



*Rev. Ann Fuller*

---

## **Rehearsals**

### **What exactly are we rehearsing anyway?**

Honestly? Standing and Walking. Seriously.

A wedding rehearsal is nothing more than deciding where everyone is going to stand, from what direction they are entering, and who is walking in front of and behind whom. You really are not having a wedding rehearsal, you are pretty much having an enter and exit rehearsal.

A good wedding officiant will be able to guide a bride and groom through the ceremony itself just with the typical stage directions written into the ceremony, body positioning and hand motions. None of this is distracting to your guests who will barely register, if at all, that this is precisely what the officiant is doing. 99% of a wedding rehearsal is consumed with details like deciding whether the bride or groom will stand to the officiant's left, where the parents will sit, whether the groomsmen will walk in with the bridesmaids or already be standing up front, and whether the flower girl will walk with the ring bearer or stick her tongue out at his retreating back.

Keep in mind as we go forward that "attendants" are simply your bridesmaids and groomsmen. It doesn't refer to your attendance. That's your guest list.

### **Do we need a rehearsal?**

Rehearsals are sometimes absolutely necessary, but often a matter of personal preference. I leave it to the bride and groom's discretion but do have a "rule of thumb" and an "exception to the rule of thumb." While the bride and groom have two of the easiest parts to play--logistically anyway-- if you have several attendants on either side, consider their nerves on the big day. I once officiated a formal wedding that had five attendants on each side and no rehearsal. The bride and groom were incredibly laid back and prepared for whatever their wedding turned out to be. Their attendants were a mess! It took three of us to calm these ten people down, line them up and assure them wherever they ended up positioned for the wedding would be fine with the bride and groom.

If you only have honor attendants (maid/matron of honor and best man) you do not need a rehearsal. If you have a maid of honor, a matron of honor, two best men, six bridesmaids, six groomsmen, two junior bridesmaids, a ring bearer and a flower girl you definitely need a rehearsal. The weddings in between constitute a judgment call on your part.

First of all, rehearsals can be great fun. The rehearsal is a tradition that allows members of the wedding party who may not know one another to become acquainted. It provides an opportunity for the two families to socialize as well as mentally and emotionally prepare themselves for the big event.



*Rev. Ann Fuller*

---

*Rule of Thumb:*

- 0-4 attendants: No rehearsal necessary
- 5-6 attendants: Worth considering a rehearsal
- 7+ attendants: Schedule a rehearsal

*Exception to the Rule of Thumb:*

If you are getting married in a private home seriously think about having a rehearsal regardless of how many attendants are in your wedding party. Home weddings are lovely, but they are not natural event venues. A rehearsal will alert you to issues you may not have considered previously. You do not necessarily need your officiant for a home wedding rehearsal, but you should discipline yourselves to conduct at least one and impress upon the other participants the importance of what you are doing. It really will help alleviate some of the stress on your wedding day.

**Who should conduct the rehearsal?**

One person and one person only.

Oh wait, you were asking who, not how many.

It really doesn't matter who conducts the rehearsal. A good officiant should also be a competent wedding coordinator who can conduct an efficient rehearsal that complies with your expectations and helps alleviate your stress level regarding the big event. If your wedding is being held at a venue providing event coordination as part of your contract, take advantage of it and use their services. If you are hiring an independent wedding coordinator or event planner, that person would certainly be qualified to conduct your rehearsal in lieu of your officiant.

If you are on a budget, anyone you trust to listen to you, will understand your preferences and can project his or her voice, can do a perfectly adequate job of conducting your rehearsal. You can even do it yourself.

Something can be said for experience and professionalism. There are tricks and tips for a smooth wedding ceremony that your officiant, a wedding planner or an event coordinator will know that you or your friend may not. Sometimes rehearsals can be very much like herding cats. The authority of a stranger may be needed to bring everyone in line. This is entirely your decision.

I enjoy conducting rehearsals as it gives me another opportunity to interact with the bride and groom prior to the wedding, affords me a chance to meet the family and is one of the few times in my life I can tell people what to do and they actually do it. However, I do charge extra for the time and expense so I am completely sympathetic if a bride and groom have their wedding planner, event coordinator, a friend or themselves run the show.



*Rev. Ann Fuller*

---

My place is pretty much a given -- up front between the bride and groom. I also arrive early to check in with everyone, so I am comfortable with my role and position during the wedding whether I am at a rehearsal or not. Although it would be my pleasure, please do not feel obligated to hire me to conduct your rehearsal if you deem it unnecessary.

### **Where and when should we have the rehearsal?**

Best case scenario: Exactly 24 hours prior to your wedding at the exact location the wedding will be held.

Real life: Not always possible.

If you want to have the best idea of what the logistics will entail and what the light will be like, than schedule your rehearsal the day before at the wedding site. This is not always possible however, so do not fret that this is a requirement. Far from it. You can rehearse a month before in your living room if you want. You can sketch it out in PowerPoint and email it to your wedding party.

I have had a number of Wednesday or Thursday rehearsals for Saturday and Sunday weddings simply because the venue was already booked with other events the day before the wedding. I have had a rehearsal in a community center for a wedding at a country club and a rehearsal in a public park for a wedding in a civic center. Because there is an obvious focal point at the end of the aisle, most people head for their officiant and stand up front with him or her, so the actual location of the rehearsal is really not all that crucial.

So the answer to this question is--wherever and whenever you want.

### **What is the etiquette for a rehearsal?**

Exhibit common sense, courtesy and compassion and you've got the right idea.

Rehearsals are far less formal than weddings so people tend to show up whenever they feel like getting around to it. I expect weddings to start 5-15 minutes late, but sadly have resigned myself to rehearsals starting 20-30 minutes late. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard someone slink off with a cell phone to call a restaurant or function hall to let them know the wedding party will be late for their reservation for the rehearsal dinner. Do try to impress upon your wedding party that timeliness is as important for the rehearsal as it is for the wedding itself.

You are not obligated to hire your officiant for your rehearsal. As mentioned above, anyone can perform this function though as also stated, there are advantages to the professional experience your officiant brings to the occasion.



*Rev. Ann Fuller*

---

If your officiant conducts your rehearsal you are not obligated to invite him or her to the rehearsal dinner. An invitation is appreciated, but should be extended well before the rehearsal not during it. I have experienced a number of times when I was invited to the dinner during a particularly fun rehearsal, but couldn't attend because I already had plans. It would be a bit awkward to call home and tell my gorgeous cook of a husband I am passing on his efforts in the kitchen. Not that I would ever do that, he is a really really good cook!

While we have wedding traditions and superstitions, there are no hard and fast rules about where people stand or how they walk in or out of the ceremony. If the bride wants the groom or her sister to walk her down the aisle, go for it! The men can wait up front, walk single file before the women or walk in with the women. The flower girl can stand with the bridesmaids or sit with her parents. If the sun will be shining directly into the bride's eyes if she stands on the right, a gracious and compassionate groom can offer to trade places and have the women stand on the left.

I will tell you one tradition I tend to blow out of the water. Customarily, the bride's family sits on the side where she is standing and vice versa. That means that when the bride and groom turn to one another to exchange vows, their parents could very well be looking at the back of their own child's head! I switch things up a bit and suggest the bride's parents sit on the groom's side and the groom's parents on the bride's side. That way they can clearly see their own child's face as they exchange vows and place the rings on one another's fingers. Note this is only a suggestion and not a command. This is entirely the bride and groom's call.