



How to Build a Realistic Wedding Day Timeline

From a Planner Who Has Seen It All

35 Years of Professional Wedding Planning | wellchosenweddings.com

After planning hundreds of weddings, I can tell you this: the couples who enjoy their wedding day the most are the ones who built a realistic timeline with real breathing room. Here are the five moments where time always slips away — and exactly how much to plan for each one.

1. Getting Ready

Add 30 minutes of buffer

Hair and makeup almost always runs over. Someone's style takes longer, a bridesmaid arrives late, or the flowers show up and everyone gets distracted. Build 30 minutes between everyone being ready and needing to be in position.

→ Schedule yourself **LAST** for hair and makeup, not first.

2. Family Formals

Add 15 to 20 minutes beyond what your photographer quotes

Family photos are the most time-consuming part of any wedding day. Someone is always in the bathroom. A grandparent moves slowly. A child will not cooperate. Your photographer is excellent at their job and it will still take longer than they estimate.

→ Give your photographer a written must-have shot list **BEFORE** the wedding day.

3. Ceremony Start

Add 10 minutes

Ceremonies almost never begin exactly on time. Guests are still finding seats, someone important just pulled into the parking lot, the ring bearer had a last-minute meltdown. A 5-minute late start is completely normal. A 20-minute late start affects everything that follows.

→ Have your wedding party in position **10 minutes** before the ceremony start time.

4. Dinner Service

Add 20 minutes beyond your caterer's estimate

Caterers build their timelines around ideal conditions. Dietary restrictions, missed tables, kitchen timing — something always slows service down. When dinner runs late, your toasts, dances, and open dancing all shift later too.

→ Confirm the exact service start time with your caterer the week before the wedding.

5. The Send-Off

Add 15 minutes

Gathering a room full of celebrating guests into a send-off line takes longer than anyone expects. By the time your guests are outside and in position, you have already lost 10 to 15 minutes. The photos will be worth planning for.

→ Announce the last dance **15 minutes** before your planned send-off time.

Want the complete done-for-you timeline with every buffer already built in?

Download The Planner's Timeline at wellchosenweddings.com

Two complete fill-in templates + Day-Of Handoff Sheet — built from 35 years of real wedding experience