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OPENDATES.CA · A FREE GUIDE FOR COUPLES

The Wedding *Questions* Booklet

The questions we wish every couple asked, before they signed anything.

Before you start

Hello, you two.

I watched my sister plan her wedding through COVID: dates moving, rules changing, nobody sure of anything. Then I planned my own. And working in the hospitality industry, I have seen so many weddings, the smooth ones and the ones where a surprise popped up that nobody saw coming.

Building OpenDates has given us the chance to forge great relationships with wedding businesses, and to learn from them what really matters to couples. Almost every surprise can be avoided with the right question, asked early.

Here's a selection of the questions we wish every couple asked, in plain words, sorted by the businesses you will meet.

You do not need to ask all of them. Tick the ones that matter to you, bring the booklet to your meetings, write the answers down and compare. That is the whole idea.

We hope it saves you money, stress and at least one surprise.

With love,

Kristina and Debi

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER, OPENDATES.CA

Tick, ask, write, compare

Tick

Go through a section before a meeting and tick the questions that matter to you. Skip the rest.

Ask

Bring the booklet, or a photo of the page, to the call or the tour.

Write

Write the answers in the notes space. You will not remember them later, we promise.

Compare

Use the worksheets to put up to three businesses side by side.

THE THREE GOLDEN RULES

I

Get it in writing

If it was promised on a tour or a call, ask for it in the contract or an email.

2

Ask what is not included

The price tells you what you get. This question tells you what you will pay later.

3

Ask about the backup plan

Rain, sickness, a power cut. Good businesses have already thought about it.

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“One simple question, asked early, saves more weddings than any backup plan.”



SECTION ONE

The venue

Your venue shapes almost everything else: your date, your guest count, your budget and which other businesses you can bring in. It is the biggest decision, so it gets the most questions. Take this section with you on every tour.

Questions to ask on the tour

What the price includes

☐ What exactly does the price include, and what is not included?

A GOOD ANSWER: *A written list, item by item, with anything extra priced on it.*

☐ Is the price per person, per hour or a flat fee? What is the minimum spend?

☐ Are tables, chairs, linens, cutlery and glassware included, or rented separately?

☐ Is the ceremony space a separate fee? Is the rehearsal included?

☐ Can we see the room set up for a wedding, not empty?

Time

☐ When can our vendors start setting up, and when must everything be out?

A GOOD ANSWER: *Clear times in the contract, ideally with setup the day before or the morning of.*

☐ Is there a curfew? What time is last call and when must the music stop?

☐ Is cleanup our job or yours? Is there a fee if we run late?

☐ Is anyone else booked the same day, before or after us?

NOTES

Food and drink

- ☐ Must we use your caterer, or can we bring our own?
| A GOOD ANSWER: A straight answer, plus any fee for outside caterers in writing.
- ☐ Can we bring our own alcohol? Who holds the liquor licence or permit?
- ☐ Is there a cake cutting fee or a corkage fee?
- ☐ Can we do a tasting before we sign, and is it free?
- ☐ Where do our vendors eat, and do we pay for their meals?

Your vendors

- ☐ Do you have a required or preferred vendor list? Is there a fee to go outside it?
- ☐ What do our vendors need from you: insurance, load-in times, a site visit?
| A GOOD ANSWER: A short vendor guide you can forward to everyone.
- ☐ Where can vendors park and unload? Is there an elevator or stairs?
- ☐ Are there enough power outlets for the band or DJ, and where are they?

NOTES

The guest experience

- ☐ Will any pillars or posts block guests' view of the ceremony or the head table?
| A GOOD ANSWER: *They walk you through the room and show where the seats will go.*
- ☐ Is every space accessible: ramps, washrooms, the ceremony spot, the dance floor?
- ☐ How many washrooms are there, and are they close to the party?
- ☐ How warm or cold does the room get? Is there air conditioning and heat?
- ☐ Is there free parking for everyone? Is there a place to leave cars overnight?
- ☐ Are children welcome? Is there a quiet room for little ones?
- ☐ Where can smokers go, so they are not by the door?
- ☐ How are the acoustics? Do speeches echo? Is there a microphone?
- ☐ Where is the best natural light for photos, and at what time of day?

NOTES

Weather and backups

- ☐ What is the rain plan, and can we see it?

A GOOD ANSWER: *A real indoor space, set up just as nicely, decided by an agreed time.*

- ☐ Who decides when we switch to the rain plan, and by when?

- ☐ Is there a backup generator if the power goes out?

- ☐ If we use a tent, who pays for heaters, flooring and lights?

On the day

- ☐ Who is our contact on the day, and will they stay for the whole event?

- ☐ Is there a private room for getting ready, or for the two of us to take a breath?

- ☐ Who sets out place cards, favours and decor, and who packs it up?

Contract and changes

- ☐ What happens if we need to change our date or guest count?

A GOOD ANSWER: *Clear rules, ideally a date change allowed once with the deposit moved over.*

- ☐ What if you are sold, close or double book? What protects us?

- ☐ Can we lower the guest count later, and by when?

NOTES

Hidden costs to ask about

Ask about each one by name. If the answer is "it depends," ask for a typical number.

- ☐ Cleaning fee, or a fee for confetti, glitter or petals
- ☐ Security guards, and how many are required for our guest count
- ☐ Coat check and staff for it
- ☐ Music licensing fees (SOCAN and Re:Sound) when music is played
- ☐ Tent heating, flooring or lighting
- ☐ Damage deposit: how much, and when is it returned?

A GOOD ANSWER: *A set amount, a written checklist for the walk-through, and a return date.*

- ☐ Service charge or administration fee, and is it taxed?
- ☐ Overtime per hour if the party runs late
- ☐ Bartender or server fees on top of the bar price
- ☐ Fees for outside vendors, insurance certificates or late setup

NOTES

NOTES

Comparing venues

	BUSINESS 1	BUSINESS 2	BUSINESS 3
Name			
Date available			
Guest capacity			
Price and what it includes			
Minimum spend			
Not included			
Curfew and last call			
Rain plan			
Own caterer allowed?			
Accessibility			
Deposit and refund			
Hidden fees			
How it felt			

OUR FAVOURITE, AND WHY



SECTION TWO

Licences, permits and insurance

The least romantic page in this booklet, and one of the most important. Rules change and differ by province and town, so treat these as questions to ask, then confirm current rules with your province and municipality.

Alcohol

☐ Who holds the liquor licence, you or us? If we need a permit, which one?

A GOOD ANSWER: *They know the exact permit and who applies. Examples: in Ontario, a Special Occasion Permit from the AGCO; in BC, a Special Event Permit; in Alberta, a private special event licence from AGLC; in Québec, a permis de réunion from the RACJ.*

☐ Are your bartenders certified for responsible serving (for example, Smart Serve in Ontario or Serving It Right in BC)?

☐ What is the last call and music curfew under your licence?

☐ Do you carry liquor liability insurance, and do we need our own?

NOTES

Insurance and safety

- ☐ Do we need event insurance, and what amount does the venue require?
A GOOD ANSWER: A specific amount in writing, and whether the venue must be named on the policy.
- ☐ Does every vendor carry their own liability insurance? Can we see the certificate?
- ☐ What is the fire capacity of each room, and is our guest count under it?
- ☐ Are candles, sparklers, fog or haze machines allowed? Open flame or only enclosed?
- ☐ Does the caterer hold food handler certification?

Tents, noise and private property

- ☐ Does a tent this size need a permit or an inspection in this town?
- ☐ What are the local noise bylaw hours for outdoor music?
- ☐ On private land: is a wedding allowed under the zoning? Who checks?
- ☐ Where will washrooms, power and parking come from on private property?

Getting legally married

- ☐ Is our officiant registered to perform marriages in this province?
A GOOD ANSWER: Yes, with their registration shown, and they know exactly how the paperwork is filed.
- ☐ When and where do we get our marriage licence, and how long is it valid?

Rules, permit names and fees change. Please check with your province and municipality for the current rules before you book.

NOTES



SECTION THREE

Catering and bar

- ☐ Can we taste the exact menu we are choosing, not a sample plate?

A GOOD ANSWER: *Yes, a tasting of your dishes, with the cost and how many people can come in writing.*

- ☐ How do you handle allergies, and how are those plates marked for servers?

- ☐ How many servers and bartenders per guest? Is that in the contract?

- ☐ Is the food cooked on site or brought in? Is there a working kitchen?

- ☐ What happens to leftover food? Can we take it home?

- ☐ Is a late-night snack included, or extra?

- ☐ Are taxes and gratuity on top? Is gratuity charged on the tax too?

- ☐ What if the guest count changes after the final number is due?

A GOOD ANSWER: *A clear final-number date and a fair rule for small changes.*

- ☐ Who cuts and serves the cake, and is there a fee?

- ☐ Can we see your plates and setup at a real event, or photos of one?

NOTES



SECTION FOUR

Photography and video

- ☐ What happens if you are sick on the day? Who is your backup, and can we see their work?

| **A GOOD ANSWER:** *A named backup photographer, with a full gallery you can look through.*

- ☐ Can we see two or three full wedding galleries, not just the best shots?
- ☐ Do you shoot with two cameras and save to two memory cards at once?
- ☐ How many hours are included, and what does overtime cost?
- ☐ How many edited photos do we get, and how soon?
- ☐ Who owns the photos, and can we print them anywhere?
- ☐ Have you shot at our venue? If not, will you visit first?
- ☐ How do you handle dark rooms or a rainy day?
- ☐ For video: how long is the film, and do we get the full ceremony and speeches?
- ☐ How long will you keep our files, and is there a backup copy?

NOTES



SECTION FIVE

Music and entertainment

- ☐ Do you bring a second set of equipment in case something breaks?

A GOOD ANSWER: *Yes, backup speakers, cables, a spare mic and a laptop, already in the van.*

- ☐ What happens if you are sick on the day? Who covers for you?

A GOOD ANSWER: *A named, trusted replacement who has played weddings before.*

- ☐ Will you mic the ceremony and speeches so everyone, even at the back, can hear?

- ☐ Do you bring dance floor lighting? Is it included?

- ☐ How much power do you need, and how far from an outlet can you set up?

- ☐ Can we give you a do-not-play list, and will you stick to it?

- ☐ Will you take guest requests, or only ours?

- ☐ Do you know the venue's music curfew and sound limits?

- ☐ How long are breaks, and what plays during them?

- ☐ What do you wear, and do you need a meal?

NOTES



SECTION SIX

Flowers and decor

- ☐ Which flowers will be in season on our date, and what will they cost then?

A GOOD ANSWER: *Honest advice on what is local and in season, with swaps if a flower is not available.*

- ☐ Can arch or ceremony flowers be moved to the reception?
- ☐ Who sets up, and who takes everything down at the end of the night?
- ☐ Are vases, stands and candle holders rented? What if one breaks?
- ☐ Will the flowers survive heat or a hot tent for five hours?
- ☐ Are any of the flowers strongly scented or a worry for allergies?
- ☐ Can we see a mock-up of one centrepiece before the day?
- ☐ Is delivery and setup a separate fee?
- ☐ What happens to the flowers after? Can they be donated or taken home?

NOTES



SECTION SEVEN

Hair and makeup

☐ Is a trial included or extra, and will the artist who does it be the one on our wedding day?

A GOOD ANSWER: *A clear price for the trial, and the same artist on the day, so there are no surprises.*

☐ How many people can you do, and how long does each person take?

☐ Will you come to us? Is there a travel fee or early-morning fee?

☐ Do you stay for touch-ups after the ceremony?

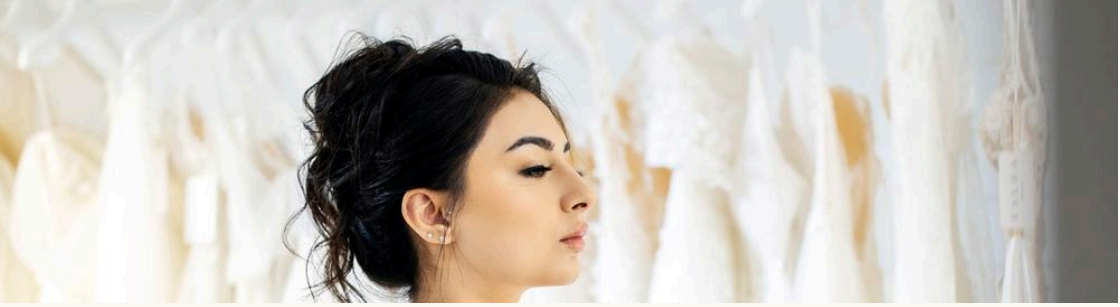
☐ What products do you use for sensitive skin, and for photos and humidity?

☐ Do you have experience with every hair texture and skin tone in our party?

☐ Who is your backup if you are sick?

☐ What do you need from us: a table, a chair, good light, power?

NOTES



SECTION EIGHT

Attire and alterations

- ☐ How long does ordering take, and what if it arrives late or wrong?

A GOOD ANSWER: *A clear order date, a written arrival date, and what happens if it is missed.*

- ☐ Are alterations included, or priced separately? Can we get an estimate now?
- ☐ How many fittings will we need, and when should the first one be?
- ☐ Can we bring our own tailor or seamstress?
- ☐ What shoes and underlayers should we bring to fittings?
- ☐ Is the outfit comfortable to sit, dance and eat in for ten hours?
- ☐ Can the store steam or press it, and store it before the day?
- ☐ What is the return or cancellation policy?
- ☐ For rented suits: when do they arrive, and when must they go back?

NOTES



SECTION NINE

Planner and coordinator

☐ Exactly what does your package cover, and from which month?

A GOOD ANSWER: *A written list: meetings, vendor calls, timeline, rehearsal and hours on the day.*

☐ Will you be there in person on the day? For how many hours?

☐ Do you take commissions from vendors you recommend?

☐ Who is your backup if you are sick?

☐ Will you run the rehearsal?

☐ Do you have an emergency kit? What is in it?

☐ Who is the contact for vendors on the day, you or us?

☐ How do you handle a family disagreement on the day?

☐ Have you worked at our venue, and with any of our vendors?

NOTES



SECTION TEN

Officiant

- ☐ Are you registered to marry people in this province?
| A GOOD ANSWER: *Yes, with proof, and a clear plan for signing and filing the licence.*
- ☐ Can we write our own vows? Can you help us shape the ceremony?
- ☐ How long is a typical ceremony with you?
- ☐ Can family traditions, languages or readings be included?
- ☐ Will you attend the rehearsal, and is that extra?
- ☐ Do you bring a microphone, or use the DJ's?
- ☐ Who files the paperwork after, and when?
- ☐ Who steps in if you cannot make it?

NOTES



SECTION ELEVEN

Cake and sweets

- ☐ Can we taste the flavours, and is the tasting free?

A GOOD ANSWER: *A tasting box or visit, with the cost (if any) taken off the order.*
- ☐ How will the cake hold up outside or in a warm room?
- ☐ Who delivers and sets it up, and at what time?
- ☐ Can you make some layers allergy-friendly, and keep them apart?
- ☐ Is a cake stand and knife included? Is there a deposit on the stand?
- ☐ Do you work with the venue, or is there a cake cutting fee?
- ☐ Can we keep the top tier? Do you box leftovers?
- ☐ What is the price per slice, and how many servings do we really need?

NOTES



SECTION TWELVE

Rentals

☐ What is the delivery and pickup window, and is a late-night pickup extra?

A GOOD ANSWER: *Times in writing, with any after-hours fee listed.*

☐ Do you set up and take down, or just drop off?

☐ What happens if something arrives broken, stained or short?

☐ Do we need to rinse dishes or fold linens before pickup?

☐ Is there a damage waiver? What does it cover?

☐ Can we see the items in person, especially linens and chairs?

☐ What if our count changes? Until when can we add items?

☐ Is anything cheaper if the venue already has it?

NOTES



SECTION THIRTEEN

Transportation

- ☐ Is the time you quote door to door, or does it start when you leave your garage?

A GOOD ANSWER: *A clear start and end, plus the rate for extra time.*

- ☐ What car will we actually get? Can we see it?

- ☐ What is the backup if the car breaks down?

- ☐ Is the driver's tip included?

- ☐ Is drinking allowed in the vehicle?

- ☐ Have you driven to our venue? Is the road or lane easy for a bus?

- ☐ Can guests get home safely at the end of the night? What time is the last run?

- ☐ Is there a fee for decorating the car or for waiting time?

NOTES

Comparing any three

	BUSINESS 1	BUSINESS 2	BUSINESS 3
Name			
Date available			
Price			
What is included			
Not included			
Backup plan			
Insurance			
Deposit			
Refund rules			
Reviews and work seen			
How they made us feel			

OUR FAVOURITE, AND WHY

NOTES



SECTION FOURTEEN

Backup plans

Ask every business the same four questions. You will learn a lot from how quickly they answer.

Weather

What is the rain, wind, heat or snow plan?
Who decides, and by what time?

Sickness

Who covers if you are sick? Can we see their work, and are they named in the contract?

Power

Is there a backup generator? What stops if the power goes out, and for how long?

No-show

What if a vendor does not arrive? Who do we call, and what does the contract say?

Our own plan B

Write down one phone number for each business, and give the list to someone who is not you two.

NOTES

Hidden costs couples forget

None of these are tricks. They are just easy to miss. Tick each one off once you know the number.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Taxes on everything | ☐ Cleaning and damage deposits |
| ☐ Gratuity, and whether it is charged on the tax | ☐ Tent heaters, flooring, lighting |
| ☐ Service or admin fees | ☐ Permits and event insurance |
| ☐ Vendor meals | ☐ Marriage licence |
| ☐ Overtime for every vendor | ☐ Alterations and steaming |
| ☐ Delivery, setup and pickup | ☐ Postage for invitations |
| ☐ Travel fees and parking | ☐ Tips for drivers and helpers |
| ☐ Cake cutting and corkage | ☐ Hair and makeup trials |
| ☐ Music licensing fees | ☐ Rehearsal dinner |
| ☐ Security and coat check | ☐ Thank-you gifts |

OUR RUNNING TOTAL OF EXTRAS

NOTES



SECTION SIXTEEN

Questions about money

☐ How much is the deposit, and is it refundable?

A GOOD ANSWER: *A clear amount, whether it comes off the total, and when it becomes non-refundable.*

☐ What is the payment schedule, with dates?

☐ What happens to our money if we cancel? If you cancel?

☐ Are prices locked when we sign, or can they go up before our date?

A GOOD ANSWER: *Prices locked in writing, or a clear cap on any increase.*

☐ Are taxes included in the quote, or added on?

☐ Is gratuity included? Is it charged on the tax too?

☐ Which payment methods do you take, and is there a card fee?

☐ Is the final payment due before the day, and to whom?

☐ Will we get a receipt for every payment?

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A LAST WORD

You have got this

If you only remember one thing, let it be this: a good business is happy to answer questions. If someone gets short with you over a fair question before you have signed, that tells you something.

Ask early, write it down, and then put the booklet away and enjoy being engaged. We are cheering for you both.

Kristina and Debi



Find businesses free on your date

Venues and wedding businesses across Canada show their open dates on OpenDates, so you can start with the ones that are actually free.

Free budget planner too. Set your budget, see what each part of the day usually costs, and track every deposit and payment in one place.

OPENDATES.CA