



Rev. Ann Fuller

It may be traditional for the wife to take her husband's last name, but it is certainly not required. I know many professional women who maintain their maiden name legally and just use their married name socially. These days, partners may keep their own surnames or decide that both should hyphenate their names. I know one couple who decided to change both of their surnames into something entirely new. I suspect that's rather rare.

Changes beyond the wife adopting her husband's last name or possibly both partners adopting a hyphenated name may require application through the court system. I went by my middle name and wanted to drop my first name when I was married. I was required to obtain a court order to do that.

For traditional name change procedures, the steps are fairly straight-forward and not too difficult. Be prepared to receive mail, statements and phone calls in your maiden name for some time before all of the changes are processed.

Process:

- You may want to consider ordering a few extra certified copies of your marriage certificate if you anticipate dealing with agencies requiring originals before allowing you to change your name on documents. It really is not necessary in most cases, but I recommend it highly for military personnel or couples where one or both parties are foreign nationals.
- The very first step you should take is changing your name with the Social Security Administration. Take the certified copy of your marriage license to your local SSA office, complete form SS-5 and they will send you a new card. You can call (800) 772-1213 for more information.
- You can now visit the DMV to obtain a drivers license in your new name. I received a very helpful email from a woman who just went through the process. She advises waiting until at least the next day as the system from which the DMV accesses their information will not register the name change immediately. You will be wasting a trip if you go directly from SSA to the DMV.



- Obtain and complete a Passport Amendment/Validation Application. Submit the application with the appropriate fees, your current passport, and a certified documentation of your name change (certified copy of your marriage certificate or court papers) to the nearest passport agency.

- Change your name on your car registration, insurance and any mortgages.



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- Order replacements for checks, business cards, credit cards and any other documents that contain your old name.
- Depending upon your situation you may want to notify lenders and creditors of your name change.
- Notify the post office, utility companies and registrar of voters of your name change.
- Notify your alma mater and other membership organizations.

Additional legal documents that should be changed if applicable:

- Health Care Proxy
- Living Will
- Trusts and Powers of Attorney
- Will
- Business Transactions / Contracts

Unlike the marriage license that is required to be filed within ten days, name changes do not have to be completed within a certain length of time. It may be easier to begin the process shortly after the wedding and roll it out over a little bit of time, but nothing says you can't change your name on your 20th anniversary either. This is a personal decision and entirely up to you. Note though, that excessive delays in some states may necessitate a change of name through the courts.