

Wedding Reception Timeline Template

00:00 | The Cocktail Hour

After being pronounced husband and wife, the newlyweds are often the first to leave the wedding ceremony, heading off (with photographer in tow) for pictures together before the partying gets under way. Your guests will head to the reception site for cocktails. Depending on the logistics of the event, your cocktail hour will begin immediately (if the ceremony and reception are held at the same venue), or it might start more than half an hour later (if there's travel involved). Cocktails will kick off your reception and will last for at least an hour. During this time the staff will serve stationary or passed appetizers and drinks, which will get people mingling and in the mood. Don't forget: Greeting your guests is essential! It's customary for the couple, along with their parents and the wedding party, to form a receiving line outside the ceremony site to greet guests before the escape. Many couples these days are opting for this post ceremony receiving line, rather than going from table to table during dinner. But if you haven't done so, you should form one now.

01:00 | Newlyweds' Arrival/First Dance

Here's the part where the bride and groom make their grand entrance. The coordinator will usually make sure guests are seated before the emcee alerts them to your imminent arrival. Generally, both sets of parents and the wedding party are introduced, followed by the announcement of the couple for the first time as husband and wife. In many cases, your newlywed first dance will begin as you step out onto the floor and into the spotlight after being announced. Find your first dance music. Alternately, you can wait until after the first course of the meal is served, but since everyone is already cheering you as you enter the reception, use the applause as encouragement enough to skim away any shyness and step on out.

01:20 | Cheers & Toasts

Following your first dance, you might want to take the opportunity -- while all eyes are still on you, since hopefully no one yet has had too much to drink -- to thank everyone en masse for taking part in your wedding. A family member, often a parent of the bride, will say a blessing (depending on the families' faiths). Then, since toasting signifies a transition in the course of an event, the mother and father of the bride will thank guests for attending and invite everyone to enjoy the celebratory meal. Keep in mind that the toasts given by the best man and the maid of honor should occur between courses, to spread out all the high-emotion, much-anticipated moments and keep guests in their seats.

01:30 | Mangia, Mangia

Time to dig into the main course. Get wedding reception food ideas. If you're having a seated meal, the band or DJ will play subdued, conversation-friendly background music as the wait staff makes the rounds. If you're having a buffet, your coordinator, DJ, or bandleader will dictate how the rotation will work by calling each table when it's time to head to the front of the line. Just remember: The bride and groom need to do everything possible to take their seats and eat!

02:45 | Party Time

Monkey-see, monkey-do is how this game is played. Guests are going to follow the lead of the bride and groom. Once dinner dishes are cleared, the newlyweds should be the first ones on the dance floor so people know it's time to start partying. Find wedding music suggestions. Throughout the jammin', the music will stop for any extracurricular activities you've planned (also known as the bouquet toss, the garter toss, the centerpiece giveaways, and whatever else you've dreamed up). If you do choose to toss the bouquet, make sure to get a tossing bouquet from the florist so you can keep your original one as a memento.

04:00 | Cake Cutting

About one hour before the conclusion of the reception, when the party starts getting a little too rowdy and the bar starts getting a little too empty, your wait staff should start preparing tables for coffee and dessert. Since the cake cutting generally signals guests that it's okay to leave soon thereafter, be sure not to do this too early or things could start wrapping up before you're ready.

04:15 | Shake a Leg

Once the cake is cut, the band or DJ should start right back into swing and rock music for those wanting to trade in their slices for another turn on the dance floor.

04:45 | Last Dance

End your wedding on a high note and choose a dance song that will leave a lasting impression. You'll want everyone to have a chance for one last twirl, so select something fast and festive.

05:00 | Final Farewell

Now the time has come to say good-bye. Your coordinator will usher everyone into the foyer or onto the steps outdoors so that as you make your grand exit from the reception, friends and family can blow bubbles, light sparklers, or toss rose petals -- and cheer to your successful celebration and future together.