a marquee? Do need wheelchair access? Chairs? If you are planning an outdoor wedding in summer is there shade for you and your guests? If it gets too hot for your guests they may become more interested in heading for the cool spots at the other end of the park rather than listening to your ceremony. Also, if the groom is wearing a traditional suit, it will be hard for him to relax if he is overheated! Some form of shade on hot days is essential.



Will you have music at the ceremony? If so, a chamber orchestra, pre-recorded, organ...? What do they require? Mains power?



If it is outdoors, have a back up venue or plan in mind in case of inclement weather. Where will you go? Crossing your fingers and hoping the weather will be fine is not the best option here. Planning for high winds or wet weather will ensure everyone is happy come what may.

Always put the alternative venue on the invitation and a contact number to call if in doubt. Use a mobile number or message bank that can have a recorded message for your guests, stating the current plan clearly. When you record the message, say at what time you are recording it.

What is your contingency plan?



Write down a few key points describing the ‘stage’ for your wedding. If you haven’t done so already, this is a chance to describe the setting in more detail than before.

Susan and John were having a late afternoon wedding just on sunset. There were 40 adults and about 20 children coming including three of their own children. A few weeks before the ceremony they had a weekend dedicated to making paper lanterns and paper cut outs for decoration. Kids and parents were invited and they cut, painted and glued, laughed and chatted. After the wedding ceremony candles were lit and placed within the lanterns and a guard of honour was formed for Susan and John to walk through, and as they continued their walk down to the reception area everyone followed, lanterns and lights bobbing, families laughing and talking.

Graham and Bonnie had three boisterous boys who were very excited about their mum and dad’s beach wedding. To utilise the bountiful energy of their children Graham arrived with the boys half an hour before the arrival time of the guests. The boys built a beautiful ceremonial circle made of sandcastles, flower petals and shells. They created a masterpiece and as a bonus for mum and dad, when it was time for the ceremony, the boys were ready to sit still!

The Invitation

On the invitation it's important to let guests know what type of event you are organising so they can come prepared. They won't want to be wearing high heels and stockings if the ceremony is to be held on the beach, or if they have to tramp up a muddy forest path to get to the secret spot tucked away down by the river. If it is to be held on a boat they might be in need of some seasickness tablets or a warm woolly jumper.

Permits

If your ceremony venue is a park or beach, will you need a permit from a local council or park authority to hold your wedding there? Is there sufficient parking? Will any of your guests have difficulty accessing the ceremony? Will they need wheelchair ramps, etc? Make a note to check up on these points later.

Likes and Dislikes

Previous experience can be a powerful tool when developing your ceremony. If you have been a guest at a wedding ceremony, spend a few moments remembering what you liked and disliked or what you would have done differently. Write your answers to the following statements on separate sheets of paper or a notebook.



What you liked –

What you didn't like –

What you would have done differently –



Now share your answers and write down those that interest or inspire you.

Traditions and Customs

Traditional weddings may have particular elements that you love and cannot do without. It may be the father walking the bride down the aisle, the recessional or hearing the words, “I do”. Then there may be certain customs or traditions that you can take or leave, e.g. the tossing of the bouquet, the father giving the bride away.



Throughout this journey of discovering what you would like for your ceremony, consider why something is being included. Does it mean anything for you? Can it be changed or taken out? Keep true to your values and vision of what it is you both want. Discuss your options with your celebrant or priest.

4 - The Ceremony Structure

Now that we've set the tone for the ceremony, we need to give it some structure. Apart from the legal requirements that will be covered on Page 33, there are no rules that state the order of things or what can or cannot be included. Check with your celebrant or priest as to their requirements but, by and large, the content of the ceremony should be up to you.

In terms of timing, again there are no rules so make your ceremony as long or as short as you would like. Most ceremonies last for half an hour from the time the bride walks down the aisle (if she does this) to the conclusion. Around fifteen to twenty minutes seems to be an ideal timeframe for the spoken part of the ceremony.

Having said that, your wedding is the beginning of a lifelong commitment – half an hour may seem like a small amount of time to mark such an important moment. If you want to make it longer than half an hour, by all means do so. An important point to remember though is that you want to hold the attention of your guests. You want them to remember your wedding for all the right reasons, not just because of its epic proportions.

Celia and Mauro had always wanted a ceremony that was short and sweet. After a short introduction by the celebrant, a friend read a verse that they had written that reflected the importance of the love and commitment that they felt for one another and then they exchanged their vows. The ceremony was complete in ten minutes. It was perfect for what they wanted.

On the morning of their wedding, Kalina and John organised for all of the men in the bridal party and the male wedding guests to set up the ceremonial area while all of the women were setting up the house for the reception afterwards. There was much merriment and camaraderie in the two groups.

Just before midday, the women came singing down the street to the meeting place where the men were standing to welcome the bride and the female guests. With music and singing the ceremony began. The formal spoken part of the wedding ceremony lasted half an hour. The guests were then invited to participate in a progressive dance (after guidance on how to proceed) to allow everyone the opportunity to meet with the bridal couple and each other.

Upon returning to the house, the bride and groom were seated as the guests of honour and then many of the guests presented prepared performance pieces to honour the marriage. The pieces ranged from poetry readings and love letters to belly dancing and music with a break for the partaking of an exquisite feast. The marriage 'ceremony' went into the night to everyone's delight.

Use the following as a guide only. You can change the order and include or exclude any section as you wish. We will explore each element in further detail as we go along.

The Welcome	Opening the ceremony and welcoming family and friends.
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'Giving Away' the Bride	Or, as it most commonly referred to today, 'escorting the bride'
--------------------------------	--

Introduction	A sharing of your values and views on love, friendship and marriage.
---------------------	--

Sharing how you met or your journey so far as a couple or family.

Acknowledgement	A great opportunity to acknowledge your parents, children, friends and family.
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Authorisation	Stating the authority of the celebrant and explaining what marriage means according to law (the monitum). This is a legal requirement in Australia and must be included at an early stage of a wedding.
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As same sex unions and commitment ceremonies are not legally recognised in Australia, this authorisation must not be included in those ceremonies.

Reading(s)	A poem or verse read by the celebrant, a family member or a friend.
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Parental Blessing	An opportunity for parents to pledge their love and acceptance of the marriage. Often used instead of the traditional 'giving away'.
--------------------------	--

The Vows	The marriage commitment. This includes the asking of questions to the bride and groom and their personal vows.
-----------------	--

Exchanging of Rings	There is no legal requirement to exchange rings. You may choose another symbol or have only one ring or you may have no exchange at all – it's your choice.
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Reading	See above.
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Declaration	Declaration of Marriage. This is where the 'kiss' comes in.
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Signing the Marriage Register and Certificates	This can sometimes include a musical piece or verse.
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Closing

This can include a blessing, reading or words of congratulations. The celebrant may also present the marriage certificate and the couple to family and friends. It can also be an opportune time to hand over to the MC who can lead the celebration to the next point.



Other than the suggested structure is there anything else you want to include in your wedding ceremony?



Once you've considered the structure, write a brief outline or program for your own wedding. You can always change this later on but it will give you a guide and show what areas you need to focus on as we get down to the detail.

The Legals

Different countries have different rules relating to what is and is not required for a legally accepted wedding ceremony.

In Australia, Commonwealth law states that a wedding must be conducted by a registered civil or religious celebrant and be in the presence of at least two witnesses over the age of 18. According to the *Marriage Act 1961*, it is also a legal requirement for a celebrant to include the following paragraph (monitum). This states the celebrant's authority to officiate at the ceremony and also defines the nature of the marriage relationship. The following is from Section 46(1):

"I am duly authorised by law to solemnise marriages according to law. Before you are joined in marriage in my presence and in the presence of these witnesses, I am to remind you of the solemn and binding nature of the relationship you are now about to enter. Marriage, according to the law in Australia, is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life."

Though the Act allows you to use 'words to that effect' there is little room to change the wording of the monitum. Any changes that are made must not dilute the original meaning.

The *Marriage Act 1961* – Section 45 (2) – also states that each party must say to the other, in the presence of the marriage celebrant and witnesses, the words:

"I call upon the persons here present to witness that I, AB (or CD) take thee, CD (or AB) to be my lawful wedded wife (or husband)" – or words to that effect.

According to the Department of Internal Affairs (2007) the legal requirements for all marriage ceremonies conducted in New Zealand are that:

- The marriage must be performed in the presence of a registered Marriage Celebrant or Registrar of Marriages at the place specified on the marriage licence;
 - The marriage must be performed in the presence of at least two witnesses; and
 - During the ceremony, and before at least two witnesses, each party must say the words "I, AB (or CD) take you, CD or (AB) to be my legal wife (or husband)" or words to similar effect.
- Both parties and witnesses sign the registration forms

In some countries (though not Australia or New Zealand) the celebrant or priest is required to ask if any of the guests or the bride and groom knows of any legal impediments to the marriage.

Now I am going to ask each of you in turn, to declare that you know of no legal reason why you may not be married to each other.

Mia: *I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I, Mia Smith, may not be joined in matrimony to Jay Renworth.*

Jay: *I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I, Jay Renworth, may not be joined in matrimony to Mia Smith.*

Some countries also have restrictions on including religious or sacred rituals, music, or even words like ‘blessing’ in marriages conducted by civil celebrants or registrars. Again, this is not the case in Australia.

Your own celebrant is responsible for ensuring that legal requirements are met and they can guide you on what the requirements are. If in doubt, you can also check with your local registrar.

Did you know?

In some countries, ‘surprise weddings’, where one partner surprises the other by arranging a wedding, are illegal. This is the case in Australia, where a Notice of Intended Marriage must be lodged at least one month and a day before the wedding, with both parties being required to sign the form. This is to ensure that there is no undue pressure on the ‘surprised partner’ and, ultimately, to protect the marriage itself.

5 - Gathering the Flock

Whatever the setting for your wedding ceremony, whether it's in a church or chapel, on the beach or a mountain top, the beginning is vitally important to gain people's attention and to create a special and sacred atmosphere.

In most cases, though, the guests will be in position before the bridal party arrives, so you may wish to give some thought to how you can create some atmosphere before the ceremony even begins. Some relaxing music, whether played by musicians or played back on CD, can help to set the tone for the ceremony.

Kate and Simon chose a quiet place down by the river on their property to get married. To get to the ceremonial area guests walked across the cow paddock along a neatly mown path. Out of sight and amongst the trees was an a cappella choir. As the guests got closer they began to sing. The heavenly sound of voices floating up was deeply moving.

In any ceremony, it is the collective energy of the participants and the guests that combine to 'make' the ceremony. Nerves are inevitable, not just for the bride and groom, but also for other members of the wedding party as well as some of the guests. This is especially so for someone who may be uncomfortable in social situations or who may not know many of the other guests.

Though this nervousness can contribute to the excitement of the event, in some cases it can also prevent someone from really enjoying the ceremony and reception. Having someone to make people welcome and put them at ease helps to alleviate this nervousness and to create a convivial atmosphere, the perfect setting for a wedding.

It can be the Groom and/or the Best Man, Groomsmen, the MC for the reception, or you could delegate this role to a trusted friend. A simple greeting and, where necessary, an introduction to one or two other guests can go a long way to making someone feel comfortable enough to enjoy the ceremony at a more relaxed level.

If either of the mothers is without a partner, it is also a lovely gesture to have someone escort the mother to her seat and then again to the reception. It may be one of the groomsmen or another member of the family.



Spend a few moments now considering how you could create the right atmosphere for your ceremony. What music (if any) would help to set a tone that matches what you envision for the ceremony? Who can you trust to help put guests at ease as they arrive for the ceremony? Write your thoughts down before continuing to the next step.

The groom, his son and two musician friends were waiting down by the river where the ceremony was to be held. The bride and guests were up at the house. At the given time the groom and his friends signalled to the house on hand drums and issued a welcoming call from a bamboo flute. Up at the house another musician responded on a flute. It was time for the children to come to the ceremony. After five minutes another call was issued and the rest of the guests came down. The call and response of the flutes created a feeling of excitement and a beautiful sense of becoming present with the beginning of the celebration. And finally, when everyone was in place, the flute called for the bride to come.

A Restless Guest List?

Will there be any young children at the ceremony? If so, consider how their presence will impact on the atmosphere created before and during the ceremony. Children can often contribute a sense of joy and spontaneity to a ceremony but they can also be very unpredictable, especially in circumstances that are unfamiliar to them or with large groups of people. Maybe have a special pillow or chair for young ones to sit on. Think of ways to include them – flower girl, page boy and ring bearer are the more obvious choices. Or maybe they could give out the Order of Service or petals, or escort grandparents to their seats.

Consider, in advance, any precautionary steps that could pre-empt any situations that might arise. I always carry a couple of spare 'bubble blowing sets' and paper and drawing pencils in my celebrant's kit. Have a little snack pack and drink ready as sometimes it is quite a wait before food is served. You might even like to delegate a trusted friend, paid babysitter or family member to care for or occupy excited children if necessary. Highlight this section now as a reminder if necessary.

Walking up the Aisle, Along the Garden Path, Through the Forest

The entrance into the ceremony area has traditionally seen the bride's father walk the bride down the aisle to stand beside her beloved. Nowadays there are many options, including walking to the celebrant as a couple, or even coming together from two different directions, meeting at the altar.

If someone is walking the bride down the aisle, who will it be? It could be the father and/or mother of the bride, grandparent, a brother or sister, a child or children, a dear friend or someone else of your choosing. The bride may of course choose to walk down the aisle alone.

Take a few moments to consider who you might like to take up this role. What is the significance of this choice for you? Is it to acknowledge their role in your life in some way? Are they 'giving you away' or are they accompanying you because they are part of your journey into the next stage of your life?

Whoever you choose, when you ask them, share the reasons for your choice with them. This can make the difference between feeling like an 'extra' at your wedding to taking an active and honoured role in the ceremony.

When you get to the altar or celebrant, will they remain standing next to you to be asked for a blessing or formal giving away or will they sit down? You may wish to discuss this with your chosen person(s). Again, this will help them feel like they are taking an active role in the ceremony.

If the groom is walking alongside the bride down the aisle, it may be that the other groomsmen escort each of the bridesmaids to the front as well (if you have bridesmaids and groomsmen, that is).

Julie had two very special fathers in her life; her biological dad, Stephen and her step dad, David, who had raised her since she was two years old. She wanted both of them to walk her down the aisle and yet not together. David walked her from the house to near the guests where Stephen was standing. They shook hands and then Stephen escorted her to Jason, her partner.



What vision do you have for your entrance? If you want to have someone escort the bride, who would you like it to be?

Again, consider what music you might play for the walk up the aisle. Bagpipes? Chamber quartet? Organ? Uncle Bob with his banjo?



Who do you want to be responsible for playing the music? They will need to take their cue from the celebrant so ensure they are introduced to each other before the ceremony. If it is recorded music ask that they wait for ten seconds once everyone is in place then fade the music gently out, rather than deliver an abrupt stop.

6 - The Welcome

The traditional way to begin a wedding ceremony is for the celebrant to formally welcome the guests.

Alternative beginnings include:

- An inspiring poem, prayer, verse or blessing.
- Inviting everyone to take a moment to become present with the beauty and/or silence of the venue.
- One of your friends or family could welcome your guests and share a few words of why you have all gathered and then introduce the celebrant.
- A local indigenous elder could bless the proceedings, or begin with an acknowledgement of their sacred land and traditions.
- A choir or soloist can offer a song to begin the proceedings. This can be especially touching if it comes from a friend or family member. If you want the guests to join in with the singing prepare song sheets for them to use.
- A guided meditation. You need to consider many factors here beside guest receptivity, including noises or distractions, comfort of the guests, children or babies who are present, environmental considerations, and the ability of the celebrant or person to lead the proceedings.

A young couple asked me to lead a guided meditation at the beginning of their ceremony to bring people together in a quiet space and to feel the love and connection that was present.

When I arrived there were about 20 guests, ten of who had been out drinking until three in the morning – they looked pretty hung over. Wondering about the receptivity of this group, I asked the couple if they still wanted to go ahead with the meditation. “Oh yes,” they said! The guests formed a circle with the bride and groom and everyone was very interested.

After a short guided meditation, the rings were passed around the circle as family and friends blessed the rings. Many of the young guests approached me afterwards and said it was a deeply touching ceremony.

Any other ways you can think of that might interest you?



Take a few moments to write down how you might like to commence your ceremony.



How do you want the celebrant to address you? Does everyone know you by your middle name or a shortened version of your full name that you would like to use?



How do you want the celebrant to address your guests?

- Family and friends,
- Beloved family and friends,
- Ladies and gentlemen,
- Other...



Why are we gathered? What are we here to celebrate? Spell it out.



What is special about the date, time or place?

Examples:

“Dear Friends, Simon and Annette have chosen this magnificent place for their wedding for it was here one year ago that Simon asked for Annette's hand in marriage. It is a place that they hold very close to their hearts. I would like to welcome you all to this special celebration of their love and commitment to one another and to the beauty of this coastal headland.”

“John and Sally have chosen Arrawarra because it is here that John's family has holidayed every year for the last thirty years. Last year John and Sally brought their 6 month old daughter, Saskia, for her first holiday and now today they celebrate their wedding.”

Write down some special features or reasons why you have chosen your date, time and place.



Is there anyone who cannot be present that you would like to mention?



Is there anyone who has passed away that you would like to mention?

Sally had brought her wedding forward six months so that her mother, who was not well, could be present. Her mother died three weeks before the new wedding date. The last time everyone had been together was at the funeral. We took a moment at the beginning of the ceremony to acknowledge the sadness that her mum couldn't be present, and acknowledged that her presence of love and joy would be with us as we celebrated their marriage. There were lots of tears and yet it brought comfort as well as joy, to bring an awareness of her spirit and love into the ceremony.

You may find it more appropriate just to make a general acknowledgement of someone's absence than actually name the person. Discuss this with your family if necessary.

"On this special day we would like to take a moment to think of the family and friends who are not with us today to celebrate the marriage of Vicki and Gareth. We also remember, with love, those who have gone before and know they would have been very proud to see you share this commitment of marriage here today, and we know that their love is present here with you both."

7 - The Introduction

This is an opportunity to share your values, views and beliefs about marriage, and the qualities that you know to be important for a healthy relationship. It can include the story about your meeting or a metaphor of your journey together, special times you have shared, challenges you have overcome or what you enjoy doing with each other. This is also an appropriate place to include the monitum.

Dean and Shelley both spoke after the celebrant's welcome, sharing with everyone what marriage meant for them both (see sample ceremony, Page 172). They closed the introduction with a poem they had both written, each reading a verse in turn.

Your Meeting

How, where and when your relationship began will almost always be a point of interest for guests as well as a terrific point from which to 'build your story'. Many guests won't have even heard the story and will be interested, fascinated and even surprised to hear where it all began.

Even more important, reliving the beginning of the relationship will help create a feeling of excitement that you can both carry through the rest of the ceremony building process.

The wedding itself is a lifetime commitment and the journey that led you to make that commitment is worth recalling and reliving.

Here are a few things to consider when telling how it all began and what brought you to making a lifelong commitment. As you answer all of these questions, your story will begin to take shape. It's almost inevitable that you will find you have too much story to tell. That's okay as it will be trimmed later but in the meantime, treat the extra parts of the story as a bonus. It all helps to create the right mood and energy.



How did you meet? Take some time to remember your first meeting, the circumstances around it, and how you felt at the time. Do this separately before sharing. You may each have very different recollections of how you met and could very well have different feelings associated with it. Bringing the two stories together adds richness and interest for your guests (and for yourselves).

Phillip and Sunjani met on the internet, and were a little embarrassed about it when they talked to me at the first meeting. Most of the guests knew their story however, so I encouraged them to embrace their meeting and share it with everyone.

"You have all been invited here to witness the culmination of the amazing courtship of Phillip and Sunjani. The story of how Phillip and Sunjani found each other is perhaps a little unorthodox. It began on the 24th September 2001, when Sunni sent a missive to Phillip on the internet inviting him to chat. Phillip responded promptly to her charming invitation and they eventually met and realised that what they had discovered together over the internet and via the phone was real face to face. They took a risk and accepted, with the spirit of adventure, all that a romance conducted over a 4000 km distance would bring. Sheer bliss when they were together and lonely heartache when apart. They knew they belonged together, and decided that caution had to be thrown to the wind."

“Craig and Julie were both born and raised in a large coastal town in Australia, but it took them many years and quite a big distance to finally meet. On independent travels they finally met in Spain. They became travelling companions and best friends instantly. They lived together in England for three years and returned home to get married.”

“John and Sarah met at their workplace six years ago. John was very keen on impressing Sarah but wasn’t quite sure of what he could do. He tried talking to her about how nice her little red shoes were. An approach that he thought would show her that he had his eyes open and was able to notice the important things in life. However, that was about as far as he got, until Sarah was finally informed by a colleague one day, ‘I know someone who thinks you’re lovely!’ So with the help of her friend Paula, an afternoon drink was organised and it was at this first meeting that Sarah and John talked for hours. Soon after, a proper date was planned, however, it was the night before this that the first date nerves were broken when they shared their first very public kiss whilst out with a group of friends.”



How did you meet? Share your accounts of your meeting now and write down some key features of your journey together. If you like you can even write a draft of the story now.



What did you think about each other when you first met? You can have a lot of fun with this. Couples are often surprised to hear their partner's answer to this question, which can range from total disinterest to heartfelt passion or anywhere in between.



When did you know you were in love? Did it happen for you both at the same time or did one of you take a while longer? How, when and where did you tell your partner that your feelings had progressed to this point?



Was there a specific moment when you realised this was your life partner? Where were you and what triggered that moment? Was it something they said, a look that they gave you or were you just daydreaming while doing the ironing?



Who proposed and how?



Describe how your mutual journey has been so far.



What have been some memorable times? Write down two or three of your favourite times together.

"I have often heard it said that travelling together can make or break a couple. For John and Sarah their two and a half year experience overseas was fantastic. They had many amazing adventures and many gorgeous days together in beautiful places. They always agreed on where to go and what to do. John was the tireless driver and Sarah the planner extraordinaire. Even though they knew each other really well they always had something new to talk about and they would make plans about what they hoped to do in the years to come. There were, of course, plenty of challenges which made their relationship stronger; and there was lots of fun and laughter. For both of them, it was an invaluable life experience made richer by sharing it together.

There is one story from this time I think you would all enjoy: In the beautiful university city of Oxford they shared a very cosy single room and slept together in one single bed for almost a year. Surprisingly, they both got used to it and even liked it. Whilst that is quite hard to imagine they knew that, if they coped with that, they could cope with anything."



What do you enjoy doing together, either regularly or as special occasions?



What can you tell your guests about your relationship that they may not already know?



What challenges have you overcome during your time together?

John and Marcia had been through a challenging time together which everyone was aware of. They chose to acknowledge this time and the strength that it gave their relationship without too much focus on the details and bad times.

“Marc and Liz have had a great deal of fun together, laughing and caring for one another over the last eighteen months. They have also had their fair share of challenges which has seen them grow stronger and brought them closer together. They wish to continue to grow together, learn together and, most importantly, trust and love one another for many years to come. For Marc and Liz this marriage is about companionship and a lifetime partnership.”

What Does Getting Married Mean?

Surprisingly, this is one area that couples often only consider on a surface level without really digging deep where the true answers lie. Initial answers might include the house with a picket fence, raising children, overseas trips together, growing old...

These are all valid and worthwhile ways of sharing mutual love but they are more about **how** you will share the relationship rather than **why** you will. I said in the introduction that the process of developing your ceremony will challenge you to reveal yourselves – this is where we'll roll our sleeves up and start digging deeper.

What does getting married mean to you? Security, comfort, sharing, expression, adventure, passion, family...? Following are a few questions to help you find the **real** reasons you have for getting married.

Be prepared for surprises here as it may well be that you haven't discussed these questions before, or that you haven't dug as deep to find the answers. You may even need to ask yourselves the questions two or three times to get the answer you are looking for.

Bear in mind that the answers do not have to be the same for each of you. While it is okay for a couple to have the same reasons for getting married, it is not compulsory. There are no right or wrong answers here. It is more important that each partner has an understanding of the other's reasons.



(Consider your answers separately before coming together)

Why did you decide to get married? Hint: “Because I love him/her” is not the answer you are looking for here. You probably love dozens or even hundreds of people but have no desire to marry them. Another way to word the question is, “If you didn’t marry each other, what would you be missing?”



What will marriage add to the relationship that you don't have already?



What does marriage mean for you personally?



What does marriage mean for you as a couple?

Stephen and Shona's ceremony was opened with the following quote: "Marriage is not a ritual or an end. It is a long, intricate, intimate dance together and nothing matters more than your own sense of balance and your choice of partner" (Quote by Amy Bloom).

Today Steve and Shona begin their intricate, intimate dance together and we as their family and friends are privileged to witness their joining in marriage.

For Shona and Steve this dance of relationship is one in which they get pleasure from the intimacy that keeps the dance going. They know they have to be closely attentive to each other and coordinate their steps. While dancing they get close, very close, and then on occasion step back to give each other space to dance a little on their own."



What are the foundations that your marriage will be based on?



What are important qualities and strengths for a healthy relationship?

“John and Sarah’s marriage is based upon a strong foundation of acceptance and respect, honesty and trust, common goals and shared values. They have described their relationship to me as devoted, caring, joyful and inspiring. They have learnt over the years that even after the romance has settled, their love for each other keeps getting better.”



Write down three loving words to describe your relationship



What have you taught each other about love and commitment and what have you learned from others?



Are there any couples that serve as role models for your idea of an ideal relationship? You don't have to mention them in the ceremony (though you may if you wish) but what are the qualities of their relationship that you value and wish to duplicate in your marriage?

“There are two couples here today that have had an amazing influence on John and Sarah’s lives for which they are deeply grateful. John’s parents Harold and Buntz and Sarah’s parents David and Paula.

(To the parents) You have blessed John and Sarah with a home life that was overflowing with love. Your love for each other as a couple and for your family has inspired them both. They know you have had your challenges and yet you have an amazing ability to help each other to shine. You have shared with them your values ... not by instilling them but by living them. Respect, honesty, compassion and the willingness to understand and accept others; the importance of working hard and also taking time out and having fun to enjoy life. They are both grateful for the love, support and encouragement that you have given to them as individuals and now as a couple; and also for your friendship.

They hope that they can have a relationship as strong and loving as the marriages they feel privileged to have been witness to.”



One of the enduring clichés about marriage is ‘for better or for worse’. How do you see yourselves coping with the worst?



The rest of your life is an unknown period of time but how do you feel about committing yourself to one person for the rest of your life?

8 - Friends and Family

Marriage isn't just the joining of two people: in most cases it is the joining of two families and often the joining of two circles of friends. Even if you are eloping or having a small intimate ceremony, chances are that you will want to acknowledge their role at some stage during your ceremony.



What do you appreciate and love about each other's family?



What values have they given you?



How did they inspire you with their own marriages and ways of relating?

"Sarah and Matthew would like to take this moment to acknowledge their parents. Sarah's parents, Tom and Petra, and Matthew's parents, John and Frances, have been married for a combined 54 years. During this time, they have raised their families in a sphere of love and respect. This is a priceless legacy that has guided and supported Sarah and Matthew in their relationship. (Celebrant facing towards the parents) For this, and the support and encouragement you have given them, they are deeply grateful. Thank you."



Did your family and friends have a part to play in your meeting?

"Mel and James have found great love, enthusiasm and acceptance from their families and friends for their union, and for that, they thank you. They deeply appreciate the warmth with which both of their families have accepted the other person."



What do you appreciate and love about your friends?



Is there any special way that you would like to include family and friends in the ceremony (e.g. lighting candles, reading a verse, etc)?

Janice and Tyler presented both of their mothers with a beautiful white rose just after the opening of the ceremony. This represented the coming together of the two families as well as the love and gratitude that Janice and Tyler had for their mums.



Are there any special moments you have shared with your friends or family that have brought you closer together or inspired you in some way?

“When John and Sarah were exploring with me what they wanted to share here today, I had the pleasure of reading pages and pages of gratitude for their parents, siblings, family members and dear friends. You have all had a tremendous impact upon John and Sarah.

They shared that you are a wonderful bunch and that you all really know how to have a lot of fun which is why you are all here today. John and Sarah treasure your friendship, your honesty and the trust they share with you.

Since the very beginning of their relationship, they have heard only praise for their relationship. You have all had a role in shaping the kind of people they have become and in the decisions they have made in life so far. They wanted you to all be here for this very big step today. Making a promise to each other is what marriage is about and making it in the presence of family and friends feels for them even more momentous.

John and Sarah, may you always know you are dearly loved, and in times of need call upon the love and support that is present here today.”



Why is it important that your family and friends are present? Do they have a role as witnesses, advocates, mentors, support?

“Stephen and Chris ask you to bear witness to the joining of their lives and their families; to bless this union both now and throughout their lives together; to take your presence here as an open invitation to be advocates of their special relationship; to be supporters of their love, both individually and together.”

“We are here today to affirm and celebrate Brandt and Roxy’s commitment to each other. We are here as family and friends because we are very important to them and their lives. Brandt and Roxy, we offer you our love and our support today and for the many years that lie ahead on your journey together.”

Giving Away or the Giving of Support and Blessings

The transition into married life has undergone massive change over the past 20 or 30 years. While many still opt for the tradition of a father giving the bride away, there are now many more creative ways of incorporating a parental or family blessing into a ceremony. Options include the traditional asking, a blessing or even a call for support from everyone present. You can have none, one, or all of these options.



Would you like to include the traditional or formal ‘giving away’?

Before the asking, it may be appropriate to recognise the role of the person escorting the bride and acknowledge their relationship.

“John, with your wife Marion, you have cared for and supported Sally, nurturing your relationship. You have watched her grow into the beautiful young woman she is today. I know you are very proud to escort her here today and I would like to thank you for your love, support and encouragement throughout her life and here today. Thank you. I would now like to formally ask you: John, do you bring Sally to be married to Fanco?” “I do.”



Would you like to ask for a blessing or for support in your marriage?



Who would you like to ask and why?

- The person escorting the bride
- Father of the bride
- Father and mother of the bride
- All parents (this may include any new partners of parents)
- Your children
- Everyone present
- Other ...

“As family and friends it can be our role to encourage and support Mika and Blair in their married life. To love them, to listen to them and to share with them at their best; and also when they are challenged.

Are you willing, as close friends and family, to offer your support to Mika and Blair, not only today, but also throughout their many years together? If you are happy to do so would you please respond now by saying: We do!”

Guests: *“We do!”*

“Mika and Blair, wherever you are as you journey through life, remember you can call upon the love and support that is here for you today at this celebration of your love for each other.”



What do you want the blessing to say? Do you wish to thank them for the part they have played in bringing you to this stage of your life?

This can be a great opportunity to formally introduce the parents. It can also be a perfect time to recognise new relationships: the mother of the groom welcoming the bride and her family, or the bride acknowledging the groom's mother/family and the groom acknowledging the bride's mother/family. This can be done verbally or with a small gift.

You may wish to include a beautiful candle ceremony to signify the joining of two families. The mothers (or parents) of the bride and groom each light a single candle representing the two separate families. Later in the ceremony, the couple comes forward to light a single 'marriage candle' with the two individual candles.

Without Family Blessings

In some cases, it may well be that one or more parents don't support the marriage. You may know this because they have said so or you or your partner may simply have a sense that this is the case. If so, you may wish to consider bypassing the giving away/parental blessing part of the ceremony. The ceremony needs to be based on honesty and truth and if you are including the blessing simply because you feel you should, then you could be undermining that sense of truth.

"One of the most important relationships we have in life is the one we share with our parents. Throughout our lives they guide and show the way. Families all have their ups and downs which shape us into who we are. Charmaine and Phil are very proud to be here with their parents, Brett and Emily, Adam and June, as they embark on this exciting journey of marriage."

Children and Family Life

Marriage nowadays is often not just the joining of a husband and wife, but can also include children as well; either those of the couple or one or both partners. You may wish to honour the role of any children involved in some way, either by mentioning them in the ceremony or asking them specifically for their blessing or by having them play an important role in the ceremony.

Children love to be involved. They can take the more obvious roles such as ring bearer, flower girl, bridesmaid, groomsman, usher or pageboy. If they are old enough you could even ask if they wish to share a reading. If you already have children, your marriage is an important aspect of the family union. You may wish to acknowledge the richness that having children brings to your relationship – the joys and the challenges.

“Marriage is also an affirmation of the family union, of Michael, Sandra, Annie, Angus and Maggie, and the responsibilities, joys, sharing, love and strength that this family holds for them. Michael and Sandra adore their beautiful children. They know that by loving one another they will be giving their children the greatest gift of all, that of giving and receiving love. Their shared love and friendship will bring great joy to themselves and to all those who know them.”

Children can also walk their mother down the aisle, hold her bouquet while the vows are being spoken, or write something special to be read at the ceremony. You may wish to ask them what they would like to do.

If you have children who don't live with you yet will be at the wedding, you may wish to find some special way of acknowledging them... listen to your heart to find the right words. Keep it honest and simple.

“Linda and Mark are very proud and happy to have Linda's children Dane, Jenna and Sam here today, to take part in this ceremony.”

Linda to children: “Dane, Jenna and Sam, Mark and I love you equally and unconditionally. Though we may live apart, please remember that the door is always open and we will welcome you with loving, open arms. This is our promise to you... We love you.”

“Esme and Chen would like to acknowledge the love they hold for their two beautiful children, Samuel and Nicholas. They are also delighted to feel the magical presence of their child that Esme carries.”

You could also consider having a name giving ceremony as part of the day (see my website, www.WendyHaynes.com for information about name giving ceremonies).

To help you decide how you might want to incorporate children in the ceremony, consider the following:



What do you love about your children? (Individually or as a group)



How has having a family added to your relationship? To your life?



What have been the challenges and how has this strengthened your relationship with each other?



What are the most important values you would offer your children?



What does this marriage offer them?



What do you appreciate about each other as parents?



If you have a blended family, what have been the joys?

"This is also a time where Mykie and Oscar wish to affirm the love they feel for their children, Keisha and Matt, and Brian, Scott and Natalie. Mykie and Oscar have shared with me that each one of you is an extraordinary, unique person in your own way and that you are a remarkable group of young people. The bond they share with each of you is very special.

They would like to say thank you for your support and acceptance which has made this day possible. It can be a big challenge at times for all concerned when blended families come together and Mykie and Oscar are aware of that.

They are grateful for all that you have given to them in helping this extended family come together and making it work. It is something they will treasure and love you dearly for, forever."



Would you like your children to say anything? If you are interested in having your children declare vows of any form ensure you ask if they wish to do so in such a way that they can easily decline without appearing to offend either of you. Instead they may wish to write something special to read on the day or share a poem that has been chosen for them. Keep it simple and support them in their endeavours.



Is there any special way you want to include the children?

Okay, so you don't have children – what do you love about your cat, dog or the budgie?

Sometimes people say to me they don't have any children but ask if they can mention their favourite dog, and out comes the photograph of their beloved pooch.

If you are really fond of your pets and everyone knows of your special relationship then you might want to put a few words in your ceremony. You might even want to include them in the ceremony.



Would you like to include or say anything about your pets?

Samantha and Michael had wanted 'Bella' their poodle to be the ring bearer. A line was set up to run from the back of the ceremonial area to the front. When it was time for the rings to be exchanged, Bella was placed on the run with the rings attached to her collar. When Samantha and Michael called her she bounded to the front where she delivered the rings that signified the bond between Samantha and Michael. Getting her back wasn't so easy but it was nice to include her in such a significant moment of the ceremony.

"On this special day we would like to take a moment to think of the family and friends who are not with us today to celebrate the marriage of Trent and Deanne and of course we know that Bluey and Tam (their dogs) must be wondering where 'mum and dad' are."

9 - Readings

Kitchen Notes and Love Letters

There are thousands of beautiful poems and verses that can capture the essence of your relationship, love and friendship. Just type “love poems” into the internet search engines and you will be presented with many options.

You want a reading or readings that you are comfortable with, that make your heart and face light up when you hear them. You may choose a poem about love and marriage or an inspirational reading about life and friendship.

Your readings can come from cards, books or songs or they could be ones you have written personally. This is a great time to dig out your old love letters, write new ones, find your Valentine’s Day cards or even the notes you’ve left each other on the kitchen table or in the lunchbox. Of course, you can change lines you don’t like or make any other improvements that you feel necessary. From the Love Letter exercise on Page 98 you can even create your own poetry or readings to share at your wedding ceremony.

You may wish to write a blessing inspired by your surroundings or by what you would wish for your marriage. Play with your ideas and rework them until you are happy.



What readings would you like at your ceremony?



Do you have any favourite lines or quotes from any songs, books or poems?



Who would you like to read these? It is wise to choose someone who is comfortable and confident with speaking in public.

Community Thoughts

If you would like to involve guests in a more relaxed manner you could ask in advance or in the moment whether guests would like to share a few words. This can offer a profound sense of community and involvement amongst the guests.

This can be facilitated by asking key questions such as

- When you reflect upon your own relationships, what are important qualities that you would wish for the bride and groom's marriage?
- I'd like to invite you to think of the gifts that come from being married. Let's offer these now to the bride and groom, please call out using one or two words.

Be warned that it takes a skilled celebrant to maintain control and keep guest involvement like this manageable.

Gaye and Robert wanted the guests to be actively involved. During the early part of the ceremony everyone was asked what they thought were important values and qualities that made up a healthy marriage. Family and friends spoke spontaneously, some just calling out words, "honest and clear communication", "friendship", "a good sense of humour". Others reflected on their own years of happy marriage: "We've been together 46 years and my wife is still my very best friend. We accept one another for who we are, and I love her as much as the day I married her."



If you would you like to include this option, what question would you like your celebrant to ask?

Inspiration is All Around



What might the qualities of your wedding venue or environment symbolise in your relationship? Your answers may inspire you to form a verse or a poem.

“Let the beauty of our surroundings be symbolic of the beauty of your love that you bring here today.

May the trees remind you of the strength of your commitment. The tendrils and roots of your love growing deep in your hearts providing a strong foundation for your relationship.

Like the branches and stems may you reach out and grow providing shelter and protection for all who sit in its shade.

Like the light reflecting here and there on the leaves may it represent the twinkle in your eyes that you hold for each other.

May you grow and prosper together like the beautiful new coloured growth.

May the flowers represent harmony and laughter in your life and may your marriage bear the fruits of your love and kindness bringing forth a home and family that makes your hearts sing.

May your lives be blessed with great beauty and harmony, such as that we see here today.”

Inspiration is Within



Complete the statement ‘Love is...’ Write down whatever comes to mind and then reword your ideas into a reading like the one below from John and Sarah’s wedding ceremony.

“Love is constant and ever present

Love wants to be expressed... more than once.

Love opens the door to kindness and generosity

Love expresses tolerance and understanding

Love celebrates the joys and the achievements of each other.

Love can go deeper and the union can become stronger

when facing the challenges together

A vital marriage takes time and effort.

Marriage is a gift for life.”

10 - Pre Vows

Having gone through the welcome, introduction and acknowledgement stages of the ceremony, the pre vows help to bring attention back to the couple standing in front of their assembled family and friends.

We've already covered what marriage means to you and why you each want to get married, but the pre vows are an opportunity to state why you want to get married to this person standing before you. Usually it will take the form of the celebrant speaking or for each of you to speak in turn before leading in to the vows themselves.

Here are some examples of some pre vows to give you some ideas for how you might shape yours.

“Brandt, Roxy loves and appreciates your ever present touch, your patience and your caring. Her heart opens in your presence and she enjoys the laughter and fun that she shares with you. She loves everything about you.

Roxy, Brandt loves so much about you, your generous affection and care, your acceptance of him and the support you give so freely when he needs you. He too loves your humour and the joy and fun that you have together.

What a blessing for you both to share your lives with the generosity and joy that you experience.”

“April, you are the most beautiful woman I have ever set eyes upon. You captivate me and respond to my love in kind. I love the way you wake in the mornings with a smile for me. I love the way you care for yourself. I also love and deeply appreciate the way you look after me, the time and endless effort you give to my happiness and comfort. I consider myself to be the luckiest man in the world to have found such a kind and caring friend to share the rest of my life with.”

“Peter, I never expected to fall in love with you. You made me laugh and had a genuine interest in me and my well-being. When my heart opened in love for you, I knew that you were the one that I wanted to be with forever. You care for me in a way I cannot explain. You bring sunshine into my heart. I want to grow old with you, share our family together, and have a place in your heart forever.”

To help develop content for your pre vows, answer the following:



What are five loving words that describe your partner?



What do you love and appreciate about your partner?



What did you say when you proposed and/or what was your response when you were proposed to? You may have already mentioned this in the introduction. Here, though, we are more interested in how you were feeling when you proposed and/or what did you feel when you were proposed to? These feelings and emotions could help to inspire content for the pre-vows.

At this point you might feel comfortable to write the pre vows now or you might just like to keep the answers from the above in note form and come back to it later. Either way is okay.

11 - The Asking

Whilst it is not a legal requirement, a lot of couples like to hear the words 'I do' in their ceremony. There is of course the traditional asking:

Karl, do you choose Heidi to be your lawful wedded wife? Do you promise to love her, comfort her, honour and keep her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep you only unto her, so long as you both shall live?" ("I do")

A more contemporary version:

"Sara, marriage is a precious gift between a man and a woman. Together you will build a lifelong partnership of love, trust, loyalty, friendship and respect. Will you take David to be your husband and love, cherish and respect him always?" ("I will")



Or you can create your own version of asking.

12 - The Vows

The big moment is drawing nearer. How are you feeling at this point? We've got a way to go yet but it is okay to feel a tinge of excitement that you've reached this point. What are you going to say to each other for your vows? What words could you possibly choose to sum up your love for your partner and how deeply you value the commitment you are about to make? Well, let's find out. We'll start with a love letter!

The Love Letter has to be one of my favourite exercises. As it turns out it is often a favourite among couples that I have married also. As well as a chance to express and explore your love for each other, it is also a precious gift both to give and to receive. Though you have obviously explored and expressed your love for each other already, the love letter exercise helps you to enter into the marriage relationship with your eyes and heart wide open. It is affirming, supporting, empowering and fun. It also provides essential ingredients that can be used in the ceremony, especially the vows. Enjoy!

The Love Letter

Write a love letter to your partner using the following prompts. This letter is only to your partner and not for everyone at the wedding to hear so don't be shy and don't hold back. We're exploring feelings here and looking for inspiration so ignore that little voice in your head telling you, 'you can't say that!' (Note – I would suggest you each do this on separate sheets of paper. Remember to keep them as part of your wedding ceremony keepsake though!)



Begin with a heartfelt opening;

Beloved..., My dearest ..., or any other term of endearment you might have for your partner.

Complete the following statements:

- What I love and appreciate about you is...
- My life is richer because...

What is your vow as a marriage partner? What are you promising of yourself to your partner? (This may or may not be used in the ceremony, so allow yourself complete freedom to ramble on, or put it in point form.)

To close your letter, finish with words of love and gratitude for your partner.

Come back together and exchange your letters – don't discuss them yet. Just take the time to read through your partner's love letter to you. Observe how you are feeling, and enjoy this gift. Be present with the joy, be present with the tears, and be present with whatever arises.



Now, discuss with each other any thoughts or feelings that have come about from doing this. Listen fully to each other in turn. Is there anything you would like to use in the ceremony, the vows in particular?

When you are finished go back through your partner's writings and underline or highlight any favourite words or sentences that reach out to you.

At this point, using the feelings and words you have discovered above, you can start assembling your vows. In addition to what you wish to say to each other, the vows will also need to include the legal clauses. In Australia these include:

"I call upon the persons here present to witness that I, (name), take thee, (name), to be my lawful wedded wife/husband", or words to that effect.

In Australia the words 'husband', 'wife', 'spouse' or 'partner in marriage' must be used in the vows, and inappropriate words may not be substituted.

With the legal requirement met, you can word your vows according to your personal beliefs and values. They can be the same for each partner or you might like to write different ones. You may choose to use the traditional vow and add your own personal vow at the end. You may want to agree on a specific length of time for each one though.

Keep in mind some of the more common ways of delivery for the vows.

- One is to repeat the vow after the celebrant (the celebrant states the vow in manageable sections for the couple);
- the second is to read the vow from a card (particularly if it is quite long) that the celebrant can pass to you; or,
- thirdly you can recite the vow from memory (though this can place a lot of pressure on learning and recalling the lines).

In my experience, the first option works the best for most couples. You can also have the celebrant state some of your declaration in third person form beforehand.



What is your preference for delivery?

With the second and third options above you will need to consider whether you want your voices to be amplified so everyone can hear you say your vows. If so, you will need to discuss this with your celebrant.

Following are some examples of vows.

The Traditional Vow:

"I call upon the persons here present to witness that I, (name), take you, (name), to be my lawful wedded wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, and thereto I give you my pledge."

Alternative and Personally Written Vows:

"Francesca, I choose you above all others as my best friend, my lover and my wife. I love, trust and respect you and will cherish you always. I offer you my care and support with an open heart. Francesca, I will share the laughter and the tears, the joy and the sorrow and embrace all that life brings us."

Chris: *"Steven, you are everything I ever dared to hope for. Your presence strengthens me and complements me."*

Your love strengthens my spirit, granting me the space to fly and the courage to experience life and love like never before.

Unrelentingly, you insist upon intimacy, connection and understanding. You do not allow me to slip away and hide, and for this I am so grateful.

Dearest friend and closest companion, you have come to claim my heart and devotion forever, and forever, willingly, I give it to you.

(continued overleaf)

I vow to love you and remain open to you in laughter and tears, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain.

I vow to listen to you and communicate honestly.

I vow to respect you, to encourage your individuality, so that you may thrive as a whole person, independent of me.

I vow truly to abide by the will of God.”

Steven: *“In many corners of the world I have searched for you.*

In many rooms, in many cities.

Sometimes I have been confused as to your appearance.

But now, here, I have found you.

And I have found, too, that no part of the journey was in vain.

For it has granted me the wisdom to recognise you.

You are my heart, my love.

Chris, I vow to love you and remain open to you in laughter and tears, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain.

I vow to listen to you and communicate honestly.

I vow to respect you, to encourage your individuality, so that you may thrive as a whole person, independent of me.

I vow truly to abide by the will of God.”

You can find more vows in the Examples of Actual Ceremonies, beginning on Page 151.

Vows can also be written in the third person so that the celebrant reads them out.

(Note: The legal clauses would still need to be said by the bride and groom.)

Celebrant: *“Mark and Jill acknowledge their willingness and commitment to each other to make this marriage strong and lasting.*

They bring each other happiness and joy, and realise that only a person who is at peace and content with one’s self can truly make another person happy.

They accept each other for who they are and will continue to encourage each other to grow and achieve individual ambitions. They will continue to work together to achieve their mutual ideals, goals and ambitions.

They are willing and able to listen and communicate openly and honestly.

They are willing to share the success and the joy that life brings and also the challenge of sorrow and mistakes.

They declare their love to their son Jonathon, and declare their support to each other in their role as parents. They are willing and able to encourage each other to act in the best interest for themselves, their son Jonathon, and their world together.

Mark and Jill will look after each other – their health, their minds and, of course, their hearts.”

If any of the words or ideas in these examples inspire you, feel free to use them.

You may find this is the most challenging part of developing your ceremony. If you find you are getting stuck and that you need a break from the process, by all means take one. You don't have to get the vows 'right' first time; in fact it's unlikely that you will. If you do take a break, take some time to reread your love letters before you resume the vow writing process again. This will help recapture those all-important feelings that will contribute to writing heart-felt vows.

The vows are the most enduring part of your ceremony. Long after the cake has been eaten, your vows, the promises you have made to each other, will remain a part of your marriage. Spend as much time as you are able to and as much time as it takes on the writing of the vows.

Even if you decide to copy your vows from elsewhere, which is just fine, at least spend some time discussing them together. Go over each word and make sure they apply to your relationship. Someone else's vows may sound beautiful and poetic but it is the meaning behind the words that is most critical.

Your Vows...

It may help you to get started if you write the following sentence down and see what happens:



I, _____ take you _____ to be my husband...

I, _____ take you _____ to be my wife...

13 - Exchanging Rings

There are many different rituals when it comes to the rings (if you choose to have them). Some couples choose not to have any at all, or a ring for the bride only. You may even choose some other symbol or token instead of a ring – a necklace, a bracelet or some other gift. Believe it or not, I once married a couple where the groom chose a set of golf clubs rather than a ring! (They didn't bring the golf clubs to the ceremony however!) Adapt the following for whatever you choose for your ceremony.



Who will hold the rings and who will present them?

You may choose to have a ring bearer who then presents them to the best man and chief bridesmaid, who then pass them to the groom and bride. Maybe your parents can bring them forward. Or maybe the groom has them in his pocket. Whoever is involved, you will need to make sure they know their role and that they are reminded on the day. Though clichés about misplaced rings are a bit worn out, it does happen occasionally so it doesn't hurt to overprepare in this department.

Blessing the Rings

You may choose to have the rings blessed before they are exchanged. You could ask your celebrant to bless them or, for a smaller wedding, you may wish to pass them around the assembled guests who could bless them either quietly or by speaking openly (if time permits).

Janice and Peter asked the best man to step forward and hand the rings to their family. The rings were passed along the front row of immediate family, including both sets of parents and grandparents. One by one they stood and shared some very profound blessings for the new couple.



Do you want a separate vow when you exchange your rings or include the giving of the rings with the primary vow?



What do your rings symbolise to you? The promises, love and commitment? Your friendship? Your fidelity?



What do you want to say as you place the rings on each other's finger (or exchange tokens)? You might like to choose some words here that missed out on being included in the vows.

"Christine, I place this ring on your finger, as a symbol of my love and commitment to you. Please wear it with faith and trust that I will always love you and respect you."

"Katie, with this ring, I call upon everyone here present to witness that I, Matt, take you, Katie, to be my wife. Let it be a reminder that wherever you go, my love goes with you."

Scott held Wendy's ring whilst he declared his vow to her. He then kissed her ring every so gently and placed it on her finger. Wendy did the same with Scott's ring. It was very beautiful to witness.

Did you know? – Rings as a symbol of marriage are thought to have originated in Ancient Egypt. The 'ring finger' on the left hand is believed to have been chosen at that time as there is a vein in the finger that runs directly to the heart. The circle of the ring represents eternal love as it has neither a beginning nor an end.

14 - Summary of the Ceremony

This is the final drum roll before the actual declaration of marriage. At this point you may wish for your celebrant to write something or, as always, you can choose the words yourself. Essentially, it is a reminder of why everyone is gathered, what they have witnessed and just what marriage is. A few simple words may be all it takes to sum up.

“Dearest family and friends, we have been privileged witnesses here today as Annabelle and Matt have declared their love for one another and committed their lives to each other. We have seen and heard them exchange both the symbolic wedding band and their personally composed vows.

In the years to come, your rings will remind you with joy of this celebration. May you always be as happy together as you are today. There are no guarantees in a marriage. Marriage is a work of love. It calls for two people to share their vision of life, with tolerance, patience and understanding. It calls for two people to remain as individuals whilst enjoying a life of togetherness.”

If your vows and the remainder of the ceremony are still in draft form, you might wish to leave the summary until later. If you feel inspired to write your summary now, though, by all means do so.

15 - The Pronouncement of Husband and Wife

The moment has finally come! The pronouncement is fairly simple and straightforward. Here is an example:

“It is in the spirit of love and friendship that you have spoken and declared your love and commitment to each other. It is with much pleasure that I now, with the powers vested in me by the laws of this country, do pronounce you ... husband and wife!”

Now for the Kissing!

Strange as this may seem, practise your kiss beforehand. Ensure that it is not too short or too long. Find a kiss that is perfect for you and the occasion. It is your kiss and it's a moment to be treasured.

After the kiss spend a moment hugging. Do not be too quick to come apart! Enjoy this fully. Yes, you may well feel self-conscious, but that's okay – it's your day and your guests will treasure the moment almost as much as you will. They are happy for you to take your time! You may even kiss again!

Groom's note: If your bride has a veil, be warned! Once the veil has been lifted and it flows beautifully down her back, when you go to kiss and hug, make sure your hands go under the veil, otherwise with your hands on top it will pull her head back and you may end up getting an 'ouch' rather than a kiss and a smile!

16 - Signing the Register and Marriage Certificates

Congratulations! You are now married! However, there is still a small amount of paperwork to be dealt with to comply with the legal requirements. You can conclude the ceremony either before the signing of the Register and issuance of the Marriage Certificate or afterwards.

Personally, I always recommend that we include the signing as part of the ceremony and then re-gather the guests' full focus before closing the proceedings. This helps to keep the attention on the newlyweds and closes the ceremony before the hugs and kisses begin.

There is no restriction on where the register must be signed. It can be at a table nearby, on a surfboard, someone's back, sitting on a natural feature such as a large rock, or standing using a large register. You are free to choose whatever setting fits the theme of your ceremony.

If you are going to conclude the ceremony after the register has been signed, you might like to arrange for some music to be played for the duration. If you have a friend with a talent for singing, this might be a nice time for a short solo. Alternatively, you could have someone recite a verse although, as the couple are busy signing, they may miss this gift.

If you are going to have a pen that has special significance to you to sign the register, arrange for someone else to be responsible for this on the day, both before and after the ceremony. It's one less detail for you

to be concerned with and it also gives someone else an opportunity to feel that they have played a special role in the ceremony.

Saskia and Mauro had a special pen for the signing. Mauro's father was one of the witnesses for the Marriage Certificates. After the ceremony, Mauro presented his father with the pen they used for the signing. The father was crying as the two embraced.

Juan's youngest son was responsible for bringing the pen forward for the signing. Juan and Marion invited him to stay with them whilst this was happening. He was very proud and happy to do so.



Where will the signing take place? Do you need to provide a table and tablecloth and/or chairs?

17 - The Final Blessing

Once you have completed the signing of the register, you may wish for the celebrant to offer one final blessing. Ideally, this would be a forward looking statement to mark the transition that you have just undergone. You are no longer just a couple, no longer fiancés – your marriage has begun and you are husband and wife.



What do you look forward to?



What are your goals together?



How do you feel about growing old together?

You might like to share these sentiments with your loved ones before the ceremony concludes. Again, this is something you might want to leave until after you have developed the rest of the ceremony. By that time you will probably have a feel for whether enough has been said.

“May your lives be blessed with laughter and friendship, inner strength and peace that will hold you through the many twists and turns of life. May you be blessed with good health, prosperity and happiness.”

“On behalf of your family and friends, I would like to congratulate you both and wish for you a lifetime of loving and caring for one another, a beautiful family, your renovations completed to your hearts, and budgets, satisfaction and may you both be blessed with a lifetime of love and laughter, peace and happiness!”

18 - Presentation of Marriage Certificate and Closing

Doves, balloons, butterflies, petals, bubbles, candles – there are many rituals you can include for the closing. Some public places won't allow you to use confetti or petals, so check with your venue beforehand as to what is acceptable.



What would you like to include in the closing?

The ceremony is almost over. Like any celebration, you want to finish on a high note.



Do you want the celebrant to introduce you to your guests at the final closing?

“Congratulations! I would now like to introduce...

- *...Mr and Mrs Cutler*
- *...Jeremy and Jane Cutler*
- *...Mr and Mrs Jeremy and Jane Cutler*
- *...husband and wife Jeremy and Jane*
- *...(or other).”*

Or you could finish with something simpler like:

“Congratulations, Jeremy and Jane!”

Make sure though that you allow time to mix with the guests before moving on to the next stage. Your guests will inevitably want to offer their congratulations and share how they felt about the ceremony. Relish these moments!



Do you want to have a recessional where you walk out through the guests or do you want the guests to come forward to congratulate you?

If the bridal party is retiring for photos, it's always a good idea to announce to the remaining guests where they should go next and when the bridal party will be rejoining them. Usually your celebrant will be happy to do this for you or, if you prefer, you might like the celebrant to introduce the MC for the reception and hand over the baton, so to speak.

If the reception is at the same venue and immediately following the ceremony, you might like to include the transition to the reception.

Remember Kate and Simon's wedding at the beginning with the a cappella choir welcoming the guests? After the ceremony the choir led us back to the house playing an African rhythm with drums. It had the cows running to greet us at the fence line. With the bride and groom in front, everyone was following the music back to the house, laughing and smiling. We rounded the corner of the house and there were the caterers and a string quartet waiting to greet us.

19 - Bringing It All Together

By this stage you probably have several pages of notes and might be wondering how you can ever make sense of it all. Don't worry – you will make it work. It will take a bit of effort but, if you've answered all the questions so far, you've done the hardest part.

You've probably got the 'big picture' of the wedding ceremony fairly well shaped in your minds. We've been through each of the elements of the ceremony so it probably isn't as daunting as when you sat down at the beginning.

The first thing to review is the overall program for the ceremony that you prepared at the beginning. Knowing what you know now about each individual element, is there anything in the program that you want to change? Do you want to include or exclude a particular element? Do you want to change the order of things?

Spend some time now reshaping the program if you need to. Start with a clean sheet of paper and list each element in the order that you currently feel you want to have them (you can change them later if you wish so if you still aren't certain that's okay). On the right hand side of the page, draw two vertical lines down the page so that you create two narrow columns. Label one column as 'Done' and the other column 'Time' (see below).

Element	Done	Time

This will be your task sheet for the rest of the process. It's now time to revisit each element on the program one by one. You don't have to do this in the order that they appear on the task sheet. Treat it like a jigsaw now. You have an idea of the big picture which you can put together one piece at a time. And just like a jigsaw, you can choose the easy ones first if you wish.

Go back through each element and, using the answers and notes you

have already made, begin writing any required text in more detail. Write now on clean sheets of paper with headings denoting each element of the program. If you prefer to work on a computer, that's fine. Either way, have the notes and answers handy as prompts. Wherever possible, try to recreate the feelings that arose when you first answered the questions together.

Each element is likely to be less than five minutes in length, which makes them very manageable. You don't have to rush it but you will be surprised how quickly you will be able to write each element. You will have an opportunity to work through the ceremony with your celebrant so you don't have to labour over each and every word.

As you complete each element or get it to the final draft stage, place a tick in the 'Done' column. Also place an estimate for how long you think this element will take at the ceremony in the 'Time' column. This will allow you to work out an overall estimate for the length of the ceremony. There is a very good chance that the overall timeframe will be longer than you first planned and that's okay. You can economise later and your celebrant will no doubt be happy to help you with this.

As I said earlier, the ceremony is like a masterpiece and will gradually take shape. Before long it will become recognisable as a complete ceremony. When will it be finished? Only you will know. By talking it over with each other and with your celebrant, you will know when your ceremony and vows are complete. Even then, ideas might come to you after you've 'finished'.

Length of Ceremony

If you have answered all the questions in this book you will have plenty of information to include in your ceremony. We have to be careful to bring it all together as succinctly as possible. The ceremony has to be created keeping in mind that it is also for your family and friends to witness, not simply as a private exchange between you and your partner. You want to create a ceremony that interests people and is not too long – a ceremony that is sincere and intimate yet not too intimate. Careful editing is very important.

Let your original draft sit for a few days then come back to it and read it afresh. It helps to have a close friend who can give you honest feedback to read over it.

20 - The Final Check and Rehearsal

Once you have given the draft to your celebrant they will be able to assist you to put the final touches and give you feedback on the wording, layout, practicalities and the length of the ceremony. You may even use the services of a professional writer or proofreader to assist you. Details of providers of these services can be found on my website www.WendyHaynes.com.



Have a complete read through of the whole ceremony out loud with each other or maybe a trusted friend. (Be careful not to share your ceremony with too many people beforehand though.)

It is most important to discuss and rehearse the unfolding of the ceremony from the beginning to the end with your celebrant. Make sure that the logistics of any rituals work in practice.

And practise the delivery of the vows and exchanging of the rings. This can make sure everything flows well on the day.

Making a Stand – Which Way?

Discuss with your celebrant the different options to position yourselves during the ceremony. The two basic stances are where you would face out to your family and friends with the celebrant on the side, or facing the celebrant in the traditional manner with your backs to the guests. Facing out to family and friends means that they all get to see you, great for photos, yet you may feel very exposed.

If you face in the traditional manner, it makes it very personal and intimate for the two of you and your celebrant, which is much better if one or both of you are extremely self-conscious. In this position it also helps to keep the attendants facing out to family and friends. Get them to take a step back to be in line with the priest or celebrant.

Whichever way you choose, you will want to be facing each other for your vows.

How to Manage Nerves

Nerves aren't necessarily 'bad' and can actually contribute to the excitement of the day. What we don't want though is for nervous feelings to dominate or spoil the day. Your best chance of controlling nerves on the day is to be well prepared. The more prepared you are, the less chance there is that something will go wrong.

If nerves are a concern, there are natural remedies that can be taken prior to and on the day. Dr Bach's Rescue Remedy (available from most pharmacies and health stores) has helped many couples before, during and after their ceremony. Finding a celebrant who has a calming and relaxing presence is also a great plus. Practising relaxation or meditation beforehand can help you to retain a sense of calm on the day as well.

To Cry or Not to Cry?

Many brides and a few grooms express their concern that they will not be able to stop crying on the day. That they will blubber the whole time. Tears are a beautiful and natural expression of the joy, the nerves and the emotion of the moment. Rather than berate yourself for being silly or whatever you are thinking in the negative, be gentle on yourself and just allow your tears to flow down your cheeks. You won't be the only one crying, I can assure you.

A few hints:

- Take your time when you, as the bride, walk down the aisle. Stop for about 15 seconds. Feel your feet on the floor or grass and ground yourself. Look around if you have the courage and smile at your guests. Look to your groom and feel his love for you. This is an amazing moment in time that you will remember forever... enjoy it fully.
- Make sure you have a handkerchief handy... for both of you.
- If necessary take a moment to turn away and blow your nose. Then you won't sniff through your vows.
- Wear waterproof makeup so you can relax about not getting 'panda eyes'.

Remember why you have chosen to have the celebration – to marry your beloved. Support each other, feel each other's strength and vulnerability. The wedding ceremony is a very small window of opportunity for everyone to be touched deeply. Let yourselves be touched!

In the words of one of the brides I once married, "Look at all the websites, read all the books, do the whole bride thing – then look inside your heart, relax and do what your feelings say. It's so personal, it all comes back to your individual wants – don't worry, be happy!"

21 - After the Ceremony...

After your wedding you may want to print your vows onto beautiful paper and have them framed. Placing them in your home in this way affirms and reminds you of all that you declare on your wedding day.

You may also want to give them to your photographer or the graphic artist who puts together your wedding album and they can place your vows or selections amongst the photographs.

Also, as life changes and your relationship develops and changes, you may wish to add to or change your declarations or vows. Acknowledge the joys and the challenges. Take the time to do this on anniversaries or at the beginning of the New Year and continue to celebrate your love and friendship!!

22 - Celebrate Your Heritage

If you would like to incorporate religious or cultural rituals you can research these on the internet or at your local library, or you can speak to members of your family and local community. This can be a great way of involving 'respected elders' in the family. They are likely to be a mine of information about what the traditions and customs are as well as their meaning and origins.

Angelica and Eddie had European parents. After the ceremony a log was placed on a specially made trestle before being sawed in half by Angelica and Eddie. They worked from either end of the saw. This ritual represented their ability to work together to achieve a common goal and symbolised the challenge and art of being able to work together in harmony.

Though it may not be your own heritage, you may also wish to consider including a custom of the people indigenous to your area or to the area where your wedding is taking place.

Tara and Gary invited a local Australian Aboriginal elder to open their ceremony. The 'Welcoming' was of great importance to them both. As a custodian of the land, the elder welcomed us and then called to the spirits of the country in his own language – the original language of the land we stood on. The celebrant then acknowledged the local people and paid respect to the elders, both past and present. The respect and acknowledgement opened the ceremony with a deep sense of reverence for what was about to unfold.

Michelle and David had a traditional Maori wedding. They were invited and welcomed into the sacred ceremonial area by the traditional Maori welcome call. The elders from their community were positioned in special chairs as a sign of respect. After Michelle and David had exchanged their vows they received a beautiful blessing from David's grandfather who was present.

There are symbols and rituals from many other cultures that can be used and adapted for marriage ceremonies. However, some customs are very sacred and need to be honoured and respected. Use them with sensitivity and respect and make sure they are relevant and appropriate to use.

Explore different wedding rituals or customs, special poetry or music and from these you can incorporate words and symbols or create a blend to honour both of your backgrounds. Interfaith ceremonies provide an ideal opportunity to share what is most important from your faith.

Don't just use a custom for the sake of it – understand why you are including it and maybe even practise it beforehand to get a feel for it.

Some of these may include: warming or blessing of the wedding rings; hand fasting (i.e. binding) ceremony; lighting of candles; combining or blending of water, wine, sand or oils; exchange of roses; breaking of a glass; tea ceremony; smudging; releasing of doves or butterflies; gift giving...

23 - Choosing a Celebrant for Your Special Day

Before you Start

Your wedding ceremony is the most important part of your wedding day and can set the tone for the celebration to follow. Find a celebrant that you can trust and get on well with.

Do you have a particular celebrant in mind? Perhaps you attended a ceremony they presided over, or a friend of a friend may have given a glowing recommendation. If so, this is always a good place to start but I always suggest that you shop around as well anyway. Professional celebrants are increasing in number every day now so there is certainly plenty of choice available. The *Yellow Pages*, local wedding guide, chosen venue or even the internet are good places to source celebrants.

The first thing your celebrant will need to know is where and when your wedding is going to be. You may know this already but try to have a range of dates and times in mind. Most celebrants are reasonably flexible but they still need to work around other commitments.

Professional, Semi-professional or Hobbyist?

If your celebration is a wedding, you will have to use a government registered celebrant. Most of these will provide evidence of their accreditation with the designated authority, as well as membership of a

recognised Celebrants' association or federation. The latter gives added reassurance as most associations have a professional code of conduct that members are expected to abide by, as well as ongoing professional development programs.

If your celebration is a commitment rather than a wedding, there is no legal requirement for you to use a professionally registered celebrant. A trusted friend or family member can take on this role if you wish. It will be no surprise to you though to hear that I still recommend using a professional for this role.

Here's why:

- You can expect more from a professional. Because the celebrant has their reputation at stake, you know that they will deliver their best work for your wedding. You have a choice of having a friend or a professional do catering for your function but, rightly so, your expectations of the professional would be higher than of your friend. Likewise with a celebrant.
- Celebrants have the training to know what to do in any given situation. They aren't just reciting lines, they are also reading the mood of the guests, pre-empting situations and anticipating the next stage of the celebration. A friend may not have all these skills.

Assuming you do choose a professional, their level of experience may have some bearing on your choice. Obviously long-term professionals will have built up more experience than a relative newcomer but don't exclude someone from your considerations for this reason alone. The combination of the training that is required of celebrants nowadays with the fresh perspective of a novice could very well give you the ceremony you are looking for.

What to Look For

If you haven't met your celebrant yet, your first contact is likely to be via telephone. Use this as your screening process. Find someone you like, who you have a rapport with. Do they speak clearly and slowly? Are they interested in you and what you want? Questions you may need answered at this time include:

- Are they available? (always a good place to start because if they are not then you don't need to proceed much further) If they are not available ask them to recommend another celebrant.
- Are they government registered and are they a member of any celebrants' associations or federations?
- What do they include in their services?
- Will they support you in having the ceremony that you want?
- Do they offer ideas and support to assist you with the writing of your ceremony and preparation for the wedding day?
- How many times will they meet with you to plan and prepare the ceremony?
- How long before the wedding do they arrive?
- How close together do they book weddings?
- How much do they charge? Hint – Don't make your decision on this factor alone. Charges will vary considerably between celebrants but may not necessarily reflect the 'value' that they deliver. Some may even not give you an answer in the first call and may wish to meet with you first to find out what you require.

- Are there any 'extra' costs involved?
- Are they familiar with your chosen venue?
- Do they offer a rehearsal off/on-site? Are there any extra charges for this service?
- If there is something unique about your proposed wedding, e.g. helicopters, bungee jumps or nature weddings (i.e. just a fig leaf or nothing!), are they willing to participate in this?
- Do they have a portable high quality PA system?
- How do they prepare their marriage certificates – laser printed, handwritten, calligraphy printed? Is the marriage certificate that is issued by the Registrar after you are married included in their fee? (You will need this if you are changing your name.)

Note that I said 'questions you may need answered' rather than 'questions you will need to ask'. Most professionals know what you need to know and will offer this information freely and without much prompting. This is a good indicator of whether the celebrant has empathy with their clients.

You don't have to commit to your celebrant at this point but you are likely to get a fairly good sense of whether the person you are talking to could be the right person for the job. If so, make a time to visit them face-to-face.

Some celebrants will charge for an initial consultation whereas others might offer this for free. Make sure you are clear about this before you commit to meeting with them.

When you do meet face-to-face, as well as discussing the details of the wedding, ask yourself, “Do I want this person at my wedding?” If the answer is no then you can safely cross them off your list of prospects and excuse yourself politely. If the answer is yes (which is more likely), you need to look for the qualities that they might need to facilitate your ceremony. Above all, these include warmth and confidence. A friendly and inviting smile helps too, as does the ability to communicate clearly.

If you don't already know someone who has been married by the celebrant, ask to see some testimonials from past clients. Don't be shy about asking for phone numbers of past clients either. Most celebrants will have one or two who have expressed a willingness to receive phone calls from prospective clients. Some may prefer not to intrude on the privacy of past clients. If so, they should at least have some written testimonials on hand.

If you do have the chance to speak with past clients, as well as general satisfaction levels, ask them how flexible the celebrant was in allowing them to contribute to the development of the ceremony. If you have read this far, this is obviously important to you.

Photographs from past weddings are also a great indicator of how well your prospective celebrant ‘performs’ so ask if they have any on hand. You will not only see how they present themselves but you can also get a sense for how the wedding party and guests enjoyed themselves.

Ask to see written material verifying their professional accreditation and memberships. If their professional accreditation is ‘dated’ (i.e. from some time ago), ask to see recent evidence of continued professional development. In Australia this is a requirement to maintain accreditation. In countries where it is not required, you can take it as evidence that your celebrant is committed to keeping their practices up to date.

Most celebrants will also have some written material for clients which

they will willingly show you. From this you will get a sense for how thorough they are in their approach.

In some cases, you may not have the opportunity to meet face-to-face before you need to book your celebrant. This is often the case with elopements or 'holiday weddings', where you get married out of town. If so, then client testimonials are doubly important. If your prospective celebrant has a website, make sure you visit it.

Important note – Unless you are getting married in Las Vegas (or anywhere else that offers 'instant weddings'), remember to book your celebrant well in advance of the date so that all the legal requirements can be taken care of. Many jurisdictions require that applications be lodged within a certain time. In Australia this is at least one month and a day in advance of the wedding date. This is especially important for elopements and holiday weddings.

Martika and Jon called on a Friday morning and asked me to be their celebrant for their wedding. I asked what date and they said 'tomorrow'. When I explained about the legal requirement of lodging a notice of intent to marry form a month and a day before the wedding, they were shocked. The two of them were eloping from North Queensland. They had already driven for four hours and were half way! They had accommodation and a restaurant booked, they had rings, hairdresser, photographer, flowers, everything set to go... After chatting for a while I suggested that they still come and see me and discuss whether a commitment ceremony might meet their needs.

Later that next day, Martika and Jon, the photographer and myself were standing on a headland overlooking a glorious beach with the sun setting over the mountains as they declared their love to one another and exchanged personal vows and their rings.

Earlier that morning we completed the notice of intended marriage and, once the required period had passed, they returned and we formalised the legalities with another small ceremony.

Martika and Jon got exactly what they wanted and more – two romantic weekends away celebrating their commitment to one another.

Down to Business

Once you have found ‘the one’, you’ll need to talk business. Most celebrants will have a written agreement that will outline their terms. These may include:

- the agreed time, date and venue of the wedding (assuming they are known at that stage);
- what time they will arrive;
- an agreed number of times to meet prior to the wedding to discuss the ceremony and agreed rates if this timeframe is exceeded;
- the inclusion or addition of expenses such as telephone, postage, etc;
- whether any ‘travel time’ is applicable or not;
- any applicable cost penalties if the wedding party arrives late (yes – time is money, even for celebrants);
- whether the celebrant will provide any equipment – rostrum, PA system, register table, etc;

- agreed terms for payment of a booking fee and final payment (usually made before the wedding);
- inclusion or otherwise of relevant taxes; and
- agreed terms for payment of a cancellation fee or booking fee forfeit if required.

Some celebrants may not cover all these points but the agreement is to your benefit as much as theirs and helps prevent any misunderstandings in the lead up or on the day. Most celebrants will require a booking fee to hold your date and time of wedding in their diary.

Wedding Hells

Weddings involve human beings and thus are subject to human failings. On rare occasions, a couple may be dissatisfied with the performance or conduct of their celebrant. Sometimes it may just be due to lack of rapport but, occasionally, it may be due to poor service. If so, you don't have to just write it off as a bad experience. If you have engaged a professional, you are entitled to professional service.

All Australian marriage celebrants must adhere to the Code of Practice for Marriage Celebrants. If you have a concern about the service you have received from a marriage celebrant in relation to your wedding, you may make a complaint. If you have any concerns you should discuss them with the celebrant first, explaining what you are dissatisfied with and why, but if you are not able to do this, or believe your complaint requires further consideration, there is a special procedure set out in the Marriage Regulations to enable complaints concerning the performance of marriage celebrants to be responded to. For more details visit www.ag.gov.au/celebrants.

Or you may contact the Registrar of Marriage Celebrants in one of the following ways:

Marriage Celebrants Section
Attorney-General's Department
Robert Garran Offices
National Circuit
Barton ACT 2600
Phone: (02) 6234 4800
fax: (02) 6234 4811

email: marriagecelebrantssection@ag.gov.au

In New Zealand you can contact the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

If your celebrant is a church minister, address your complaint to their higher officer also.

Most organisations and registering bodies will have a Code of Conduct that your celebrant has pledged to adhere to, as well as grievance procedures to follow when they are breached. While it may not be possible to undo any damage done, it is very rare that a grievance is not resolved satisfactorily.

Of course, you are most welcome to report 'good conduct' also 😊. If your celebrant is guilty of exceptional performance and delivering that 'more than satisfied' feeling, the relevant bodies are more than happy to hear of this. This helps us to decide who our award winning celebrants are!!

24 - Fast Track...

Run Out of Time?

If you find you have no time for anything else this following exercise can bring out many ideas from your hearts and minds onto paper. You can then use your love letter to formulate your own vows (see the section on Vows, Page 98). For the body of the ceremony you may wish to choose sections from the Examples of Actual Ceremonies (beginning Page 151).

Love Letters



Begin with a heartfelt opening:

Beloved..., My dearest ..., or any other term of endearment you might have for your partner.

Write about when you first met and the journey you have shared together, times when you have laughed together and cried together, maybe a time you haven't thought about in a very long while.

Write and tell them how much they mean to you and to your life.

Complete the following statements:

- What I love about you is...
- The strengths in our relationship are...
- My life is richer because...

Now tell them what marriage means to you:

- My expectations of marriage are...

Share with them any fears you may have. How will you manage these fears if and when they happen?

What is your vow as a marriage partner? What are you promising of yourself to your partner? (This may or may not be used in the ceremony, so allow yourself complete freedom to ramble on, or put it in point form.)

After the marriage comes your life together:

- I look forward to ...

To close your letter, finish with words of love and gratitude for your partner.

25 - Last Words

By now you should will be well on the way to creating your own inspiring ceremony. Following you will find some examples of actual ceremonies and a glossary of inspiring words that might be useful.

And if you haven't guessed already, you are also welcome to visit my website, www.WendyHaynes.com, where you will find more sample ceremonies, resources and links to other useful websites. You will also find details about other important life celebrations: name givings, funerals, birthdays, and even housewarmings. The website is updated regularly so it is a great way to keep up to date. You can even subscribe to my email mailing list.

If you have an interest, you will also find information on how to build your own award winning celebrant business.

Thank you again for allowing me to be part of your inspiring wedding ceremony. If you feel inclined to share some stories from your ceremony with me, I'd love to hear from you – either by email to info@WendyHaynes.com or by post to PO Box 688, Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450, Australia.

May your wedding be an inspiring one and may your marriage be blessed with love, laughter and happiness.

Wendy

Examples of Actual Ceremonies

The couples who wrote the following ceremonies have kindly agreed to share them with us so that you may be inspired by their creative endeavours. Except for the first ceremony, the full names of the couples have not been included to protect their privacy. Feel free to shape your ceremony with borrowed lines, verses and/or your own words. Whatever works for you...

Traditional and Contemporary

Brian and Jane met whilst travelling through Europe three and a half years ago and now live in Sydney. They were married in a beautiful chapel at a beachside resort. Brian's parents were religious so Brian and Jane wanted a ceremony that would honour the traditions of their family and yet was a celebration of their own beliefs as well.

Welcome & Introduction

Celebrant: Beloved family and friends, on behalf of Brian and Jane and their families I would like to welcome you here as we gather for the celebration of a very special occasion. Today we honour the commitment which Brian and Jane are about to make to each other, this public declaration of their love. My name is Wendy Haynes and I am a civil celebrant.

We are here to witness the joining in matrimony of Jane Carlyle and Brian Reynolds.

Parental acknowledgement

Celebrant: Bruce and Karen, as Jane's parents you have cared for and supported Jane throughout her life. This next moment acknowledges this very special relationship and the love you share. Jane, your parents have escorted you here today, and I would like to now ask them formally:

Giving away the bride

Who brings Jane to stand beside Brian to be married?

Bride's parents: We do.

(Bruce and Karen return to their seats)

Authorisation

Celebrant: I am duly authorised by law to solemnise this marriage according to the law of this country. Before you, Brian and Jane are joined in matrimony, I must remind you of the solemn and binding character of the vows you are about to make. Marriage according to the law of this country is the union of a man and a woman, voluntarily entered into, for life, to the exclusion of all others. It is a union made to provide love, friendship, help and comfort for each other. It should not be entered into lightly nor lightly put aside.

Pre vows

For Brian and Jane, getting married is a proud confirmation of the love, friendship, trust and respect that they have for each other. It is the coming together of two people and two families. It represents for them both the first step on a new journey that they will take together.

Brian and Jane met over three years ago when they were travelling through Europe and decided to travel together and share their adventures. They grew to know and understand one another. They explored their friendship with many lengthy conversations – waiting for planes, climbing mountains, and sitting quietly, relaxing by the side of the rivers they came to. Brian and Jane share one of life's richest gifts – that of playfulness and a great sense of humour.

They have both given 'getting married' a great deal of thought and they know that a strong and vital marriage exists only when there is healthy communication and an acceptance of each

other. It means working together, sharing their goals and living each day with happiness and peace as their primary focus. It is nurturing each other's individuality and ensuring each partner can rely on the other in times of need. It is a marriage Brian and Jane are excited to begin and for which they are well prepared.

Brian and Jane, today you will exchange vows which will unite you as husband and wife. The words are a formal and public pledge of your love and a promise of a lifelong commitment to each other.

Reading

Jane's grandmother, Ellen, will now share a reading from 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 13.

Ellen:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love,

I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge,

And if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,

But have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

It is not rude, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease;

Where there are tongues, they will be stilled;

Where there is knowledge, it will pass away...

And now these things remain

Faith, hope and love

But the greatest of these is love

**Acknowledgement
& blessing of
friends**

Celebrant: Now the moment has come for these two friends to contract their marriage before you, their witnesses.

Friends and family contribute a great deal to a couple's well being. Brian and Jane appreciate your presence here today and extend their love to you all.

**Exchanging of
vows**

Our role as family and friends is to encourage and support them as they travel this new path of marriage.

I would like to ask all of you, family and friends, are you willing, now and always, to support and strengthen this marriage by upholding both Brian and Jane with your continued love and care?

Everyone replies: We are.

Celebrant: Brian and Jane, in times of both joy and need, may you call upon the strength and support that is here for you and may you feel the embrace of the love and friendship that is present.

Celebrant: Brian and Jane, would you please turn and face one another to exchange your vows and rings. Thank you.

Jane, would you please repeat after me:

Jane (after celebrant):

I call upon these persons here present to witness that I, Jane Carlyle, do take you, Brian Reynolds, to be my lawful wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live, and to this I give you my pledge.

Celebrant: Brian, would you please repeat after me:

Brian (after celebrant):

I call upon these persons here present to witness that I, Brian Reynolds, do take you, Jane Carlyle, to be my lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and cherish, as long as we both shall live, and to this I give you my pledge.

Exchanging of rings

Celebrant: Now we have come to the exchange of rings.

The giving and receiving of rings represents a way of sealing the contract of marriage, and is an outward sign of the life long promise you have now made to each other.

Jane: I give you this ring as a token of our marriage and a symbol of my commitment to you.

Brian: Jane, I will wear this ring with joy as a sign of our love.

Brian: I give you this ring as a token of our marriage and a symbol of my commitment to you.

Jane: Brian, I will wear this ring with joy as a sign of our love.

**Summary &
Declaration of
marriage**

Celebrant: Brian and Jane, may you be blessed with many years of happiness and a shared peace. You have come here today to give the rest of your lives to each other.

May your commitment to each other continue to grow in its depth and understanding. With each new day may you move deeper into the mystery which is the love that unites you both as one.

Remember that on this journey called marriage, there will be moments of perfection and times of harmony. There will also be imperfections and weaknesses. Allow forgiveness and encouragement to be born from the grace of your love for each other. Trust each other, particularly in times of difficulty, knowing that together you can weather any storm.

May you be blessed with open hearts and clear vision, and may you be blessed by the love and friendship that your family and friends bring here to your celebration today.

May you keep the love and hope of this day ever present in your consciousness, and may your love, trust and respect for each other continue to grow with each passing day.

Brian and Jane, you have come freely this day before your families and friends to state your commitment to this marriage. Now you have made these promises and you have exchanged the rings that symbolise your vows to all.

**Signing the
Marriage Register
& Certificates**

You have made the declarations prescribed by law and have made a solemn and binding contract with each other in the presence of your witnesses, family and friends gathered here today.

It now gives me great pleasure with the powers vested in me by the laws of this country to pronounce you husband and wife. Congratulations to you both. Brian and Jane, you may now kiss! (Applause)

We will now proceed to the signing of the Register.

Closing

Celebrant: On behalf of your family and friends I would like to congratulate you both. May you increase each other's joy in life, every day of your lives together. I would like to be the first to introduce Brian and Jane Reynolds!!!

This verse was used earlier in the ceremony but is shown here in a 'prayer' form. It is here to show you how you can play around with the words to fit the style of your ceremony.

God our creator and source of life and love, we ask you to bless Brian and Jane with many years of happiness and a shared peacefulness of spirit. They come here today to give the rest of their lives to each other. Help their commitment to each other continue to grow in its depth and understanding. With each new day, may they move deeper into the mystery which is the love that binds them together as one.

Help them to trust each other, particularly in times of difficulty, knowing that together they can weather any storm. May their love, trust and respect for each other grow with each passing day.

We pray that you will help them draw upon the ever present love and peace that resides within each of them, knowing that there will be moments of perfection and harmony as well as times of imperfections and weaknesses. However, your promise to us was of a love that is capable of forgiving – give them both the grace to bring forth that love and to forgive and encourage when needed.

Finally, we ask you to bless Brian and Jane with open hearts and clear vision, and may they feel the love and friendship that surrounds them here today as they celebrate their marriage.

Amen

By the Sea

Emma and Dan's chance meeting one night during the Sydney Olympics was the beginning of their story together, a story which led to their beautiful beach wedding. They built a ceremonial stand out of bamboo on a quiet part of the beach. They wove white cloth around the top sections which blew in the afternoon breeze. There were petals on the sand and barefooted guests gathered close. A classical guitarist played as Emma and the bridesmaids approached Dan and his groomsmen.

Welcome

Celebrant: On behalf of Emma and Dan and their families I would like to welcome you to this beautiful place. This gathering is for the celebration of a very special occasion. We are all here to witness the commitment which Emma and Dan are about to make to each other, this public expression of their love, and to wish them joy, and every happiness for their future. My name is Wendy Haynes and I am a civil celebrant. I now call upon you all to be witness with me in this marriage between Emma and Dan.

Introduction

For Emma and Dan, marriage is a lifetime partnership. It means being a rock of support or a soft place to fall or rest. It is the ultimate friendship – trusting, honest, intimate and evolving. Marriage means going on an amazing adventure together as life partners, having fun, laughing together and loving one another in their twilight years.

For those who don't know the story, Emma and Dan met one balmy Olympic evening in Sydney four years ago.

Emma was on her way home from her work at the casino, and Dan on his way home from a night out.

As chance would have it, they found themselves on the same ferry wharf at 3.00am in the morning. Getting into the Olympic spirit, Dan decided to say hi. There was an instant attraction.

After getting along like old friends, Emma offered Dan a lift home. Almost home, and neither of them wanting the night to end, Dan suggested a stroll on the beach and a swim (at the lovely time of 4.30am). At last, the first kiss. Again, they headed for home, but again, neither of them wanted the night to end, so they drove randomly up and down the coast, just getting to know each other until 7.00am that morning. They spent the next day together at the beach and things have continued as they started, with Emma and Dan not bearing to spend great lengths of time apart.

Every person here has been an integral part of Emma and Dan's life. Your presence today reflects the love, friendship and caring that exists between you and Emma and Dan. Our task is to encourage and support them with the commitment they are about to make to each other. To help them when they may have need of us and to remember them always in our thoughts. Through their commitment to each other and with our loving support, they will find the gift and blessing of a happy life together.

Authorisation

As a civil celebrant, I am duly authorised by law to solemnise your marriage, according to the laws of this country. Before you, Emma and Dan, are joined in marriage in my presence and in the presence of your family and friends, I am to remind you publicly of the solemn and binding nature of the relationship into which you are about to enter. Marriage, according to law in Australia, is the union of a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

**Acknowledgment
(those who
cannot be here
today)**

On this special day we would like to take a moment to think of the family and friends who are not with us today to celebrate the marriage of Emma and Dan. We also remember with love those who have gone before and know they would have been very proud to see you share this commitment of marriage here today, and that their love is present here with you both.

Reading

Emma's brother Ben would like to give a reading called Love.

Ben:

Love is a friendship that has caught fire.

*It is quiet understanding, mutual confidence,
sharing and forgiving.*

It is loyalty through good and bad.

*It settles for less than perfection, and makes
allowances for human weakness.*

Love is content with the present.

It hopes for the future and it doesn't brood over the past.

It's the day-in and day-out chronicle of irritations, problems, compromises, small disappointments, big victories and working toward common goals.

If you have love in your life, it can make up for many things you lack. If you don't have it, no matter what else there is, it is not enough, so search for it, ask God for it, and share it!

Parental blessing

Celebrant: One of the closest relationships in life is that between caring parents, and their children. This connection continues to grow and change as these children grow into independent and mature adults. Today Emma and Dan would like to take the time to honour this relationship. (We were on the beach so everyone was already standing – otherwise you would ask the parents to stand.)

Dan's parents, Lynne and Dennis, and Emma's parents, Lynne and Peter, represent their families and all of us when I ask them:

Do you give Emma and Dan your blessings, and pledge them your love, support and acceptance of this marriage?

Parents: We do.

Reading

Celebrant: Dan's sister, Michelle, will now share a poem with us that she has written.

*Today is your special day –
the start of both your lives together.
May it be special in every way
sparked by the love you have treasured
and may all the love you're feeling
still find a way to grow,
sharing joys which have a meaning
that only both of you could know.*

*May God bless your health
as you care for each other's needs,
may you both share in the wealth
of raising a family,
may your new dreams never end –
we hope they all come true,
and may you always be two friends
whose love each day feels new.*

*I always want the best for my big brother
and that's why I'm glad he's found Em,
we can see their love for one another
and we're here to love and support them
as they go on together,
blessed by me and you,
may these two friends always treasure
the day they said, "I do".*

**Exchanging of
vows & rings**

Celebrant: In the light of their love and friendship, and with you, their beautiful family and friends, present, I would like to ask Emma and Dan, would you please face each other, take each other's hands and exchange vows.

Dan, would you please declare your vow to Emma.

Dan:

*Emma, I choose you above all others
to share my life.
I vow to love you always,
To fall in love with you over and over.
I vow to always remember how amazing you
are, and how special our love is.*

*No matter what life brings us,
I promise to always be faithful and loyal,
to always support you,
and to always keep our love fresh and new.*

*Thank you for being you –
I am honoured to be your husband.*

*As I give you my hand to hold,
so I give you my life to share.*

Celebrant: Emma, would you please declare your vow to Dan.

Emma:

*Dan, I enter this marriage
with my heart wide open.
You are my best friend,
my light, my inspiration.*

*You fill me with love, laughter and
happiness.*

*You challenge me, balance me and
complete me.*

*I vow never to take you or your love for
granted.*

*I vow to care for you and support you
in every way.*

I promise to trust and honour you.

*I give myself wholly to you –
now and forever.*

*Thank you for being your wonderful self –
I am honoured to be your wife.*

*As I give you my hand to hold,
so I give you my life to share.*

Celebrant: Arthur, do you have the rings?

Emma, do you take Dan to be your lawfully
wedded husband? Do you invite him in love and
in harmony to share your life with you as your
friend, your lover and your companion?

Emma: I do.

Celebrant: Dan, do you take Emma to be your
lawfully wedded wife? Do you invite her in love
and in harmony to share your life with you as your
friend, your lover and your companion?

Dan: I do.

Celebrant: Then Dan, as you place the ring on Emma's finger, would you please repeat after me:

Dan (after celebrant): I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Daniel, take you, Emma, to be my wife.

Celebrant: Then Emma, as you place the ring on Dan's finger, would you please repeat after me:

Emma (after celebrant): I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Emma, take you, Daniel, to be my husband.

Celebrant: The roundness of your rings represents the endlessness of your love. Its pure metal speaks of the purity of your love. Its value will remind you to uphold and protect that which you hold most valuable in life. I ask you to wear your rings with love and honour.

Declaration of marriage

Celebrant: And so, in love and in harmony and with the joy of their love radiating in their smiles, Emma and Dan have agreed to live together in marriage. They have made special vows and shared these with each other, and have symbolised their love by the giving and receiving of wedding rings. Therefore, with the powers vested in me by the laws of this country, it is with much pleasure that I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss the bride.

**Signing the
Marriage
Register &
Certificates**

We are now going to sign the Marriage Register and Certificates.

If you would please get your bubbles ready, after the signing, we can bless Emma and Dan with our bubbles of love and friendship.

Closing

On behalf of your family and friends I would like to congratulate you both. May your marriage be blessed with love and peace, patience and understanding. Every day, keep sight of the pleasure and friendship that you share in each other's company.

I would now like to introduce Emma and Dan Leman!!! Congratulations!

House and Garden

Dean and Shelley knew each other when they were in primary school. Their lives took them on different paths, and they rediscovered each other in their early twenties. They got married in their beautiful garden at home surrounded by close family and friends.

Dean greeted guests as they arrived and then Dean and Shelley spent a short time together in the room where Shelley was getting ready. They walked out together after the guests were gathered and faced their family and friends with the celebrant by their side.

They chose to speak a lot of their ceremony and had a beautiful hand made book with large print on a stand before them so they could read it comfortably. The stillness and grace that was present was deeply touching.

Welcome

Celebrant: On behalf of Dean and Shelley I would like to welcome you to their home and to this intimate celebration of their love, friendship and commitment to each other. My name is Wendy Haynes and it is a great honour to be here with these two very special friends. I have witnessed their love blossoming from their early meetings and it has been a delightful courtship to watch unfold.

Authorisation

As a civil celebrant I am authorised to marry you according to the laws of this country. Before you, Dean and Shelley, are married I must remind you of the solemn and binding nature of the relationship into which you are about to enter.

Introduction

Marriage, according to law in Australia, is the union of a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life. Marriage is a declaration that you will love, support and care for one another, and be loyal to each other for the rest of your lives together.

And now as family and friends, we are here today to witness and to give our blessing to the wedding of Dean and Shelley because we are important in their lives. Today also marks the joining of two families through marriage and the making of a new family.

This morning's ceremony will be a brief one as Dean and Shelley have chosen. They wish to make these vows a consolidation of a life they have been making together and confirmation of a future they intend to share.

Today, Dean and Shelley wish to declare their love honestly and openly and to exchange rings, to forever symbolise their love. Dean and Shelley have begun a life together here in this garden and in this house. And from this day they will go forward as friends, lovers and partners.

Dean and Shelley are going to share with us a little about their journey together.

Dean: To put this day in context, the two of us have known each other for nearly 20 years. For much of that time our whole worlds revolved around the same small neighbourhood.

In that world we were children and we were friends. As we grew older, our worlds expanded and we both drifted away from the neighbourhood, though our paths briefly crossed from time to time (grand occasions all of them, city buses, on the way to lectures, occasionally on the Johnsons' doorstep).

Shelley: So when I visited Coffs Harbour a couple of years ago I thought I would take the opportunity to catch up with Dean. During that time we talked a lot and discovered, much to each other's amazement, that we could both recall with considerable detail many of the occasions we had met since we left school, what was said, where it was, what we were wearing and, perhaps most importantly, what we had been thinking to ourselves but not said about one another. Today we would like to say these things.

Pre vows

Dean: Shelley. Today we are to be wed. This partnership has been the most wonderful romance and I know that my mother would be happy to know that there has been much constructive criticism between the two of us and though at times we have played like children, we have also made a home together and as much as we share a deeply romantic bond, we also share the cooking and the washing up.

Let us live this life together and really live.
Let us continue to explore and learn together
and let us grow old together.

In this partnership we are equals and we are friends and we are happy and, for these things, I will be wed and I will marry you, Shelley Johnson.

Shelley: Dean, in a letter I wrote to you after spending a week together here in Coffs Harbour, I recall writing an apology – an apology for shedding tears as we were saying our farewells. There were a lot of similar farewells and a lot of similar letters that year.

I want to take this opportunity to retract that apology. I don't apologise for crying the times we had to say goodbye, I don't apologise for the many letters I wrote which pined for you, and I don't apologise for loving you as deeply as I do.

Loving you has become a part of who I am.

If this experience of loving you is the greatest experience that I will have, then I am truly satisfied. I have not climbed a great mountain, solved a puzzle, or saved a life, and yet knowing this life and this love with you is more than I could have dreamed. I love you.

Reading

Celebrant: For Dean and Shelley, this marriage is a declaration of the love they share and they have found a beautiful expression of this love, in the following verse that they wrote together.

Dean and Shelley took it in turns to read a verse

*This is to be a short verse
to describe our love
But what are the words
that could carry these emotions?
I stumble through my vocabulary
and settle with "I love you"
"I love you" "I love you" "I love you"
But what is love, I ask? What is this thing?*

*I have heard it described in many ways,
by many people
But to tell the whole truth,
I never really took much notice
It never really made much sense
I saw no evidence of it
in the world around me.
Or perhaps I should say
I never saw it in myself.*

*Wars have been fought in the name of love
Everything and anything has been bought
and sold in its honour
We are told that love is in the air
And love is all you need
And yet, in my life there was just me...
But then you came along...*

*And I swear there was thunder and
lightning and the sky seemed bluer
And the birds and the insects
were singing just for me
It was truth and it was beautiful
And here we are and here it is*

*To me love is sitting next to you at night
 Love is sharing my thoughts with you
 To me love is missing you
 when you are not near
 Love is in the silence at the top of a
 mountain when I stand by your side
 Love is wanting to spend
 the rest of my life with you*

*Perhaps love cannot be defined by words
 And it is difficult to understand,
 But it is unmistakable when it is known*

I love you

Acknowledgement

Celebrant: Dean and Shelley both value their family and friends deeply, and they would like to take a moment to acknowledge the relationship they share with their parents, Cheryl and John, Claire and Ted. As parents, the love that you have shared within your own marriages has been a legacy granted to Dean and Shelley. For them, marriage seems natural and you have offered them quiet yet inspiring examples of how it can be. You have encouraged them to live their own dreams and offered them support that has been greatly appreciated. And they love the sense of family you have given them and your sense of humour.

Dean and Shelley would like to say thank you.

Parental blessing

It is in this light of respect and gratitude that I now ask the parents:

Exchanging of vows & rings

(To Claire and Ted) Do you give your blessing to this marriage?

Claire and Ted: We do.

Celebrant: (To Cheryl and John) Do you give your blessing to this marriage?

Cheryl and John: We do.

Celebrant: Dean and Shelley, would you please turn and face one another to exchange your vows and rings. Thank you.

Shelley: Dean, I hope you never feel alone in this companionship and never feel the need to hide your voice within this trust. I hope you never hold back your feelings from this honesty and never withhold a dream in our future. This love is sacred. Let us share it forever.

Dean: Shelley, the time I have spent with you has been the time of my life and I know that the life we can make together is the life that I want to live. To you and to this marriage I will give everything that I have and everything that I can be.

May we always remember these words.

Celebrant: Can we have the rings please? Thank you.

Summary & Declaration

Dean: Shelley, I offer this ring to you as a gift and as a symbol of my love. I ask, will you accept it and be my wife?

Shelley: I will. With this ring that I will joyfully wear, I call upon the people here present to witness that, I, Shelley, take you, Dean, to be my husband.

Dean, I offer this ring to you as a gift and as a symbol of my love. I ask, will you accept it and be my husband?

Dean: I will. With this ring that I will joyfully wear, I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Dean, take you, Shelley, to be my wife.

Celebrant: It is a lifetime journey to know our own hearts, and getting a glimpse into another heart, their inner world, is very special. It is an honour to be invited into that space, and calls for respect, trust, openness and a willingness to be present. You share many beautiful qualities together, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, patience, and understanding. You offer each other support, encouragement and care when needed. Your dedication to each other and your relationship is ever present.

Dean and Shelley have pledged their love and commitment to each other in our presence. It is an honour to be a witness to their love, care and affection for each other.

It now gives me great pleasure, with the powers vested in me by the laws of this country to pronounce you husband and wife. I now invite you to begin your married life with a kiss!!!

**Signing the
Marriage Register
& Certificates**

We will now sign the Marriage Register and Certificates.

Closing

Dean and Shelley, continue to enjoy the happiness that a really loving partnership brings, and always keep sight of what has brought you here today, your love and respect for each other. Take the time to rediscover your love and friendship every day and rest securely in this love. Dean and Shelley, we wish for you a lifetime of love, laughter and happiness! Congratulations. (Clapping and cheering)

Asian Retreat

Caroline and Glen met in Thailand, and had decided upon an Asian theme for their wedding. They started their wedding plans two years prior to the date and the attention to detail and scope of planning was amazing.

They had booked a National Park an hour from the closest city. It was 17 km off the main highway down a dirt road. There was no power, just a campsite and toilets. Everything had to be brought in. All the power was provided by solar panels.

As I arrived on the Saturday afternoon, I was greeted by a small village of tents and campervans. On one side was a marquee decked out with silks and Asian umbrellas, orchids and a banquet setting for over 100 guests, with caterers busying themselves preparing a sit down meal. Over to the right there was a bar with Chinese lanterns and bamboo mats with little tables and silk cushions. The ceremony area was in a natural forest setting with chairs for the guests and flower petals down the aisle.

The weekend before the wedding there had been storms and torrential downpours. This weekend, blue sunny skies and a freshness in the air – Perfect!

The bride arrived in a convoy of four-wheel drives adorned with wedding ribbons and flags. Caroline walked down the aisle to classical music to stand next to Glen.

Welcome & Introduction

Ian (bride's father): Caroline and Glen would like to welcome their families and friends to this beautiful place that is so special in their hearts. They would like to thank each and every one of you for making the journey to be with them today, their special day.

For some of you this is a once in a lifetime adventure and they appreciate the lengths taken for you to be here. They hope that you will all share in the wonder and beauty of this magical place and join with them in celebrating their love to one another. They feel the presence of those close to them who are unable to be with us today – Grandma Jardine, Auntie Jen and her family, Arlene and Sandra.

Derek (groom's father): As some of you will already know, Caroline and Glen met on a tropical island in Thailand one starry night some six years ago. They have been inseparable ever since. They have shared their lives in all ways, sharing ideas, dreams and values. They have always had the love and support of their respective families and cherish the fact that they are each loved by the other's families. The support of their friends has been binding and they are stronger because of all the love and kindness they feel from around the world.

Celebrant: This gathering is for the celebration of a very special event. We are all here to witness the commitment which Caroline and Glen are about to make to each other, this public avowal of their love, and to wish them joy and every happiness for their future. My name is Wendy Haynes and I am a civil celebrant. We are here to witness the joining in matrimony of Caroline and Glen. I ask therefore if any person knows of any just cause or impediment why they may not be lawfully married to each other, you should declare it now.

Neither Caroline nor Glen enter into this union lightly. They will from this day forth be entwined as one and will work in unison to realise their shared dreams and goals.

As they travel, Caroline and Glen wish to continue to grow together, learn together and, most importantly, trust and love one another. Although they will become as one, they will still nurture each other and allow each other to grow as individuals.

So I now call upon you all to witness with me this marriage between these two beautiful people.

Authorisation

As a civil celebrant I am authorised to marry you according to the laws of this country.

Before you, Caroline and Glen, are married I must remind you of the solemn and binding nature of the relationship into which you are about to enter. Marriage is the full and voluntary commitment between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, entered into for life.

Marriage is a declaration that you will love, support and care for one another and be loyal to each other for the rest of your lives together.

Reading

I would now like to invite Nikki, a very close friend of Caroline and Glen, to share a poem that she has written especially for them.

Nikki:

*It was a dream
in the beginning*

*by star (and by)
stone
phosphorescence in the foam*

*But Love demanded vulnerability
or the dream would be hollow*

*Love demanded honesty
or the dream would be only pretence*

*Love demanded courage
or there would be simply
no dream*

*And so by star
the dreamers' guide
at each cross roads
you invoked the three:
honesty
courage
vulnerability*

*And so by stone
solid foundations
you made a home
and so...*

*Love led you here
where your dream
hangs like magic in the air
Love led you here.*

Blessed Be

(Dream Time Nikki J Moore)

Parental blessing

Celebrant: I would like to invite Rosemary, Caroline's mother, to come forward to say a few words on behalf of her family.

(Rosemary spoke spontaneously of their love and support for the marriage.)

Reading

Katherine (close friend):

Reading taken from the book of Ruth, Chapter 1, verses 15 to 18.

So Naomi said to her, "Ruth, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her God. Go back home with her."

But Ruth answered, "Don't ask me to leave you! Let me go with you. Wherever you go, I will go: wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and that is where I will be buried. May the Lord's worst punishment come upon me if I let anything but death separate me from you!"

When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her she said nothing more.

Pre vows

Celebrant: Caroline and Glen made a commitment to one another many years ago. Having family and friends living on opposite sides of the planet, their decision to be together, motivated by their love, has meant both have

needed to make the same sacrifice at different times; namely the time and space they have put between themselves and their families. Because of this, they have needed to bond wholly, supporting each other through every decision and challenge.

They have grown to know each other completely and enter into this marriage with their eyes wide open.

Caroline, would you please hand your bouquet to Simon and would you please face one another and hold hands. Thank you.

Glen, would you please repeat after me:

Glen (after celebrant): My beautiful Caroline, when I first saw you my heart missed a beat, you are the sparkle in my eye, you are the love of my life, you are my soul mate and my foundation. Your love is a warmth that covers me. Your beauty transfixes me. I travelled the earth to be by your side and would do it again at a moment's notice.

I will always be there for you. I will be beside you at all times.

I want to marry you with all of my heart. I want to commit to you for the rest of our lives. I want you to know how much I love you. I want us to grow old together and with that I ask you to be my wife.

**Vows &
exchanging of
rings**

Celebrant: Caroline, would you please repeat after me:

Caroline (after celebrant): Glen, my life has been wonderful since that magical moment we met. You are my inspiration and have taught me to be free. When I'm with you, your spirit ignites me.

I will always be there for you. I will be beside you at all times.

Your passion excites me and your tenderness keeps me warm. I promise to love you forever and am honoured to become your wife.

Celebrant: Glen, will you take Caroline to be your wife? Will you love and respect her? Will you cherish and honour her? Will you stay at her side, through good times and bad? Will you laugh and dream together? Will you be loyal and true to her till death do you part?

Glen: I will.

Celebrant: Caroline, will you take Glen to be your husband? Will you love and respect him? Will you cherish and honour him? Will you stay at his side, through good times and bad? Will you laugh and dream together? Will you be loyal and true to him till death do you part?

Caroline: I will.

Celebrant: Hamish, can we have the rings please. Thank you.

Glen, as you place the ring on Caroline's finger would you please repeat after me:

Glen (after celebrant): I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Glen, take you, Caroline, to be my wife. Caroline, I offer you this ring as a symbol of our eternal love.

Celebrant: Caroline, as you place the ring on Glen's finger would you please repeat after me:

Caroline (after celebrant): I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Caroline, take you, Glen, to be my husband. Glen, I offer you this ring as a symbol of our eternal love.

Declaration of marriage

Celebrant: Let these rings be a joyful reminder of your love, and a symbol of the vows you have spoken today.

As we are gathered here to bear witness to the union of these two beautiful people in marriage, with the powers vested in me by the laws of this country, I do joyfully declare you to be husband and wife. Glen, you may now kiss your bride!

Signing the Marriage Register & Certificates

We will now proceed to sign the Marriage Register and Certificates. Susan and Rachel, Caroline and Glen's respective sisters, will be witnessing the act.

While we are signing, Dommie will hand you all a small, very precious parcel.

Please don't open it yet, or shake it. It's Caroline and Glen's gift to you all, a very special kind of confetti. Hold the parcel between both hands. (Native butterflies to be handed out by Dommie.)

(Song sung by Andy while paperwork is signed.)

Prayer

God of love, look mercifully upon Caroline and Glen in the new life which they begin together this day. Unite them evermore in your love. Keep them faithful to the vows they have made, one to the other. Strengthen them with every good gift and let your peace be with them now and always. Amen.

Closing

Now I would ask you to open your special box very carefully as the bride and groom walk back down the aisle. (The butterflies are released!)

Congratulations, Caroline and Glen. May I be the first to introduce Mr and Mrs Easter!

Premium Blend

Sara was a widow with two children, Justine (13) and Ruben (9). The groom, Raymond, had never been married but had a daughter, Alysha (9) who he had custody of. Alysha and Ruben were also in the same class at school, which is how Sara and Raymond came to meet at the party of one of their classmates. The wedding was held at Sara's parents' farm where she grew up. Justine had a passion for singing and a beautiful voice which she shared with us during the ceremony. Sara and Raymond also chose to have only one wedding ring which Sara will wear.

Welcome

Celebrant: It is with much joy that I welcome all who are gathered today to witness the marriage of Sara and Raymond. My name is Wendy Haynes and I am a civil celebrant.

Introduction

Marriage is two people sharing an intimate relationship. This experience is enhanced and supported by our sense of what we feel is right – our ability to be loving and forgiving, thoughtful and caring, trusting and understanding. It involves respecting each other and giving comfort and support whenever it is needed.

For Sara and Raymond, this marriage is about sharing in each other's lives and the chance to let that person wholly into their life. It's about companionship and a lifelong partnership. They both honour their own and the other's individuality and uniqueness, they honour their differences and celebrate their union.

It is in this spirit of love and friendship that they stand as equals before us now, to declare their vows and exchange rings.

Authorisation

As an authorised celebrant, it is my duty to remind you, Sara and Raymond, of the solemn and binding nature of the relationship you are now about to enter. Marriage, according to the law in Australia, is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

Acknowledgement

Marriage is also an affirmation of the family union and today Sara and Raymond share this affirmation with their children, Alysha, Justine and Ruben who take honoured roles by their parents' sides today. In preparing this ceremony, I have been touched by the warmth, excitement and enthusiasm the children have shown for this event and for the prospect of joining together as one family. Today, Sara and Raymond also wish to publicly affirm the love they feel for Alysha, Justine and Ruben.

Today they recognise not only the responsibility of being a marriage partner to each other, but also the responsibility of providing a loving family home. As a family they value the love and friendship that they share and know that this will bring great joy to themselves and to all those who know them. We congratulate you all on this special day.

Parental blessing

Sara and Raymond would also like to acknowledge their parents, Darcy and Margaret, Josephine and Raymond Sr. I know you are all delighted to see Sara and Raymond so happy together. They value the love and acceptance that you have shown them throughout the years. The way in which you have each lived your lives has taught them many lessons on honesty, sharing, compassion and love. For this gift they are very grateful. They both ask that you bless this marriage.

(To Parents) Will you, Darcy and Margaret, Josephine and Raymond Sr, grant Sara and Raymond your blessings and pledge them your love and acceptance?

Parents: We will.

Margaret (Sara's mother): Sara and Raymond, we offer our blessings to your marriage. We know how deeply you love each other, as you have done since you first became a couple.

Marriage begins as a loving commitment made between two people, but grows to become so much more. Continue to respect each other and celebrate with each other and you will grow strong together.

There is a saying that when your children find true love it brings the parents true joy. It brings us great joy to be here today.

Song

May your love continue to grow and may your marriage bring you both true happiness and contentment.

Celebrant: To help celebrate this occasion, this joining of families, Sara and Raymond have asked Justine to share with us her gift for singing with a rendition of “In Trutina” from *Carina Burana* by Carl Orff.

Justine sings.

Pre vows (sharing of views on marriage)

Celebrant: Thank you, Justine, for that beautiful gift. Sara and Raymond have given much thought over recent months as to what love and marriage mean to them both and would like now to share just some of these thoughts with us.

Raymond: Love is, of its nature, unselfish, understanding and kind. True love is a commitment of heart and mind. Real love is not about being totally absorbed in each other but it is looking outward in the same direction.

Love makes burdens lighter because you can share them. It makes joys more intense because you can share them. It makes you stronger because you can reach out and become involved with life in ways you dared not risk alone.

Sara: They say love is blind but in truth it is all seeing. It is both a looking glass and a mirror. It adds colour, vibrancy, beauty and richness to the world around us. At the same time it reflects the

world within us. We see the best in ourselves, and yes, we see our worst too. But because love does not judge us by our weaknesses, we do not judge ourselves, or each other, by them either.

Today is a very special day for us as it is an opportunity to express our commitment and love openly to each other and to those who are most important in our lives. We see today as a ceremony that unites all of us within a sphere of love, positive energy and lifelong relationships.

Verse

Celebrant: At this time I would like to invite Margaret to read a short verse.

Margaret (Sara's mother):

*Every day upon waking
Be open to your love for each other*

*The love that is always within you
Is your gift to each other*

*Take time with each other
Hold each other often*

*Speak with honesty and care
Listen with respect and trust*

*Both give and receive your love and
friendship with an open heart*

*From this space you can dance with the
joys and challenges*

Vows & Exchanging of rings

*Embrace this love and embrace this
marriage*

*Rest in the sanctuary and strength of your
love for each other*

Celebrant: Would you please turn and face one another, look into each other's eyes and hold hands. Thank you. (The ring is in the palm of Sara's hand.)

Raymond, would you please repeat after me:

Raymond (after celebrant): Sara, you fill me with love and laughter. You are caring, passionate and understanding.

I promise to continue to love and care for you, to share in your joy and comfort you in times of sadness.

I will keep sight of my love for you, nurturing our friendship and marriage, accepting the challenges with an open heart.

Sara, I give myself wholly to you. It will be my honour to be your husband.

Celebrant: Sara, would you please repeat after me:

Sara (after celebrant): Raymond, you fill me with love and laughter. You are caring, passionate and understanding.

I promise to continue to love and care for you, to share in your joy and comfort you in times of sadness.

I will keep sight of my love for you, nurturing our friendship and marriage, accepting the challenges with an open heart.

Raymond, I give myself wholly to you. It will be my honour to be your wife.

Celebrant: Raymond and Sara have been holding, between their hands, the ring that Sara will wear as a symbol for them both.

Raymond, as you place the ring on Sara's finger, let it be a symbol for both of you of your friendship and your marriage.

Raymond: With this ring, I, Raymond, take you, Sara, to be my wife.

Sara: With this ring, I, Sara, take you, Raymond, to be my husband.

'Sand Ceremony'

Celebrant: Sara and Raymond, you have just sealed your relationship by the giving and receiving of your ring. Today you have committed to share the rest of your lives with each other.

Justine, Ruben and Alysha, you have chosen to share this commitment and to come together

Summary & Declaration

with your parents and to form a new family. This new family relationship will now be symbolised through the pouring of these five individual containers of sand. One each, representing all that you were, all that you are, and all that you will ever be. As the sand is poured together joining as one, so too are your lives – joining together in marriage and family. The grains of sand will never be separated and poured again – they will remain united as one.

Family and dearest friends, we have been privileged witnesses here today as Sara and Raymond have declared their love for one another and committed their lives to each other. We have seen and heard them exchange both the symbolic wedding band and their personally composed vows.

The commitment between Sara and Raymond exists in ways far beyond the words of this ceremony. Today is a celebration of their union, of their commitment to one another and of the love they share.

It is with much pleasure that I now, with the powers vested in me by the laws of this country, do pronounce you husband and wife! I invite you both to begin your new life together with a kiss.

And many congratulations to the entire new family!

Signing the Marriage Register & Certificates

We will now proceed to sign the Register and Marriage Certificates. As we do so, can I invite Justine to enchant us with her singing once again – This time with “Ave Maria”.

Justine sings as the Certificates and Register are signed.

Closing & verse

Celebrant: Thank you again, Justine. In closing, I would now like to invite Jason to read a final blessing.

Jason (Best Man):

*May this marriage be blessed
With love, laughter, peace and happiness*

*With Love that supports and nurtures you
and your family
With laughter that fills your home and
family life
With a lightness and joy that is contagious
With smiles that welcome and relax
May you find peace in your space together
and in your time apart
May true contentment and happiness be
yours*

*May this marriage be blessed
With love, laughter, peace and happiness*

Golden Moments

Patricia and Carl married in their fifties. Both were divorced and both had children who now had families of their own. They were attracted to each other by their mutual youthfulness and active outlook on life. Though many of their friends and family were of a similar or older age group, they wouldn't settle for anything less than a sunrise wedding at their favourite spot, a small grassland overlooking a lake near their home, followed by a champagne breakfast picnic. Friends and family embraced the occasion and were all in place well in time for the event.

Welcome

Celebrant: On behalf of Patricia and Carl, I welcome you all here on this beautiful morning. As the sun rises behind me let us remember that this is not just another day, it is a special day – a celebration of the love and commitment between Patricia and Carl.

This moment is very sacred. We have come together in the quiet of the morning, which brings us out of the normal flow of our lives, for a very special reason. In this moment Patricia and Carl wish to open their hearts in our presence. This short ceremony allows the depth of their love to shine through, lighting up all of our hearts and touching our lives.

Authorisation

My name is Wendy Haynes and I am authorised as a civil celebrant by the laws of this country to officiate at this wedding ceremony. As part of this role, it is my duty to remind you both of the solemn and binding nature of the relationship you are about to enter.

Introduction

Marriage, according to the law in Australia, is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

Carl and Patricia have been shaped and supported by many people. Today we surround them with our love, our care, and our friendship, and for this they are very grateful.

As family and friends of Carl and Patricia you have been an amazing source of support, inspiration, laughter and good times over the years. They both feel blessed to have met you all and had the opportunity to share so many smiles on the journey so far. They thank you all for making the journey to be here and celebrate with them.

Through their commitment to each other and with the support of their family and friends, they will find the gift and blessing of a happy life together.

Indeed we could say that they have already found that gift. Patricia and Carl know each other well. In fact they have known each other socially for many years but it is only in recent times that a romance has developed. They share many objectives and have a common outlook on life – that life is for living and that not a moment should be wasted – which explains our early start today!

Reading

They bring to the relationship much shared wisdom and experience. Some of this wisdom

has been picked up recently through their mutual interest in Buddhism, which began on their holiday to Thailand last year. In this light they would like to share with you the following readings from Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced Tick-Naught-Han), from his book *Teachings on Love*, which has inspired them both.

Patricia: Practise the Brahmaviharas, love, compassion, joy and equanimity. These are the four elements of true love. They are called immeasurable, because if you practise them, they will grow in you every day until they embrace the whole world. You will become happier, and everyone around you will become happier, also.

Carl: The first aspect of true love is maitri, the intention and capacity to offer joy and happiness. To develop that capacity we have to practise looking and listening deeply so that we know what to do and what not to do to make others happy. Without understanding, love is not true love. You must look deeply to understand the needs, aspirations, and suffering of the one you love. We all need love. Love brings us joy and well being. Maitri can be translated as love or loving kindness ... and has its roots in the word mitra, which means friend. In Buddhism, the primary meaning of love is friendship.

Patricia: The second aspect of true love is karuna, the intention and capacity to relieve and transform suffering and lighten sorrows...

To develop compassion in ourselves, we need to practice mindful breathing, deep listening, and deep looking... Compassion contains deep concern. You know the other person is suffering, so you sit close to her. You look and listen deeply to her to be able to touch her pain. You are in deep communication, deep communion with her, and that alone brings some relief. One compassionate word, action, or thought can reduce another person's suffering and bring him joy. One word can give comfort and confidence, destroy doubt, help someone avoid a mistake, reconcile a conflict, or open the door to liberation. With compassion in our heart, every thought, word and deed can bring about a miracle.

Carl: The third element of true love is mudita, joy. True love always brings joy to ourselves and to the one we love. If our love does not bring joy to both of us, it is not true love... Joy ... Joy relates primarily to the mind... dwelling happily in the present moment. We don't rush to the future, we know that everything is here in the present moment. Many small things can bring us tremendous joy... we have just to open our eyes and we can see the blue sky, the violet flowers, the children, the trees and so many other kinds of forms and colours.

Dwelling in mindfulness, we can touch these wondrous and refreshing things, and our mind of joy arises naturally. Joy contains happiness and happiness contains joy. Joy is filled with peace and contentment.

Patricia: The fourth element of true love is upeksha, which means equanimity, non-attachment, non-discrimination, or letting go... It is the wisdom of equality, the ability to see everyone as equal, not discriminating between ourselves and others. In a conflict, even though we are deeply concerned, we remain impartial, able to love and to understand both sides... We have to put ourselves 'into the other person's skin' and become one with him if we want to understand and truly love him. When that happens, there is no 'self' and no 'other'... Without upeksha, your love may become possessive. We shed all discrimination and prejudice, and remove all boundaries between ourselves and others.

True love allows you to preserve your freedom and the freedom of your beloved.

Vows

Celebrant: Patricia and Carl, with these teachings as your guide and with your family and friends as witnesses I would ask you to turn and face one another to exchange your vows.

Carl, will you take Patricia to be your wife? Will you offer Patricia your friendship and loving kindness; honour and respect her growth and freedom as well as your own; give comfort and support, and love and cherish her through all of the challenges and joys of your shared life?

Carl: I will.

Celebrant: Patricia, will you take Carl to be your lawful husband? Will you offer Carl your friendship and loving kindness; honour and respect his growth and freedom as well as your own; give comfort and support, and love and cherish him through all of the challenges and joys of your shared life?

Patricia: I will.

Celebrant: Carl, will you please repeat after me:

Carl (after celebrant): Patricia, it is my true intention to offer you joy and compassion, acceptance and gratitude in our togetherness. I pray that all my thoughts, words and actions bring peace, harmony and freedom to our lives. It is in this spirit that I call upon the persons here present to witness that I, Carl, take you, Patricia, to be my partner in marriage.

Celebrant: Patricia, will you please repeat after me:

Patricia (after celebrant): Carl, it is my true intention to offer you joy and compassion, acceptance and gratitude in our togetherness. I pray that all my thoughts, words and actions bring peace, harmony and freedom to our lives. It is in this spirit that I call upon the persons here present to witness that I, Patricia, take you, Carl, to be my partner in marriage.

Verse

Celebrant: Patricia and Carl accept that they will continue to work and live together, with a strong sense of responsibility, as a couple, and as independent and mature individuals. They know that only a person who is happy with oneself can make another happy. They care about each other and are concerned about each other's happiness and peace. Through their past experiences they have become clearer about their values and the things that are most important in their lives. Their lives have become simpler and they have developed clearer understandings about life and love and the ways in which they want to live together in marriage. This following reading is an ancient Sanskrit verse that embraces their philosophy:

*Look to this day!
For yesterday is but a dream,
And tomorrow is only a vision;
But today well-lived makes
Every yesterday a dream of happiness;
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day!*

Exchanging of rings

Carl, would you place the ring on Patricia's finger and repeat after me:

Carl (after celebrant): Patricia, with this ring, as a symbol of the vows made between us, I thee wed. It is my honour to be your husband. Please wear your ring with joy, for it is a symbol of my love and respect for you.

Summary & declaration

Celebrant: Patricia, would you place the ring on Carl's finger and repeat after me:

Patricia (after celebrant): Carl, with this ring, as a symbol of the vows made between us, I thee wed. It is my honour to be your wife. Please wear your ring with joy, for it is a symbol of my love and respect for you, and I ask that you wear it for all time.

Celebrant: You have made your vows, surrounded by your friends and family who share in the joy of this, your marriage. A sharing that you have made as two mature and vibrant individuals. Sharing your lives in this way creates an atmosphere of trust.

Maintain your sense of freedom and individuality whilst celebrating your union. Uphold and affirm the other in who they are and what they want to be. Nourish your marriage and friendship.

May you always be aware of the love you share and retain the strength you need to keep the promises you have made. May your home bring joy to your family and friends.

It is now my pleasure to honour you as Husband and Wife. Many blessings to you both. I invite you to seal the marriage with a kiss!

Signing the Marriage Register & Certificates

We will now proceed to sign the Register and the Marriage Certificates.

The Gayatri Mantra is playing during the signing.

Closing and Blessing

The morning sun is now warm upon us and brings with it the blessings of a new day.

May your love, like the sun, illuminate your hearts and guide your way together. May you be blessed with courage, patience and understanding so that all of your thoughts, words and actions bring peace and harmony to your lives. There will be clouds that come as well as rainy days and yet the sun will always rise.

Rest in the silence of your hearts and bring the awareness of this peace into your everyday lives. Share quiet time together to honour and give gratitude for all that you love and appreciate about each other. Dance and laugh together often.

Let the understandings you have brought here today be present in the ways that you communicate and care for one another. May you stand together with clear vision and open hearts.

On behalf of your family and friends I would like to congratulate you both and wish you a lifetime together filled with love, peace and great joy. Congratulations. It is my pleasure to honour you as Mr and Mrs Lockley!! (Applause)

In the Name of Christ

Christopher and Linda were both committed Christians who were brought up in different denominations. They each wanted to make their Christian faith a core component of their wedding ceremony and the ensuing marriage.

Introduction

Celebrant: We are gathered here today in the beauty of this chapel, with the love and support of families and loved ones, and in the sight of God, to celebrate one of life's greatest moments, the honouring of the love and commitment between two people, and to witness holy vows which shall unite Christopher and Linda together in marriage.

Marriage signifies the mystical union, which also exists between Christ and the Church – so too may this marriage be adorned by true and abiding love.

As you present yourselves to each other and before your families and friends in this most happy reverence, you may rejoice in each other, as all may rejoice with you, that your love is a gift to yourselves and to the society which honours you as a couple.

Authorisation

My name is Wendy Haynes and I am a registered celebrant authorised by the laws of this country to officiate at this wedding ceremony today. As part of this role, it is my duty to remind you, Christopher and Linda, of the solemn and binding nature of the relationship you are about to enter.

Giving away the Bride

Marriage, according to the law in Australia, is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

Should there be anyone who has cause why this couple should not be united in marriage, they must speak now or forever hold their peace.

Who is it that brings Linda to be married to Christopher?

Bruce (Linda's father): I do.

Celebrant: I now invite Bruce to say a few words on behalf of himself and his wife, Maree.

Bruce: There comes a time in the life of a father when he realises he is no longer the most important man in his daughter's life. That time has arrived for me.

This moment is important as it acknowledges the natural cycles of life and change. We have been fortunate as a father and daughter, and indeed as a family, to have shared many wonderful times together.

Every Dad hopes that his daughter will find a man who will love and protect her, be her soul mate and best friend for life. I think Linda has found that man in Christopher. Linda's happiness is obvious, especially today!

Maree and I are delighted to welcome Christopher into our family. Christopher and Linda, you and your family will always be welcome in our home. We wish you both a lifetime of happiness together.

Reading

Celebrant: Christopher and Linda, as the two of you come into this marriage uniting you as husband and wife, and as you affirm your faith and love for one another, I would ask that you remember to cherish each other as special and unique individuals, that you respect the thoughts, ideas and values of one another. Be open to forgive and live in the present moment each day, that you may share it together – as, from this day forward, you shall be each other's home, comfort and refuge, your marriage strengthened by your love and respect for each other.

A marriage ceremony represents one of life's greatest commitments and is a public declaration of your love for each other. I wish to read to you the following verse as I know that you both value this next reading as a true model of love that you aspire to.

*What you are is God's gift to you
What you make of yourself
is your gift to God
May the beauty of your love
show in your faces.
For this new life holds promises
unimagined by the old
So undertake your passage
with trust and innocence*

*For such is the way of love
Honour your passage into marriage
Honour your commitment to each other
And be devout in your intentions
and you will be nourished*

Pre vows

Christopher and Linda know that as individuals we are given life, and that we must learn to live together. Love is given to us by our family or by our friends. We learn to love by being loved. Learning to love and living together is one of the greatest challenges of life – and is the shared goal of a married life.

Love takes commitment, commitment to be true to ourselves, commitment to offer our friendship, trust, respect, freedom and support to continue to grow and learn as an individual. It takes faith – to always be willing to go forward to tomorrow, never really knowing what tomorrow will bring. Most importantly it takes willingness and integrity to keep our hearts open to each other, to reconnect, and rediscover the feeling of love and intimacy often in our daily lives.

When you live together with this openness, this connection and this trust, your lives and the lives of those around are transformed and blessed.

Today both of you are blessed with God's greatest of all gifts, the gift of abiding love and devotion between a man and a woman. All present here today, and those here in spirit, wish both of you lots of love, joy and all the happiness that the world has to offer.

Group blessing

Family and friends, you are very important people in the lives of Christopher and Linda and today you are witnesses to the exchanging of their vows and to this celebration. Will you support and strengthen this marriage and do everything in your power to uphold Christopher and Linda in their marriage?

Everyone: We will.

**Vows &
exchanging of
rings**

Celebrant: I ask now that you would turn and face one another and hold hands to exchange your vows and rings. Thank you.

Christopher, do you take this woman, whose hands you hold, to be your wife?

Christopher: I do.

Celebrant: Do you promise to love, honour, cherish and protect her, forsaking all others and holding only unto her?

Christopher: I do.

Celebrant: Linda, do you take this man, whose hands you hold, to be your husband?

Linda: I do.

Celebrant: Do you promise to love, honour, cherish and protect him, forsaking all others and holding only unto him?

Linda: I do.

Celebrant (holds the rings and declares): For Christopher and Linda their wedding rings are an outward and visible sign of an inward spiritual grace and symbolise the love and respect that they hold for each other. The roundness of the rings is a symbol of the unbroken circle of love. Love freely given has no beginning and no end. These rings signify, to all, the union of this man and this woman in marriage.

Christopher, as you place this ring on Linda's finger, would you please repeat after me:

Christopher (after celebrant): I call upon the persons here to witness that I, Christopher, take you, Linda, to be my wife, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer.

Linda, before God and in the presence of my family and friends, I declare my commitment and faithfulness to you and give my love to you for evermore. With this ring, I thee wed, Amen.

Celebrant: Linda, as you place this ring on Christopher's finger, would you please repeat after me:

Linda (after celebrant): I call upon the persons here to witness that I, Linda, take you, Christopher, to be my husband, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer.

Christopher, before God and in the presence of my family and friends, I declare my commitment and faithfulness to you and give my love to you for evermore. With this ring, I thee wed, Amen.

Prayer

John (Christopher's father): Let us pray.

Our hearts are filled with great happiness on Christopher's and Linda's wedding day, as they come before you sharing their vows of marriage, sharing their hearts and lives openly with each other.

Grant that they may ever be true and loving, living together in such a way as to bring joy and true intimacy into their marriage.

Temper their hearts with gentleness, kindness and understanding; free them of all pretence, guilt or jealousy.

May they give to each other their very best, and encourage and support each other's dreams.

Help them to always remember to be each other's sweetheart, companion, best friend and guide, so that together they may meet the cares and problems of life with courage, strength and support.

To Christopher and Linda, grant the blessing of children. Fill them with wisdom, love and compassion as they travel the road of parenthood and care for their family.

And with the passage of time, may they find great contentment in the rich joy of their later years. May the home they are creating today truly be a place of love, peace and harmony, where your Spirit is always present.

We pray you bless this marriage and walk beside Christopher and Linda throughout all of their lives together. We ask these things in Jesus's name. Amen.

Candle ceremony

Celebrant: Christopher and Linda, the two separate candles represent your two families and your separate lives. (Christopher and Linda light each individual candle. These may be lit earlier in the ceremony if desired.) They also represent the brightness and warmth of your love that you bring into the relationship.

I ask that each of you take your candles and that together you light the centre marriage candle.

The individual candles represent your lives before today. The flame from the first candle is not diminished when it lights the marriage candle, so too when your love is shared, it will not diminish your source of love, but the sharing will light up the heart of the other. (Christopher and Linda use the two individual candles to light the marriage candle together.)

Summary & declaration

Christopher and Linda, the two of you have agreed to live together in holy matrimony. You have promised your love for each other by these vows, the joining of your hands and the giving of these rings, I now declare you to be husband and wife.

Whom God has joined together, let no one separate.

Prayer & closing

May the Lord bless you and shine his love upon you and be gracious unto you. May he embrace you with joy and peace. Amen.

Congratulations, you may kiss your bride.

It is my privilege to present to you Mr and Mrs Harris!

The Cup of Life

Michael and Alison met while travelling in Egypt and spent their first few weeks together exploring ancient lands of the Middle East. This 'mystical' beginning set the tone for their relationship and they often took time out to honour the relationship in sacred ways. For their wedding, they chose to incorporate an ancient wine ceremony.

Introduction

Celebrant: Michael and Alison, we are here today to celebrate your marriage. You share a beautiful connection of friendship and love that began when you first met in Egypt four years ago and that continues to grow stronger every day. With each other you have found more happiness and joy than either of you could ever have imagined.

On behalf of Michael and Alison and their families I would like to welcome you to witness their marriage in this rich and colourful setting of their home.

Remembrance & family blessing

There is a note of sadness today. Alison's father, Russell, died six months ago. He was delighted at the news of your marriage, and Michael and Alison would like to take this moment to think of him on this special occasion.

Last Christmas when you were all together, he gave you both some valuable advice – he shared with you the importance of allowing time for each other now, and in the years to come.

He said, 'nurture your friendship and express your love and care for each other every day'. His love and wisdom is with us here as we celebrate today.

(Alison's brother, Simon, had escorted Alison down the aisle, and John, Michael's father, was standing by Michael's side.)

Who presents this woman to be united with her beloved and blesses their love?

Simon (Alison's brother): Her family and I do.

Celebrant: Who presents this man to be united with his beloved and blesses their love?

John (Michael's father): His family and I do.

Authorisation

Celebrant: As a civil celebrant, I am authorised by law to solemnise your marriage. Before you, Michael and Alison, are married I must remind you of the solemn and binding nature of the relationship into which you are about to enter.

Marriage, according to law in Australia, is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

Acknowledgement & group blessing

Michael and Alison would like to thank you for all of your love and support that has nurtured, challenged and supported them throughout their individual journeys and has continued on this path that they have taken together.

They deeply appreciate the smiles, the hugs, the laughter, and the care. Thank you to everyone for making the effort to be here today.

Will you, who will witness these vows today, do all in your power to support and uphold this marriage in the years ahead?

Everyone: We will.

Celebrant: Michael and Alison, you bring into this marriage the blessings and support of your family and friends, who will witness and share in this journey of friendship.

**Pre vows (love
and marriage...)**

Marriage requires love, a word that is quite often used sentimentally and without much thought. We sometimes think that love is some rare and mystical event, when in fact it is our natural state of being. Love is present within us, around us, between us.

Sometimes we can get caught up in the busyness of daily life, things to do, errands and chores to attend to. This can take us away from our awareness of the love that is ever present.

When we love, we see things other people do not see. We see beneath the surface, to the qualities which make our beloved friend special and unique. To see with loving eyes is to know their inner beauty, it is to hear their inner song. And to be loved is to be seen, and known, as we are known to no other.

The secret of love and marriage is similar to that of divinity itself. It is the presence of the larger self. In surrendering to this divine force we reach deeper levels of understanding and grace. With the awareness of this grace, our lives and relationships become enriched and blessed.

Today's marriage between Michael and Alison is of two people who embrace the understanding and experience that love is ever present.

Marriage also takes trust, to know in your hearts that you want only the best for each other. It takes dedication, to stay open to one another, to learn and grow, even when it is difficult to do so. And it takes faith, to go forward together without knowing what the future holds for you both.

While love is our natural state of being, these other qualities are not as easy to come by. Michael and Alison know that it takes commitment to being present, to living in the moment, and that the benefits of being in such a state of presence are many. They are able to listen deeply to each other and to their inner truths; they are aware of their connection and experience more intimacy. They see each other anew, in a fresh and inspiring way that reflects who they truly are.

The true art of married life is nurtured by this inner spiritual journey.

Wine ceremony

For you both, marriage is about being together for the rest of your lives. It's about companionship and a lifelong partnership. It's about sharing and embracing all that life has to offer, the ups and the downs, the tears and the laughter, the times when we remember who we really are, and the times when we forget. With this in mind, I ask you now to turn and face one another to partake in the wine ceremony.

Into this chalice we pour sweet and bitter wines, even as life will pour into this marriage the rich and varied tastes of experience. Only in the deepest respect and shared love will its bitterness be so blended with the sweet that your life may be full and rich. (From the chalice two glasses are half filled.)

Michael (takes a glass and has a sip, then says): Alison, I share this cup of life with you, that we may partake of life together and share in all its sorrows and joys and celebrate our many moments, days and years together. (Michael passes the glass to Alison and she too takes a sip.)

Alison (takes the other glass and has a sip, then says): Michael, I share this cup of life with you, that we may partake of life together and share in all its sorrows and joys and celebrate our many moments, days and years together. (Alison passes the glass to Michael and he too takes a sip. The glasses are placed on the table.)

Vows & exchanging of rings

Celebrant: And now I would ask you to exchange your vows and rings. Michael, would you please repeat after me:

Michael (after celebrant): Alison, today I give myself to you in marriage. I promise to encourage and inspire you, to laugh and cry with you, to comfort and support you. I will be there for you in times of joy and peace and in times of hardship, when life is simple and when it is an effort. I cherish and adore you; and hold you in the highest respect.

Alison, my dear friend and closest companion, I love you.

Celebrant: Michael, do you take Alison to be your lawful wife? Do you invite Alison in love and in harmony, to share your life as your friend, your lover and your companion?

Michael: I do.

Celebrant: Michael, would you please say your vow to Alison:

Michael: I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Michael, take you, Alison, to be my wife and friend, lover and confidante.

Celebrant: Alison, would you please repeat after me:

Alison (after celebrant): Michael, today I give myself to you in marriage. I promise to encourage and inspire you, to laugh and cry with you, to comfort and support you. I will be there for you in times of joy and peace and in times of hardship, when life is simple and when it is an effort. I cherish and adore you; and hold you in the highest respect. Michael, my dear friend and closest companion, I love you.

Celebrant: Alison, do you take Michael to be your lawful husband? Do you invite Michael in love and in harmony, to share your life as your friend, your lover and your companion?

Alison: I do.

Celebrant: Alison, would you please say your vow to Michael:

Alison: I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Alison, take you, Michael, to be my husband and friend, lover and confidant.

Celebrant: Michael, as you place this ring on Alison's finger, would you please repeat after me:

Michael (after celebrant): Alison, I offer you this ring as a symbol of my enduring love. Let it be a reminder that wherever you go, my love goes with you.

Summary & declaration

Celebrant: Alison, as you place this ring on Michael's finger, would you please repeat after me:

Alison (after celebrant): Michael, I offer you this ring as a symbol of my enduring love. Let it be a reminder that wherever you go, my love goes with you.

Celebrant: And so, in love and harmony, Michael and Alison have agreed to live together in marriage. They have expressed their love and commitment through their vows and by the giving and receiving of their wedding rings. Therefore it is with much pleasure that I now, with the powers vested in me by the laws of this country, do pronounce you Husband and Wife!

Many congratulations! May you enjoy a relationship that is filled with love, peace and happiness. I now invite you to begin your new life together with a kiss.

Signing the Marriage Register & Certificates

We will now proceed to sign the Marriage Register and Certificates. (Rose petals are distributed to the guests during this time.)

Closing

May your wish to go on growing together be fulfilled, supporting and caring for one another through the joys and challenges that life brings. Keep looking for ways to surprise each other and keep sight of what has brought you here today, your love for each other.

May your home be a place of peace and happiness for all who come there, and a place where people feel renewed and welcome, a place for growing and a place for sharing, a place for laughter, a place for quiet and a place for love. May your family and friends be nurtured and enriched by your love for one another.

(To the guests) As you hold the rose petals in your hands I would like to invite you to think of a wish or blessing that you would like to offer Michael and Alison as they step out on this new journey of marriage together. As you shower them with your petals may you send that wish or blessing to them.

It is now my pleasure to introduce to you Mr and Mrs Chandler!

True Commitment

Helena and Chris have two beautiful children and chose to have a commitment ceremony at home. Chris had recently recovered from a life threatening illness that touched their lives for nearly twelve months. There were many people who helped to bring this celebration together and you could feel the love, support and care that embraced this family. The ceremony was held in a glade of rainforest ferns and trees. There were black cockatoos sitting in the trees around the perimeter and the blossoms of the gums were sweet.

Helena and Chris chose not to get married legally and therefore the words in Section 46 of the *Marriage Act 1961* are not included, nor are there any references to it being a marriage.

Welcome

Celebrant: Today we celebrate and honour the love and friendship that Helena and Chris share in their lives together. It is my pleasure to welcome you here this afternoon, to this beautiful garden. You have been invited here as dear family and friends as Helena and Chris wanted to share this very special moment with those people in their lives who are most important.

Helena and Chris, you have come here today to declare your commitment to each other with your family and friends as witnesses.

Group blessing

Family and friends, who comes here today to confirm and bless this union of Helena and Chris?

Acknowledgement of children

Everyone: We do.

Celebrant: After a journey of nine years Helena and Chris feel it is time to celebrate their union with a ceremony giving it a social and formal recognition. Recognition that the relationship they share is rich with love, commitment, support and friendship. It is a union blessed with two beautiful children, Jared and Katie.

We gather here at their home, a sanctuary for Chris, Helena, Jared and Katie. A place that is peaceful and isolated, yet close to the beach and all their friends. A place where we can meet as a family.

Helena and Chris love and appreciate the way you love and support them. Your generosity has been huge, particularly over the last few years, and they thank you. Thank you for coming here today and celebrating with them.

This relationship between Helena and Chris is the intimate sharing of two lives, a union of love and support that has enhanced their sense of self and their togetherness.

Relationships are forever changing, and a union that grows and blossoms is one where both people develop individually whilst growing in the understanding of the other. Then it becomes possible to share the joys and successes and also the challenge of sorrow and mistakes.

Helena and Chris have had their fair share of major challenges and an abundant amount of joy, and after all these years, they love each other even more than when they first met.

Helena and Chris, this ceremony acknowledges your commitment to each other, it means togetherness yet still being your own person. It means sharing your life with a dear friend, a cherished lover and a companion that brings you joy, comfort and support.

This celebration is also an affirmation of the family union, of Chris, Helena, Jared and Katie. A family home where there is lots of laughter, jokes, playing, music and dancing and... hugging!

They are greatly blessed with the love that they share with Jared and Katie and they are both very thankful to have them as their children. One of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is the expression of love, respect, caring and intimacy.

Chris: Jared and Katie, we both love you dearly and appreciate so many things about you both. Your smiles, your hugs, your laughter and your love of life.

Helena: We would like to give you this special gift as a symbol of our love for you. (Helena and Chris give them a small gift each. There are many tears.)

**Individual
acknowledgement
& blessing**

Celebrant: Helena and Chris embrace their love and their relationship as equals. It is in this spirit that they now stand before us.

Neil has been a close friend of both Helena and Chris for many years and with his wife Eileen has cared for and supported Jared and Katie, whilst Helena nursed Chris back to full health. Neil, Helena and Chris are deeply grateful for your amazing generosity and your love and care for their family.

I would like to now ask Neil if, on behalf of family and friends, you would grant Helena and Chris your blessings and pledge them your love and acceptance of this union.

Neil: I do.

Celebrant: Thank you.

Reading

I would now like to invite Stacey to come forward and share a poem written by Jim Boswell called *Our Shared, Sacred Space*. Stacey has known Helena since primary school and watched these two friends become closer over the years.

Stacey (Helena's sister):

*Come apart with me, my love,
Create our sacred space.
Our place for knowing, showing all,
To view with inner eyes.*

*Our place of transparency,
Of light, of passion, promise, praise.*

Vows & exchanging of rings

*What we say in this place is forever.
What we feel here nourishes our soul.
What we choose is mutually chosen.*

*Our vision,
Our truth,
Our future.*

Celebrant: Helena and Chris, will you please turn to each other and join hands. Thank you.

Chris, would you please repeat after me:

Chris (after celebrant): Helena, I stand here today with my heart full of love. You have touched my heart in so many ways and for this I am deeply grateful. I appreciate your understanding and your generosity and care. Not only are you my dear friend you are a wonderful mother to our children. It brings me great joy to openly declare my love for you and to make this commitment to you today. I love you, Helena.

Celebrant: Helena, would you please repeat after me:

Helena (after celebrant): Chris, committing to our partnership publicly is something we both have wanted to do for a long time. Now the time is right. We started off with fireworks and the fire is still burning strong after nine years. Your love has inspired me and allowed me to be myself. You are my best friend and companion. Thank you for giving the children and me such a secure family. I love you, Chris.

Celebrant: Jared, can we have Helena's ring, please? Thank you.

Chris, would you please repeat after me as you place this ring on Helena's finger.

Chris (after celebrant): Helena, I am honoured to be your friend, your lover and your partner and I invite you to wear this ring as a symbol of my love for you.

Celebrant: Katie, can we have Chris's ring, please? Thank you.

Helena, would you please repeat after me as you place this ring on Chris's finger.

Helena (after celebrant): Chris, I am honoured to be your friend, your lover and your partner and I invite you to wear this ring as a symbol of my love for you.

Celebrant: Your rings are the symbols of the love you share. Be true to the words you have spoken and wear your rings as a joyful and delightful reminder.

Summary & declaration

Helena and Chris are joined by the love they share and they are also united by the friendship. We are all unique and when a couple joins together, they stand side-by-side, hand-in-hand, heart-to-heart. They raise hands together, to find and touch what one cannot reach alone.

Continue to see the greatness in one another – and remind each other of what you see. In any close relationship there are times of sunshine and warmth, as well as the rain and storms.

You have already come so far, having lived together for nine years. Many of the possible trials and tribulations that can affect a relationship you have already experienced and from this you have both prospered and grown.

Helena and Chris, you have publicly declared your love and commitment to each other and on behalf of your family and friends, I wish for you a lifetime of love, laughter and friendship together.

Since you have pledged yourselves to each other in the presence of family and friends, I now pronounce you partners in life.

Congratulations... You may now kiss!!

(Clapping and cheering from family and friends.)

Signing the Certificates

We will now proceed to sign the Certificates.

Closing

Helena and Chris,

May your home continue to ring with the love and joy of today's celebration and be a place of happiness for all who come here.

*May the sun bring you new strength by day
may the moon softly restore you by night
may the rain wash away your fears
and the breeze invigorate your being*

*May you, all the days of your life,
walk gently through the world and know its
beauty*

Apache Wedding Prayer

Small & Intimate – 1

Celia and Tynon eloped from Sydney with their best friends, Brigitte and Raul. They explained to their family and friends beforehand that they would be eloping to a romantic holiday destination for the ceremony and that the big engagement party they were having was for everyone to celebrate their upcoming marriage. They chose this for two reasons. Firstly, it was a desire to have just a very small and intimate ceremony and holiday, and secondly it was a financial decision. After the wedding they sent everyone a collage of photographs taken from the ceremony with a selection of words from their vows and ceremony.

Welcome

Celebrant: Celia and Tynon, I would like to welcome you to this magnificent place where we meet today to celebrate a very special moment in your lives.

Brigitte and Raul, as Celia and Tynon's closest friends I also welcome you and they thank you for your caring friendship and appreciate your being here today to witness and celebrate their declaration of marriage. I know you are both very excited to be here with them.

Authorisation

As a civil celebrant, I am duly authorised to marry you according to the laws in Australia. Before you, Celia and Tynon, are joined in marriage today in my presence and in the presence of your friends, Brigitte and Raul, I am to remind you of the binding nature of the relationship you are about to enter. Marriage in Australia is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

Pre vows (love and marriage...)

This union of marriage is a mutual commitment to continue building your life together. You have already embraced and enjoy living together and embark on this next part of your journey together with a full understanding that marriage is about caring, supporting and respecting each other. It is about creating mutual joy and fulfilment in your lives and a readiness to face together the ups and downs that underlie our human experiences and relationships. Each crisis that you have faced together has made your union stronger, and every joy shared has strengthened your connection of love.

Celia and Tynon, you have come together out of a desire to be loved and to give love, to provide support and encouragement to each other and to embrace the new and exciting possibilities that your life together can offer.

Friendship is an essential ingredient for a healthy marriage. Friendship is emotional intimacy – the willingness to let someone into your life and to be able to share your thoughts and feelings honestly. It is being able to be who you really are and to accept your friend as she or he really is.

In a strong friendship there is space and support for each of you to maintain your sense of self and individuality. A space where each of you can discover your own strengths and creativity, develop your confidence, follow your goals and achieve your full potential. It is being able to find the balance between individuality and togetherness, between uniqueness and unity.

Then the richness of this balance and your personal sense of well being will be a gift and a blessing to your marriage.

Brigitte: Friendship is the garden where trust and love will flourish, provided they are planted with seeds of honesty, openness, acceptance, respect and consideration and, for a full bloom, nourished with loving care and kindness.

Celebrant: Celia and Tynon, your relationship has grown and matured into a sincere and passionate friendship of trust, warmth, laughter and understanding. You appreciate and admire each other's strengths and achievements, and honour and accept each other's limitations and little quirks, and the ways in which you differ. You know that sometimes this requires patience, the ability to listen and to be honest. You learn from each other and sometimes with a healthy discussion adjust to the other's needs without giving up your own.

As you grow in the understanding of each other, so too will your respect, trust and love grow.

Celia and Tynon, the success of your marriage depends upon the continued commitment from both of you to make the relationship one that brings you both joy and peace.

Verse

Tynon would like to read a verse that they have written together.

Tynon: *Our love gets stronger every day
Grace blesses us in every way
Let us live and laugh together
Let us plan and dream together
Let us grow in health and happiness
together*

*Our hands and hearts are joined
In love and in trust we stand
Today I marry my dearest friend
and closest companion.
Thank you for all you have given me.*

Vows

Celebrant: The vows you are about to exchange serve as a representation of the love that you pledge to each other. For it is not the words that you will speak today which will hold your promises, but it is the inner sense of love and commitment that each of you feels deep within your soul that is the binding force between you.

Celia and Tynon, do you come here today with open hearts and clear vision to share your lives in marriage during difficult as well as joyous times?

Celia and Tynon: We do.

Celebrant: Tynon, would you please repeat after me:

Tynon (after celebrant): I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Tynon, take you, Celia, to be my wife and equal, my lover and life partner. I promise to be your best friend. I offer you love and support, trust and respect, patience and empathy, laughter and passion till death us do part.

Celebrant: Celia, would you please repeat after me:

Celia (after celebrant): I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Celia, take you, Tynon, to be my husband and equal, my lover and life partner. I promise to be your best friend. I offer you love and support, trust and respect, patience and empathy, laughter and passion till death us do part.

Celebrant: The rings, please.

Tynon, please repeat after me:

Tynon (after celebrant): Celia, this ring is a symbol of my love and my commitment to you. Please wear it with faith and trust, that I will always love you.

Celebrant: Celia, please repeat after me.

Celia (after celebrant): Tynon, this ring is a symbol of my love and commitment to you. Please wear it with faith and trust, that I will always love you.

Celebrant: May your rings be a delightful reminder of your love and friendship. May the joy that you are radiating today be with you throughout your many years together.

Declaration

As you enter this new phase of your life as husband and wife, I know that you anticipate with hope and joy the welcoming of children into this marriage. May your family bring you great joy and pleasure. May your home be filled with peace and harmony, laughter, love, good friends and a beautiful and vibrant family.

May the love which you have declared for each other today reach out to touch all of your cherished family and friends, whose blessings are here with you today. May you enjoy the richness of true love and the precious blessing of peace.

With the authority invested in me, I am honoured to pronounce you husband and wife and rejoice to recognise you as life partners.

Please take your first kiss as husband and wife. Congratulations!

Signing the Register & Closing

We will now sign the Marriage Register and Certificates.

Brigitte and Raul, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you – Celia and Tynon, as husband and wife.

Small & Intimate – 2

James and Elizabeth were both in their sixties and had decided to get married without any of their family and friends present. They organised two witnesses to come for the ceremony which was held at a private home overlooking the islands of Coffs Harbour. James and Elizabeth didn't want any fuss so the ceremony was very short. The small group chatted for a while and then the ceremony began. There was plenty of time for them to really be present with one another and we created a very sacred space.

Welcome

Celebrant: James and Elizabeth, I would like to welcome you to this simple celebration. We meet here to celebrate and honour your love and commitment to one another.

Authorisation

As a civil celebrant I am duly authorised by law to solemnise marriages according to law. Before you, James and Elizabeth, are joined in marriage in my presence and in the presence of these witnesses, I am to remind you of the solemn and binding nature of the relationship into which you are now about to enter. Marriage, according to law in Australia, is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

Pre vows (love and commitment...)

Marriage is a delightful journey for two people sharing the same path. It is a union that can bring care, comfort, support and joy.

As you have discovered a marriage that grows richer and stronger over the years is one that is based on a close friendship, healthy and honest

**Vows &
exchanging of
rings**

communication and the willingness to step forward together into the future. It is continually evolving and ever changing.

James and Elizabeth, you have finally found one another. It probably seems like just the other day when you first set your eyes on each other and your hearts lit up, and still five years later, you love everything about each other and enjoy each other's company. What a gift you are to each other. I know that you want to continue to laugh together, learn together and, most importantly, trust and love one another for the rest of your years together. This marriage will be blessed with a rich companionship and a deep respect for one another.

James and Elizabeth, would you please turn and hold hands to say your vows.

Your hands together will nurture your love and your relationship. Hold each other and gently hug one another often. In times of struggle, may they help you to relax and feel safe and loved. In times of joy, may they join in celebration.

May these hands that are given to the other freely and without reservation be blessed with strength and tenderness. May these hands continue to build a relationship founded in grace, rich in caring, and devoted to loving. May they always be held by one another for many more years to come.

Do you, James, take Elizabeth, to be your wife?

James: I do.

Celebrant: Will you love, cherish and respect her always?

James: I will.

Celebrant: Do you, Elizabeth, take James, to be your husband?

Elizabeth: I do

Celebrant: Will you love, cherish and respect him always?

Elizabeth: I will

James: Elizabeth, I value your gentleness and your confidence. Your love and commitment to your family and friends is amazing and your ability to bring pleasure to people's lives is a joy. I love going out with you and laughing with you, and when you sing it makes my heart sing. I am so very happy to be standing here holding your hands and I look forward to sharing our twilight years together, laughing and enjoying each other's children and grandchildren.

Elizabeth, I treasure our friendship and I love you greatly. I trust you and I honour you.

I call upon the people here present to witness that I, James, take you Elizabeth to be my wife.

Elizabeth: James, I was very content on my own, as you know, yet from the very beginning I just knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with you. It is so simple and also a blessing to share that contentment and companionship with you. Your warmth, sincerity, honesty and integrity are all qualities I love and adore. Your devotion to me touches me deeply and when you say you love me, I truly know that you mean it with all of your heart.

James, I treasure our friendship and I love you greatly. I trust you and I honour you.

I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Elizabeth, take you James, to be my husband.

Celebrant: James, as you place the ring on Elizabeth's finger would you please repeat after me:

James (after celebrant): Elizabeth, I place this ring on your finger, as a symbol of my love and commitment to you and to our marriage. Please wear it with faith and trust that I will always love you and respect you.

Celebrant: Elizabeth, as you place the ring on James's finger would you please repeat after me:

Elizabeth (after celebrant): James, I place this ring on your finger, as a symbol of my love and commitment to you and to our marriage. Please wear it with faith and trust that I will always love you and respect you.

Declaration

Celebrant: It is in the spirit of love and friendship that you have spoken and declared your love and commitment to each other. It is with much pleasure that I now, with the powers vested in me by the laws of this country, pronounce you husband and wife.

James, would you please kiss your bride.

**Signing the
Register &
closing**

We will now sign the Marriage Register and Certificates.

James and Elizabeth, I would like to congratulate you both and wish for you a lifetime of love and laughter, peace and happiness.

Lovers in Harmony

Casey and Monique chose a secluded bay late in the afternoon for their commitment ceremony. They were both escorted down the aisle by their family to the serenade of their jazz musician friends.

As a couple of the same sex, they could not get married legally in Australia and therefore the words in Section 46 of the *Marriage Act 1961* are not included, nor are there any references to it being a marriage.

Welcome & Introduction

Celebrant: We are gathered here to celebrate Casey and Monique's union, to honour the love they share and to bear witness to their commitment to one another.

My name is Wendy Haynes, a civil celebrant. It has been a pleasure to meet with Casey and Monique and share the story of their meeting and of their lives together.

Three years ago Casey was playing in a wonderful jazz band. She was very content with her life when Monique joined the group and literally took Casey's breath away, which made the trumpet section a lot quieter!

It was a friendship that was to grow over the next six months as they dined and danced together discovering their past, their present and igniting sparks and dreams about their future together.

It wasn't long before they travelled to Europe and visited many music bars around the continent.

On this epic adventure on a misty day in Ireland, after an afternoon of music, Casey and Monique took a walk along a cold and blustery headland and Casey proposed. Mon joyfully responded with tears!

They had already talked about their commitment to each other and embraced the responsibilities that come from living and loving together. This they knew was the next step, to publicly declare what they both knew to be true in their hearts. Which, dear beloved family and friends, is why we are all here – to witness this celebration; and we are here to offer them our love and support for the many years ahead.

Family blessings

Monique, you have been escorted by your brother, John, to this celebration today and I would now like to ask him formally:

John, who brings Monique here today to be joined in partnership with Casey?

John: I do. Monnie, as your brother, I know that I have annoyed you for many years, however now I treasure the friendship we share and today you look absolutely gorgeous and I am very proud and happy to bring you here. (remains standing)

Celebrant: Casey, you have been escorted by your parents, Michael and Barbara, to this celebration today and I would now like to ask them formally:

Who brings Casey here today to be joined in partnership with Monique?

Michael and Barbara: We do.

Michael: Casey, this day has been long awaited. We are so happy you have found your partner in life and we would like to welcome you, Monique, into our home and family.

Barbara: Your father and I have raised a beautiful family who are now counted among our closest friends, for which we are truly grateful. We have had our ups and downs and it wasn't easy for us at the beginning, when we first met Mon, however we came through those difficult times, and we truly offer you both our blessings for your lives together, and wish for you a lifetime of love and peace.

**Pre vows (love
and
commitment...)**

Celebrant: It is a pleasure to be here today to witness the love that Casey and Monique share. A commitment ceremony, a rite of sacred union, makes public what is already in their hearts and lives together.

Lovers light our hearts with the pleasure they are feeling. Lovers remind us of the value of love and companionship. And this celebration is an acknowledgement of what is already present in their hearts and the willingness they share to make this union last.

Casey and Monique, you enter into this celebration today with great joy and also with

preparation and knowing that the health and vitality of this union doesn't just happen. You acknowledge that it takes an openness to be present in each moment with the challenges and the joys.

It takes healthy communication and being able to listen respectfully. It requires patience, tolerance and taking the time to be with one another. Truly being with one another in a meaningful way – holding one another and caring for one another; nurturing and strengthening your connection.

You will always be individuals with separate feelings and separate personalities, however it is your love and respect that joins you as one. As you encourage and support each other's endeavours you will become stronger as a couple. Your lives will be enriched as you watch each other grow.

You are both dedicated to your music and your creativity and in this way you derive much pleasure from each other's company. Your shared music gives you joy and delight, and is a gift to all of us here.

Today we are here to honour your love, your commitment and the music of your hearts.

**Vows &
exchanging of
rings**

I would like to ask you to turn and face one another and hold hands to exchange your vows.

Will you, Casey, take Monique, to be your partner, to live together in a state of union?

Casey: I will.

Celebrant: Will you love her, honour her, comfort her, and be with her in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, be true to her as long as you both shall live?

Casey: I will.

Celebrant: Will you, Monique, take Casey, to be your partner, to live together in a state of union?

Monique: I will.

Celebrant: Will you love her, honour her, comfort her, and be with her in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, be true to her as long as you both shall live?

Monique: I will.

Celebrant: Deborah, would you please bring the rings forward. Thankyou.

These rings represent to you both, and to all who see them, your commitment to one another. They symbolise the perfect circle of love, unity and harmony.

May you both remain true to the promises you make here today.

Casey, as you place the ring on Monique's finger, would you please repeat after me:

Casey (after celebrant): Mon, with this ring
I give you my promise
that from this day forward
we shall travel this journey of life together.
We will walk together with all that life brings us.
May you feel deeply loved, for indeed you are.
May you always feel your beauty
that I see with great joy and honour.
With this ring, I give you my love
I give you my heart.
I have no greater gift to give.
Know that wherever you are my love is with you.

Celebrant: Monique, as you place the ring on Casey's finger, would you please repeat after me:

Monique (after celebrant): Casey, with this ring
I give you my promise
that from this day forward
we shall travel this journey of life together.
We will walk together with all that life brings us.
May you feel deeply loved, for indeed you are.
May you always feel your beauty
that I see with great joy and honour.
With this ring, I give you my love,
I give you my heart.
I have no greater gift to give.
Know that wherever you are my love is with you.

Declaration & Conclusion

You have declared to each other, in front of your family and friends as witnesses, your deep love and commitment to one another. You have your community here offering their support to you. Take a moment to look at their smiling faces.

May you call upon us in times of need and in times of celebration.

It is now my great pleasure to affirm that your love is sacred, that your union is blessed. May you be a source of strength, comfort and compassion for each other, and keep your hearts open to love and honour one another throughout your lives.

Casey and Monique, I would now like to invite you to kiss and therefore seal the commitment that you have declared here today. Congratulations!

We will now proceed to sign the commitment certificates.

Two Become One

Chris and Terry celebrated their union with a large gathering of family and friends. It was very elegant, simple and deeply heartfelt. After the ceremony and the signing they had four friends appear as if from nowhere and perform a beautiful dance that enraptured everyone.

As a couple of the same gender Chris and Terry could not get married legally and therefore the words in Section 46 of the *Marriage Act 1961* are not included, nor are there any references to it being a marriage.

Welcome & Introduction

Celebrant: Chris and Terry would like to welcome you all here for this very special celebration. They are delighted that you could join them as they make public their lifelong commitment to one another and honour the love and friendship that they share.

My name is Wendy Haynes and I am a civil celebrant.

Individual acknowledgement & blessing

This is a day of celebration in which we all share, but for you, Terry, and for your family, it is not without a note of sadness; for one person is greatly missed: your mother, Elaine, who passed away last year.

Terry, your mum was very happy to see you and Chris so content together and her heartfelt blessings are here with you. I know she would have rejoiced at seeing your happiness and would have a big smile on her face if she were here.

Chris and Terry are now going to light a candle in remembrance of her love and care, and her beautiful smile. (Terry comes forward to light the candle, with the support of Chris.)

Chris and Terry would also like to make mention of some other very special people who could not be here with us: Chris's childhood friend, Shar and her recently deceased partner, John; Corey and Michelle.

They are all a very important part of your lives and I know their love is very much a part of this celebration even though they cannot be here.

Verse

This first reading, called True Love was a favourite of Chris's mother Elaine.

True Love (Author Unknown)

*True love is a sacred flame
That burns eternally,
And none can dim its special glow
Or change its destiny.*

*True love speaks in tender tones
And hears with gentle ear,
True love gives with an open heart
And true love conquers fear.*

*True love makes no harsh demands
It neither rules nor binds,
And true love holds with gentle hands
The hearts that it entwines.*

Pre vows (love & Commitment)

Chris and Terry, you have combined your lives together to make one life, however you have maintained your sense of individuality and you embrace your union. You acknowledge and cherish your differences and your similarities. Together you have laughed and cried, been happy and sad, you have felt inspired and challenged; and you know that this is the way of life and that relationships blend many different aspects and are ever changing. To ensure a healthy and lasting relationship you both know that it is essential to value one another, and even when you disagree to respect each other's feelings, needs and wants. And, thankfully, you know that it takes a sense of humour, which you are both blessed with.

Blessing

You have your dear family and friends present here today and I would like to ask, who comes here today to confirm and bless this union of Chris and Terry?

All: We do.

Verse

Celebrant: Jane, Terry's sister, has written a special verse for Chris and Terry today.

Jane:

Today you celebrate

A shared history of stories

A lifetime of dreaming

*A close friendship
that has weathered the ups and downs
Joys that have made you want to sing
Challenges that have seen you cry
An intimacy that has opened your hearts
and soul to each other.
A humour that has brought joy to each
other and to all of us*

*We are here for you,
Lean on us when you need to.
Call on us to party with you.
To support you
Our blessings are with you
Know that you are loved.*

Vows & Exchanging of rings

Celebrant: Chris and Terry, will you please hold hands to exchange your vows. Thank you.

Chris: Will you, Terry, take my hand and explore with me the many wonders of the world, both here in our home and beyond? Will you share with me the joy of new discoveries and new perspectives on life? Will you hold my hand and stand side by side as we go through all that life brings us? Will you be my life partner?

Terry: I will.

Chris: Then I, Chris, offer and affirm to you, Terry, my love and friendship, my devotion and respect for you. You are my best friend and my love and for this I am deeply grateful.

Terry: Will you, Chris, take my hand and explore with me the many wonders of the world, both here in our home and beyond? Will you share with me the joy of new discoveries and new perspectives on life? Will you hold my hand and stand side by side as we go through all that life brings us? Will you be my life partner?

Chris: I will.

Terry: Then I, Terry, offer and affirm to you, Chris, my love and friendship, my devotion and respect for you. You are my best friend and my love and for this I am deeply grateful.

Celebrant: Chris, as you place the ring on Terry's finger would you please repeat after me:

Chris (after celebrant): Terry, you have inspired me and encouraged me, you have allowed me to stand on my own, and also, you have held my hand and been right by my side. I treasure the fun and the quiet times we spend together. I love our life together.

I stand here before my family and friends to declare that you are the one I love with all of my heart and I vow to be true to you for the rest of my life. This ring is a symbol of my commitment to love, honour and respect you, now and always.

**Declaration,
Signing of
documents &
Conclusion**

Celebrant: Terry, as you place the ring on Chris's finger would you please repeat after me:

Terry (after celebrant): Chris, you have made me laugh and cry. You have shared with me your love, which has enabled me, with grace and tenderness, to find peace within my own being. I value your wicked sense of humour and your beautiful smile.

I stand here before my family and friends to declare that you are the one I love with all of my heart and I vow to be true to you for the rest of my life. This ring is a symbol of my commitment to love, honour and respect you, now and always.

Celebrant: Whenever you look at your rings, delight in the love you share and remember the commitment that you have made to each other today.

Chris and Terry are joined by their love and friendship for each other. They have already come far and experienced many things together that have enriched and strengthened their relationship.

Chris and Terry, take what you have learned and continue to grow and prosper.

May you be blessed with clear vision, open hearts and big smiles.

May you continue to always embrace one another with strength and tenderness; and with ever present respect that makes you both content and happy for many years to come.

Since you have agreed to be joined together in the bond of love, and have pledged yourselves to each other in the presence of family and friends, I now pronounce you partners in life.

Chris and Terry have elected to formalise their relationship with the signing of wills and Power of Attorneys. We will now proceed to sign these documents and the certificates.

Surprise!

Jock and Maureen both wanted to get married and conduct the ceremony as a surprise for their very large group of family and friends. The gathering was held under the guise of celebrating their birthdays; in particular, Maureen's 50th. At first they had requested to have 'just the legals' at the ceremony however, after talking with them and giving them some ideas, they opened to creating something much more special. And afterwards they were so grateful and happy we went the 'extra mile'.

Jock and Maureen greeted their family and friends to the 'birthday' party and then at about 8.45pm slipped out to get changed. Nervously, they sat out in the back room waiting for their cue to enter. A close friend, Graeme, was the MC and brought everyone together at the appointed time. He welcomed everyone and acknowledged the journey that Maureen had been on over the last 50 years and invited her sister and closest friend to come forward, and then, acknowledging that Jock's friends had also played a big part in Maureen's life, he invited their male friends to come up and join him on the stage.

Then he welcomed forward someone else whom most people knew about town and the role that she played... the local celebrant! People gasped, and then without waiting for any further ado, Graeme announced that Jock and Maureen were getting married and would they please make way for the bride and groom to walk to the front! Dusty Springfield's 'I Don't Know What It Is That Makes Me Love You So' was playing as Jock and Maureen moved through their friends who were clapping, cheering and crying! It was beautiful and breathtaking!

Welcome & Introduction

Celebrant: Beloved family and friends, we are here because we all love Jock and Maureen, and we are here because we are all very important in their lives.

We just heard Dusty Springfield sing 'I Don't Know What It Is That Makes Me Love You So' and yet, there are so many things that I know, that make all of you, as their family and friends, love Jock and Maureen so. Their refreshing enthusiasm and zest for life, their openness and generosity, not only towards everyone here present, but to each other. I have not long met both of them and it makes me smile and very grateful to be here with them.

Jock and Maureen want to publicly honour and celebrate the love and commitment that has existed between them for twenty years. And, yes, just so it's really clear... we are now about to witness Jock and Maureen getting legally married! Today was chosen as 'the day' as April is the month that both Jock and Maureen celebrate their birthdays. And April the 1st... well say no more...

They celebrated their anniversary in January, and their journey has been a dynamic love story filled with passion and friendship, with humour and care. It is this journey that we are going to honour and celebrate.

Authorisation

My name is Wendy Haynes. As a civil celebrant, I am duly authorised by law to solemnise marriages according to the law. Before you, Gordon (Jock's legal name) and Maureen, are joined in marriage in my presence and in the presence of your witnesses, it is now my duty to remind you of the solemn and binding nature of the relationship into which you are now about to enter.

Pre vows (love and commitment...)

Marriage, according to law in Australia, is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

Marriage for Jock and Maureen is a public acknowledgement of the beautiful union they share. It is an affirmation of their total commitment to each other. And it is an honour, as family and friends, to stand alongside them and celebrate with them.

Jock and Maureen, there are many strengths in your relationship that will be the basis of your marriage: your sense of individuality and your togetherness; your personal sense of wellbeing, and the overriding care, open affection and love that is present.

Your respect for each other runs very deep, and in that space you are able to speak your mind, honestly and openly with each other. And, it is this honesty and respect that keeps your love dynamic and alive.

Individual acknowledgement & blessing

Maureen, I know that you were very happy that your brother Peter has been able to make it here this evening. And your sister Colleen is also here with you. They represent the love that your family brings to this gathering.

I am now going to ask Peter... who gives this woman away today to be married to Jock?

Peter: I do.

Speech from the couple

Celebrant: Family and friends are a vital part of a healthy relationship. They would like to thank you all for your presence here, and for your support, love and friendship both individually and as a couple.

Jock and Maureen, you have travelled many roads together, physically and metaphorically. You have laughed and cried together. You have a strong foundation of trust, and you stand before us today as close friends and companions. It is in this spirit of love that we join with you as we witness and honour your declarations that you are about to make to each other. Jock and Maureen, would you please turn and face one another and hold hands.

Maureen (to Jock): I don't know what it is that makes me love you so, I only know I never want to let you go, cause you started something and can't you see, that ever since we met you've had a hold on me. That was 20 years ago...

Maureen (to the guests): I met Jock when I lived with Martin (groomsman) and two other people in a huge terrace in Darlington and someone had moved out and we needed another house mate. I arrived back from touring in Perth and Martin had let this Scottish guy named Gordon move in. I was introduced to him and then immediately advised Martin to get rid of him. He was far too straight to live in our party house! Martin's response – "you're never here" – "we like him" – and "we like the idea of having a Scotsman, as I am Irish and Steve is Welsh. We

now have a multicultural house and the UK is represented here. In other words – butt out. I lost but added to the guys that his moustache had to go. He also turned out to be a bigger party animal than all of us were!

Over the next two years a deep friendship formed between us: even after I had moved out, we still continued to see one another. At some stage I had even broken it off with him but it was I knocking on his door and telling him I'd made a big mistake and would he take me back. He did.

We have been officially a couple for the past 18 years as at January this year.

We are best friends and do very little without one another. We are seldom apart.

Jock has embraced my friends and family and professional life as they have embraced him. He has taken on the Coffs Harbour lifestyle and thinks he is a very lucky little Scotsman to be living here. As he should.

As most of you are aware – he has already honoured his vow 'in sickness and in health'. Look out, Jock, when it's my turn – I'm scared! Be scared!

I'm a very lucky girl. How many of you have been given a cup of coffee in bed every morning of your life for the past eighteen years?

Jock (to Maureen): I love you very much!

You are my rose – my thorn – my rock.

You're my world.

Jock (to the guests): Thank you all for coming.

First of all to celebrate Maureen's 50th birthday. I'm sure you are all glad she was born in the year of The Monkey and a cheeky wise monkey is what she is and we all love her for it.

Secondly, we are happy to have you all witness our marriage ceremony. Everybody in this room knows Maureen and me, but I would like to introduce you to the wedding party, who did not know about our plans until a few days ago.

First – Colleen, the sister of the bride, who when she's around gives me as hard a time as Maureen does.

Marcia – A beloved friend of my wife's for 30 years.

Janaya – Who has been privy to many secrets over the years and is very good at keeping them. Terry taught her well.

Couraan and Minidel – our bobbies and best friends. (Their two big dogs who were present.)

Thank you, ladies!

Now for the men of the party.

Peter – Maureen's brother. Thank you for giving her to me.

Martin – Who is responsible for Maureen and I meeting. By letting me share his house in down town Darlo. I can still picture him answering the door in his silk dressing gown and being surprised.

Harold – My personal lifeguard and introducer to Australian surf culture.

Geoff – The man who has let me feel the excitement of the surf by taking me out on jet skis and in long boats and surfed me down the waves of Namotu. He has also taught me to fish – a great teacher – but I'm not such a great pupil. A true man of the sea.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Now to my darling Maureen.

You are my rose – my thorn – my rock.

You're my world.

Speech from a guest

(As Jock and Maureen were not having speeches later on they invited each one of their bridal party to speak.)

Vows & exchanging of rings

Marcia: There are not many occasions that could get me up in front of a crowd like this but this is definitely one of them. Maureen and I lived together as young, single party girls a long time ago and Maureen was exactly the same then as she is now – generous, loyal and loving.

Her priorities haven't changed at all. Maureen worked out early on that the most important things in life are the people you love – and to have fun! In Jock she has found the perfect partner – happy to party, happy to be her handbag, and love and support her through anything life tosses up. You've got to love a man who is not only hardworking but also tall, dark and handsome. We love you both!

Celebrant: Jock and Maureen, would you please turn and face one another and hold hands.

Jock and Maureen, together you have built a lifelong partnership of love, trust, loyalty, friendship and respect. So, I now ask you:

Do you, Jock, take Maureen to be your wife?

Jock: I do.

Celebrant: Do you, Maureen, take Jock to be your husband?

Maureen: I do.

Celebrant: Jock, would you please repeat after me:

Jock (after celebrant): I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Gordon, Jock, take you Maureen to be my wife.

Celebrant: Maureen, would you please repeat after me:

Maureen (after celebrant): I call upon the people here present to witness that I, Maureen, take you Gordon, Jock, to be my husband.

Celebrant: Now Jock and Maureen's 'girls' are going to bring the wedding ring forward. This marriage is also a celebration of the family union, of Jock and Maureen, Couraan and Minidel (*their pet dogs*).

Who else would have such loyal companions, loving devotional bed warmers, and all round playful housemates?

Thank you, Couraan and Minidel. (*Martin takes the ring that was tied on a ribbon around Minidel's neck and hands it to Jock.*)

Maureen, Jock gave you this ring that he bought in Scotland, over 15 years ago. It was given with his love then, and it is given now with that same love, that has continued to grow and flourish.

**Declaration,
signing of
documents &
conclusion**

*We signed the
marriage register
and certificates
after they had been
hugged, kissed,
berated, and
mugged by their
family and friends!*

Jock, as you place this ring on Maureen's finger
would you please repeat after me:

Jock (after celebrant): Maureen, with this ring I
thee wed. This ring is a symbol of my love and
respect for you; and know that wherever you go,
my love goes with you.

Celebrant: Maureen, would you please repeat
after me:

Maureen (after celebrant): Jock, it has always
been an honour to wear your ring, and with its
wearing, I thee wed. You have my love and
respect always, and know that wherever you go,
my love goes with you.

Celebrant: Jock, you may now kiss the bride!

Family and friends, would you please make a
space on the dance floor for our married couple.

On behalf of your family and friends I would like
to congratulate you both...it is now official. I
would like to introduce Maureen and Jock Shaw!!

Music – Daryl Braithwaite: "You Are My World"

The Big Event

What a magic couple Sally and Douglas were to work with! Sally was an events co-ordinator and from the beginning it was a team event and an exciting one as well.

Tasty emails arrived hinting at the design of the bride's frock and flourishes of colours and fabric were intimated at. Douglas was sewing his own glamorous outfit by hand, which was kept under wraps until the day. Invitations with a festival flavour excited and tantalised us months beforehand.

Sal and Douglas were getting married on the banks of the Never Never River at the Promised Lands in Gleniffer. Sounds romantic and intriguing? Well, it was.

Family and friends met at intimate social gatherings to make lanterns and hall decorations for the special day. When I arrived at the venue I was completely amazed at the transformation of an old community hall into a reception venue that was totally stunning. Caterers were buzzing about and friends and family were putting up the final touches. And then the celebration began... down by the river with a beautiful white duck in attendance. It was truly magical!

Welcome & Introduction

MC – Dave: Firstly on behalf of both families I'd like to welcome you here today. Many of you have travelled a long way to get here and we really appreciate the efforts you've made.

There are also many people who at present are sitting all over the world opening up bottles of champagne ready to share our toasts later on tonight.

Also a special thought goes to Reverend Alec Jamieson who lives in Tallangatta and having reached a bloody good innings of 93 wasn't able to join us here today and April – Douglas's little girl who just turned five this year.

Groomsman – Steve: Amongst us are friends and family who have come from places as far away as London and Mt Maunganui in New Zealand; a little closer to home we have people here from Buderim, Brisbane and Mapleton in Queensland; Wagga, Maitland, Thora, Coffs Harbour and Junee in New South Wales; Ballarat, Tallangatta and Melbourne in Victoria and of course the rowdy LOCALS!

Bridesmaid – Kat: We are gathered here on the traditional lands of the Gumbaingirr people under the gaze of Nungali. Nungali is a living link to people who walked this earth thousands of years ago and whose stories tell the dreaming of our mountains and the creatures that roamed here.

Bridesmaid – Jenny: We're here to join two families, to meet new friends, to smile, to laugh and to share precious moments together because we're alive now.

Groomsman – Jim: We're here because we are all special to Douglas and Sally; we are the people they wanted to stand before as they share just how lovely their life is since finding each other and ask for your blessing.

Authorisation

Sally: We're here in the depth of winter – a time of preparing for renewal – just like what we're doing here now – renewing our commitment to each other.

Douglas: We're near water – and there's a reason for that too – the question was popped in the bath!

Celebrant: Hi, everyone, my name is Wendy Haynes and I am duly authorised by law to solemnise this, Douglas and Sally's special marriage ceremony, according to law.

They have asked me to help them today to celebrate this beautiful love that they have found in each other and bring back some ritual and ceremony into their lives.

Before they are joined in marriage in my presence, as a civil celebrant, and in the presence of all of you, their witnesses, I am to remind you, Sally and Douglas, of the solemn and binding nature of the relationship of marriage. Marriage, according to the law in Australia, is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

Pre vows (love and commitment...)

'Life' these days, as we all know, is a variable thing. Sally and Douglas have grown over the course of more than three decades and go into this relationship with their eyes open, their great sense of humour in hand and their hearts strong.

Sally: When I finally decided to go to the National Folk Festival I never realised that there was such a lovely person ‘waiting’ for me – but he was in a way. He was waiting to dance Tango with me. Waiting to make me shake my head at ‘bloke’ things like not answering me and then coming up with a bloody good idea after quietly stewing on it for a while.

Waiting to laugh with me until our sides ached over silly jokes that everyone else (except Alec my Grandfather) would groan at and then, when he serenaded me on bent knee one time – I thought what can a girl do – he’s gorgeous just the way he is!

Douglas: Thank you, Love.

Meeting you has brought wonderful moments into my life. The last year has been so full of wonderful memories that it hardly seems possible that it has only been 18 months since we met.

My memories of the early days are of long drives to delicious weekends, early mornings, early, early, early mornings, beautiful welcomes and farewells, roses, tango, Bellingham and all the joys a broken alternator can bring.

Sally: *(spoke spontaneously about what her marriage to Douglas would add to her life)*

**Individual
acknowledgement
& blessing**

Douglas: Sally, the days I spent with you at the National Folk Festival brought me to reassess my life – to think of potentials and dream of what my life might be with you by my side.

I knew I would be challenged, that you would inspire me to rise to meet the vision I could see in your eyes.

We have been great for each other, and with our lives before us, I look forward to the dreams we may bring to life.

Celebrant: Now Sal and Douglas have some very special and lovely parents and grandparents who have showered them over the many years with lots of love, advice, care and support and in this moment I would like to invite them to share a few words with us.

Sal's Mum and Dad, Douglas's Mum and Step Dad and both of their grandparents spoke of their love and support for Douglas and Sally.

**Vows &
exchanging of
rings**

Sally and Douglas turned and faced one another and held hands.

A tartan scarf that was from Sally's Clan was then wrapped around their joined hands symbolising the joining of the two families and their blessing for this union.

Sally: Amazing wonderful man. We've shared so much laughter together that I feel as if the heavens have given me a lifetime of happiness already.

Will you stand here in front of all our family and friends and say out loud the words we've only shared in the quiet spaces of us?

Will you dream with me and remind me to smile when I'm grumpy and have lost the light?

Will you fly with me into two beautiful lives and yet remember to follow your heart?

Will you let me purr out my happiness on the same shoulder as my tears have fallen to?

Will you be brave and walk with me into the scary places and use your great sense of humour to help us through conflict and vice?

Will you continue to be the "bloke" you are so I can keep my sacred women's business safe and never have to tell you how a "Mum look" works?

Beautiful man, you constantly amaze me. I once exclaimed, "I love your mind. I love the way you think!"

That was I, astounded at the you that makes you who you are.

So yes, I do think you're gorgeous but it took more than that to catch my attention.

If we are given the chance to grow old together then let the space we travel to be a healthy one. Let it be as our parents and mentors have shown us – that there are depths of respect and teamwork beyond words.

We have a path to travel whether short or long, are you, Alan Robert Douglas Tuck ready to do this with me?

Douglas: Yes, I am.

I call upon the people here to witness that I, Douglas, take you, Sally, to be my wife.

Marriage to me is a commitment to the future, to look at the relationship with the long term in mind, work out those little problems before they become big ones, and remember to keep the magic of our beginnings alive in the years to come.

Sally, will you take this step with me, will you look to the future with me, and walk at my side, holding my hand as we share what life brings us.

Sally, will you be my wife?

Sally: I will.

I call upon the people here to witness that I, Sally, take you, Douglas, to be my husband.

Douglas: This ring symbolises many things to me – the gold of the sun, sparkling gems of the stars, the cycle of life. The links of the chain of love which binds us already.

Sally, take this ring and let it remind you of this wonderful moment, standing before our friends, that this moment may lift you through the years to come.

Sally: This gift to you... with its band of gold mined by people who know the weight of each tiny ounce;

with its ancient sparkly rocks that have been brought from the depths of our beautiful and forgiving planet;

and then adorned with its blood red rubies –

my birth stone,

is a reminder to you always that where ever you are and how ever long we shall have to share together it connects you to this earth, to thousands of hands who have been part of our story and to the hour I came into this world and the family that I came from – your new family... but most of all, to the simple magic of being loved deeply by someone. Wear it with pride, beautiful man.

Declaration

Celebrant: It is in the spirit of love and friendship that you have spoken and declared your love and commitment to each other. It is with much pleasure that I now, with the powers vested in me by the laws of this country, do pronounce you... officially hitched!

Douglas and Sal, would you please celebrate with a kiss!!

Verse**Maree:***Irish Wedding Blessing*

*May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon the fields.*

*May the light of friendship
guide your paths together.
May the laughter of children
grace the halls of your home.
May the joy of living for one another
trip a smile from your lips
and a twinkle from your eye.*

*And when eternity beckons,
at the end of a life heaped high with love,
May the good Lord embrace you
with the arms that have nurtured you
the whole length of your joy-filled days.*

Blessing

Sally and Douglas had a recording of a blessing that was given to them from her grandfather who couldn't be present. It was a beautiful way to close the ceremony before we all paraded back up to the hall from the river.

Grandfather Alec (pre-recorded): In a Scottish Clan, when a new baby was born it was immediately wrapped in the tartan or plaid of the clan. This symbolised a statement or pledge by all the Clan which said, 'You are now part of us. We will fight to the last man or to death to protect you from harm. Everything we can do we will do for your benefit.'

Douglas, the Jamieson clan welcomes you and your family with our pledge of love and support.

Sally, the love and pledge of support of the Jamieson clan go with you, as you become part of the Tuck clan.

Sally and Douglas, as your extended family and friends, we wrap you in the plaid of our love. Our pledge is to do what we can to support you in your new relationship. Our hope and prayer for you both is that you will be helped, guided and blessed by our pledge as you live the rest of your lives together.

Almighty God, may Sally and Douglas be conscious of your love and care as they live in serenity through to eternity.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the power of the Holy Spirit go with you both, and with all of us, your family and friends who are gathered around you here today. Amen.

**Conclusion &
Signing of
documents**

*Celebratory music
starts.*

MC – Dave: If you would all like to walk with Sally and Douglas as they walk back to the hall to sign their certificates and then join them for some nibbles and celebratory champagne, and of course the hugs and kisses!

Useful and Inspiring Words

Words to Use When Creating Your Wedding Vows

AFFECTIONATE: adoring, caring, considerate, devoted, loving

AFFECTIONATELY: dearly, devotedly, fondly, lovingly

BEAUTIFUL: attractive, lovely, stunning

BEAUTY: attractiveness, charm, elegance, grace, loveliness

CHARM: attraction, fascination, glamour

CHERISH: esteem, cultivate, nurture, value

COMPANION: mate, partner, soul mate

DELIGHT: enjoyment, gladness, happiness, joy, pleasure

DEVOTION: affection, fidelity, loyalty, dedication

DIVINE: godly, heavenly, glorious, wonderful, wondrous, sublime

DIVINELY: blissfully, gloriously, splendidly, sublimely

ENDLESS: continual, eternal, perpetual, unceasing, unending, timeless, never-ending

ENDLESSLY: ceaselessly, constantly, forever, eternally

FAITHFUL: constant, steady, steadfast, true, loyal, devoted

FAITHFULLY: devotedly, loyally

FOND: affectionate, dear, devoted, loving

FOREVER: eternity, always

GRACE: elegance, dignity

HAPPILY: blissfully, joyfully, joyously, cheerfully

HAPPINESS: bliss, cheerfulness, contentment, delight, joyfulness

HAPPY: cheerful, glad, joyful, joyous, merry, pleased

HOPE (noun): faith, optimism, belief, desire, wish

HOPE (verb): anticipate, await, count on, expect

HOPEFUL: hoping, optimistic, promising

INFINITE: endless, limitless, unbounded, immeasurable, eternal, never-ending

INSPIRE: excite, stimulate, awaken, uplift, energise, enliven, arouse, invigorate, animate, exhilarate, motivate, impress

JOY: bliss, delight, elation, gladness, happiness

LOYALTY: constancy, devotion, faithfulness, fidelity

MARRIAGE: matrimony, nuptials, wedding, union

MARRIED: wedded

MARRY: wed, combine, couple, link, unite, join

NOBLE: royal, ethical, moral, virtuous, honourable, gracious

OPTIMISTIC: bright, sunny, upbeat, promising, positive

PEACEFUL: quiet, serene, still, calm

PRICELESS: precious, inestimable, invaluable, valuable

PROMISE: pledge, vow

RENEW: regenerate, restart, refresh, rekindle

RENEWAL: invigoration, rebirth

RESPECT (noun): admiration, appreciation, esteem, favour, honour, regard

RESPECT (verb): honour, regard, value, admire

SINCERE: genuine, honest, real, heartfelt

SINCERELY: genuinely, honestly, really

SINCERITY: candidness, genuineness, honesty

SPIRIT: being, heart, mind, psyche, soul, energy, life

TOTAL: complete, entire, whole, absolute, pure, sheer

TOTALLY: absolutely, completely, entirely, fully, purely, wholly

UNDENIABLE: certain, sure, unquestionable

UNDYING: immortal, eternal, everlasting, enduring, lasting

UNIQUE: extraordinary, rare

UNITE: connect, join, meet, merge, unify

UNSELFISH: selfless, generous, charitable, giving

VIBRANT: intense, strong, vivid, dynamic, energetic

VIRTUOUS: ethical, moral, noble, principled, pure

WARM: compassionate, tender

WISDOM: insight, knowledge

WORTHY: deserving, desirable, suited, honourable, noble

NOTES
