



# WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

BY RICHARD SPEARS

# **“Wrong Way Wedding Photography”**

Guerrilla Tactics for Breaking into the Wedding Business

By Richard Spears

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To Judi for putting up with my crazy idea that I want to photograph weddings, and all those Saturday nights I left her alone – Thank You.

To Kelly for originally being a voice-activated light stand (V.A.L.) and now my talented second shooter. Your talent will take you a long way in this business. You have a good eye. I hope this book inspires you.

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## “So You Want To Be a Wedding Photographer?”

Hi there. First let me say thank you for reading this. You might be wondering why I would write something like this. I can proudly say that I’m a wedding photographer. I didn’t get here the traditional way. While I know the correct way to get started in this genre of photography, I didn’t have the time or inclination to take that road. I sort of made up my own pirate path as I went. I broke the rules without knowing or respecting those rules.



Occasionally I’ll read an online forum for photographers and someone will ask “How should I get started in Wedding Photography” and the so-called experts will first tell them not to. Then they will go to great lengths to discourage the newbie and tell them about all the hoops they will have to jump through. **Screw that.** (by the way, if you are easily offended by colorful language this will be a difficult book to read) It’s not that wedding photographers are some sort of secret society with weird handshakes, but let’s just say that most aren’t comfortable with new people getting started using the techniques that I’m going to share with you. They paid their dues the long and correct way, and they want you to do the same.

I’m not making friends by writing this book. I expect the usual suspects of experts to try everything they can to keep this e-book out of your hands. So why would I write this? I realize I’m not going to make a lot of money with this. Let’s just say that I like to teach, and I think competition is good for everyone. I live in a large metropolitan area in South Texas. There are new guys every week that get into this business. Some will make it, and most won’t. I don’t worry about you competing with me. If you’re good, then you deserve to beat me for a gig.

For the sake of repetitive wording, I'm going to refer to wedding photographers in this book as "togs". I'll warn you now that I don't consider myself a professional writer, so bear with me. I'll try to keep the bad jokes and bad grammar to a minimum. If you enjoy this book I'd love to hear from you. If you hate the book, I'd just rather you keep it to yourself. I may not be able to refund your money, but I'll certainly buy you a beer if you're ever in the neighborhood.

## Who Am I?



Strangely enough, I didn't start off as a photographer (and it's becoming clear about not being a writer). I'm actually a middle-aged cop. I got into law enforcement a few days after my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, and I'm getting very close to retirement. When the day does come that I hang up my gun belt and badge for good, I plan on continuing as a wedding photographer until I start needing those adult diapers. Holy Jesus I can't tell you how I'm looking forward to that. (Retirement, not the diapers)

My background in photography is a little unusual. I bought my first SLR camera when my son was a baby in 1985. It was a Minolta 35mm camera, and I hated it. A lot of old timer togs speak fondly of the "film days" but for me it was one big pain in the ass. When I bought my camera, I didn't know an aperture from a shutter speed. I figured I could learn as I went. That would eventually work, but not until after wasting probably hundreds of dollars in ruined film and prints. I would take 3 rolls of pictures of my son, and proudly take it to the local drugstore. After a week or so (everything was so slow back then) I'd go and get my prints only to find that everything was too over-exposed, or under-exposed. No one was happier to see the age of digital cameras than I was. My first digital camera was a little Kodak EasyShare point and shoot that could create 2 megapixel images. Just the thought of taking hundreds of pictures without paying for film, and not worrying about my settings made me ecstatic.

My job as a cop took me into the world of crime scene investigation. Yes, I learned the basics of photography by shooting pictures of dead people and blood splatter. The secret (for me) to becoming “one with the camera”, was simply taking a LOT of pictures. My whole outlook on photography changed the day I got the phone call from a friend who was getting married. They didn’t have much money, and they knew I was pretty good with a camera. Maybe that’s where you are at. Whether you’ve been asked to shoot a wedding, or you just want to, here are the secrets to becoming a successful wedding photographer. Today, I have to turn down a lot of clients. If you follow my suggestions you can be booked every Saturday and depositing checks in the bank every week.



Some people are confused at the title. It's only the wrong way depending on who you ask. For me, it was the right way, and the fast way. Sometimes it's okay to do it the wrong way. A philosopher once said “If there are two roads that both get to the same location, then neither is the wrong way”. The advice that I got when I started out was mostly the traditional thinking. I tried, I really tried. Maybe I'm just too impatient, and maybe I like to break the rules of tradition.

## What is the Fast Track System?

It's a plan. It's just a name for the plan that I came up with and followed. It will take about a year. One year from now, you'll have gone from a regular photographer to a wedding photography business, with a decently booked calendar. Some of you may be thinking "A whole year?" If you want to have a successful business by the end of the week, then this Fast Track isn't going to be fast enough for you. Sorry. Thank you for reading this far, and goodnight.

For those of you who are still reading, here's the plan: You are going to jump into your first few weddings with whatever equipment you have, and put together a portfolio. Then you're going to take that portfolio and do a little street-level advertising and advertise low cost photography services for weddings. For a short time, you'll become one of those "Budget Craigslist Photographers" that other photographers make fun of. The cool thing is that you're going to grow. You'll see yourself start to climb up the ladder and build your business. The best part is, you won't have to throw parties, and get your friends to invest in Tupperware, soap, knives or any of that junk.

Let me pause for a moment and tell you what this **ISN'T**: This isn't a technical or technique book. I'm assuming you know what an f-stop is. There are many fine books that will teach you about your camera system and how to be a better photographer. This is not one of those books. If you are one of 'those' people who want to become a wedding photographer, and you have no idea how to use your camera, I would just prefer you to move on.

I'll provide you with the plan. I'll give you a contract that I use for all my clients. All you need at this point is a decent digital camera, a good internet connection on your computer, and the desire to jump into one of the most exciting and dynamic genres of photography. At the end of this book, I'll provide you with a LOT of links to some of the top wedding togs in the business. Their art will knock your socks off. You will study their work, and learn from them.



## Don't Listen To Them

As you go down this path, don't be surprised at the number of other togs who will tell you that you're doing it wrong. They will tell you that you don't have the right equipment. You don't have the experience or the knowledge. Don't listen to them. They will be most upset at your pricing structure. They will feel that it threatens their livelihood. It doesn't, but that is how they will perceive you. With this E-Book, you'll develop your plan, stick to it, and you will grow. Trust me; it works.

Later in the book I'll be giving you some links to different photography forums where other togs post their work for comment and critique. These forums are great resources for information and techniques. In the beginning though, I would discourage you from posting anything or letting any of the other togs know how you are getting into the business. If you do, you'll be attacked like a wounded deer walking through a pack of hungry pitbulls.

This is not to say that you shouldn't network and make friends with other wedding photographers. It's important to have friends in the same business. This comes in handy if you get an inquiry from an engaged couple, but you are already booked on their wedding date. I have two other photographers in my area, and we send business back and forth, and there is a great amount of respect between us.

Just be aware that not all wedding photographers will want to help you. When other photographers would ask me how I got started in the wedding business, I never went into details. I'd mumble something about what a pain it was to be an assistant all those years under a master photographer.

The important thing as a beginner in this industry is to not get discouraged. Proper mental attitude, and stubborn dedication will get you through the slow start. You're going to have to hustle. You'll have to continuously work to get your name out there, and market yourself to EVERYONE.

Just because this is a FAST way to get started in the wedding business, don't make the assumption that it's going to be easy. My "Fast Track" system, and the traditional apprentice method are both difficult and hard work. You'll come home from a wedding after being on your feet constantly moving for 10 hours exhausted. Then you'll spend the next few days uploading and editing those images. You'll have to answer emails, return phone calls, and design marketing materials.

When you add up the hours you spend shooting the weddings, and then the time for editing, and you collect your pay for that first year, you'll realize you could have made more money working at McDonald's. Are you sure you still want to go down this path?



## The BAD News

Most of you who read this will fail. Sorry to bring that little raincloud to the parade, but that's the sad reality here. The problem is that there are more people who consider themselves a wedding photographer than there are weddings. Maybe not everywhere, but certainly in most populated areas. The problem (as I see it) is every idiot who gets a Rebel EOS camera for Christmas thinks he/she will become a wedding photographer because their friends tell them they are talented. You're going to need some talent and business sense to be successful.



It gets easier as you become more established, but in the beginning you will be compared to and competing with idiots. You need to take a good look at yourself and ask yourself if you have the necessary skills and fortitude for this.

## The Basics

Don't you hate reading those books where the author doesn't give you the good stuff until the very last chapter? That's not me. Let me give you the summary and then I'll go into detail on how it all works. Our first big goal is to put together a portfolio. It's sort of like a Catch-22. (most of you who are under the age of 40 will not get the meaning of that, so go back to Amazon and buy the book or at least watch the movie) You won't be able to book any weddings unless you have a portfolio of your work to show engaged couples, and you won't have a portfolio until after you've shot some weddings. I'm going to show you how to get your first portfolio of pictures, and then you'll start booking some weddings. You're going to work cheap at first. You may even have to work for free a few times. Yes, I said free, as in charging them \$0, nada, nothing.

As you move up the ladder of success, each time you reach a goal, your pricing structure changes and you begin to make a little more money. At this point, you are on the bottom tier. You'll work hard, and not break even. Each wedding you shoot, adds to your portfolio. As your portfolio grows, so does your credibility and your talent. At the end of my first year, I had twelve. Twelve weddings was a decent size portfolio. My second year, I booked 26 and turned down business because I just didn't have the time. With each wedding, as you deposit the money, you'll be investing back into your business, buying equipment, and marketing materials.

This is not rocket science. You're going to start slow, low, and take baby steps. You'll have specific goals along the way. This is the fast track, trust me. The only way you could screw this up is to try and skip steps. Skipping steps on a plan that is already the fast track will fail you. By following this plan, you'll be an established and successful wedding photographer by the end of your second year.

## Assumptions

Before you jump into this career path, we need to go over a few prerequisites: We'll assume that you have a day job that pays the bills. If you're a homeless guy with a camera, I don't think I can help you. By having a day job, you'll be able to price yourself so that you can work cheap and not have to worry about eating Ramen Noodles every day. With this day job, we'll also assume that your Saturday afternoon-evenings are available. I don't know why or when the tradition of having weddings on Saturdays began, but that's the way it is here in the US.

We're going to assume that you have a decent digital camera (DSLR) and you know the basics on how to use it. We'll discuss the types of cameras later. The important part is do you know how to use it? Do you have the ability to take 900 pictures in a day, and have most of them properly focused and exposed correctly? Don't worry if you don't understand or use the manual settings. I think I shot my first two weddings with my camera on the "Auto" mode. There are already too many wedding photographers out there who don't know how to take a good picture. Don't add to the problem.

There is a lot of angry debate over the Auto vs. Manual modes. The photography purists and experts will think you're just crappy unless you shoot in Manual all the time. I've expressed my opinion on some of the forums, and it always stirs up a hornets nest. The main thing is creating a focused image that is



properly exposed. Whether you get there by adjusting the settings manually, or the camera does it for you is unimportant. The ONLY important thing is a good image. As you get better at your craft, you'll learn that the camera doesn't always make the correct settings in Automatic mode.



If you're not comfortable in your basic abilities with the camera, put down this book and get [Scott Kelby's series of books on digital photography](#), and then get "[Understanding Exposure](#)" by [Bryan Peterson](#). Both authors are easy to read, and will give you the basic understanding of how digital cameras work. There are lots of links at the end of the book to help you find tutorials on the web to help you improve your basic camera skills.

The biggest challenge to a tog when covering a wedding, is the sudden and drastic lighting changes. You must be able to shoot accurately exposed pictures outside in bright light, then change to a shaded doorway, then to a dimly lit room, and back outside again. If you want to practice, that's a good exercise. Get a friend to go from outside, to doorway, to dim light. When you get really good at it, have them change into an all-white outfit and do it again. When you are good at that, then have them put on solid black and repeat. Not as easy as you thought, is it?

Don't kid yourself if you know your skills aren't up to par. It doesn't mean that you can't become a wedding photographer, it just means that it will take even longer because you will HAVE to master certain skills with your camera.

## What's The Right Way?

Before we get into the meat of the Fast Track Guerrilla Tactics (which is arguably the WRONG way), let's talk about how to do it the right way, and why that may not be possible or practical. If you were able to get 10 professional togs and get them to sit down and explain how a person should get into the wedding business, you'd get 10 different answers. The bigger problem is getting 10 professionals to even *talk* to you, but we'll get to that later.

In my ever so humble opinion, in a perfect world, I would tell someone to do the assistant/understudy/apprentice path. This has roots going back to the Middle Ages, and is still practiced today with limited success. If a boy wanted to become a knight back in the Middle Ages, he would become a squire to a knight. The squire would spend years shining the knight's boots, grooming the horse, and preparing meals for the knight. Along the way, the knight would teach his young squire a few tidbits about chivalry. The squire might spend five to ten years before he ever picked up a sword. That kind of dedication and patience does not exist today.

If you watch any YouTube videos that have behind the scenes footage of some famous photographer, such as [Annie Liebowitz](#), you'll notice lots of young assistants carrying her gear and setting up the light stands. These are usually not paid employees. These are her **assistants** who work for free to gain experience and learn from the "*master*". With wedding photographers, it's generally accepted that an assistant will work with the senior photographer for years before they move up to the position of "second shooter". A second shooter will take photographs at the wedding, and get the odd-angle shots that the main photographer can't get. The second shooter will be up in the church balcony during the ceremony, or laying in the grass behind the couple in an outdoor wedding. Some second shooters get a small fee, and most are expected to work for free while they learn from the master.

If the prospect of carrying a photographer's gear for a few years for no pay, and then a few more years as a second shooter earning \$100 per wedding doesn't sound exciting... just wait, it gets better. Just getting an established or famous photographer to accept you as an assistant can be next to impossible because of all the mistrust in the industry. A popular New York City photographer once told me that it took him years to take on a guy who wanted to be his assistant because he just couldn't trust anyone.

It never hurts to try however, so even if you use my Fast Track method, try to get to know some established togs in your area and ask them to consider you as an assistant. I've had college students work with me as a second shooter on some weddings, and it turned out great. The biggest problem I've had with that arrangement is finding second shooters that are dependable. This is not like a job at McDonald's where you can call an hour before you're supposed to be at work and tell them you're sick.

You can probably see why this path didn't interest me. The thought of being an assistant for years, and then being allowed to second shoot for a few years was not appealing. As long and painful as this method sounds, it is still the 'way it is done' in the minds of many professionals who did it. If you have five or six years to give so that you can be an apprentice, then go for it.

The other generally accepted “Right Way” to do it, is through formal college education. I agree that if you have 4 years and unlimited funds, get a bachelor of arts degree at a good arts college. You’ll learn more about art than weddings, but in the end, you’ll have the eye for artistic composition that many pros struggle with. One warning however: since it is well known that there are a lot of people who want to become a wedding photographer, it has resulted in a lot of low budget vocational schools offering home study courses to learn at your own pace how to be a wedding tog. These schools are rip-offs. Don’t waste your money.

Workshops can be very productive. One of the 'Masters' mentioned in the back of the book is Sal Cincotta who puts on Wedding Photography Boot Camp workshops around the country. Sal is one of the most successful wedding photographers in the country. His workshops are fairly pricey, but if I were doing it all over, and had the money, I'd check it out.



## Here's The Fast Track

You can't attract a engaged couple by telling them "Well, I don't have any sample pictures to show you... I'd like to photograph your wedding, but you will be my first." So our first goal is to shoot two weddings to put together our portfolio. I'm a big believer in visual goals, so write "Two Weddings" on a dry erase board, or a large piece of paper and put it on the wall.

First ask all your friends and relatives if anyone is engaged or thinking about marriage. Then ask everyone at your day job. You don't have to tell people that you are going to become a wedding photographer. You can tell them "I'm working on a photography project where I have to shoot pictures at a wedding" Be sure and let them know that they will get great pictures, and there's no fee.



*From my first gig. They were friends of mine*

Sometimes you won't be able to find a friend or family member getting married. If you live close to a college town, make a few fliers and hang them in the bookstores, coffee shops, and laundromats. "Need a wedding photographer and short on cash? Looking for engaged couple to help me with photography project – no cost" or something similar. You can post a similar ad on Craigslist. This will usually generate several inquiries. You can be very clear that it is a photography project, not a business transaction.

I live near the metropolitan area of San Antonio Texas. Every day, there are 10 or so weddings downtown in front of the courthouse. You could hang out in the downtown area, and offer one of these couples your services for free. People always look at you funny when you say free, because they want to know where the catch is. You can tell them you're just doing a photography project. Tell them you'll

send the images to them, and if they feel like tipping you, that's their decision. While you're there, get to know some of the wedding officiants that work downtown. Let them know you're building up a portfolio.

You could also stage a “*mock wedding*”. This can take a lot more prep and planning, but there is less pressure on you since it's not a real wedding. You'll need to advertise for some models. In the U.S. look on [Model Mayhem](#). There are always models looking to enhance their modeling portfolio. You'll need to arrange a wedding dress, tuxedo, and the location/church. If you can find a small wedding dress shop, they will barter a deal with you to loan you a dress in return for some photography work for their website. If there are any theatrical groups or community theater in your area, those are valuable resources for actors, costumes, and creative people who would have fun with this type of project.

## Beware The Dark Side

You'll be tempted. You'll want to put up some photos in a portfolio so that you can show potential customers, but you'll be frustrated at first because you don't have any. You may look at the thousands and millions of wedding photos out there on the net, and think “Who would know?” I know, it's tempting to put someone's picture as your own. Don't do it. I'm not going to preach to you about right and wrong here (wrong book) it's just that you'll eventually get “outed”. There are websites that do nothing but display photo thieves. Once you get caught, (and you WILL get caught) you can kiss the wedding business goodbye. Your reputation will not recover.

Google has image search tools that I regularly use on my own pictures so that I can search the net looking for my images. Here's just one of the groups that's been very successful in shaming those who steal photos: <http://stopstealingphotos.tumblr.com/> Some of the photo thieves have been very gutsy. They seem to steal from everyone. Famous photographers and photographers that no one has ever heard of. Trust in my system. If you follow the guidelines that I'm laying out for you, you won't have to steal anyone else's work. You'll have a portfolio in just a few months.

## What You Need

This seems to be the major stumbling block for a lot of photographers. Once again if you ask the “professionals” for advice on what kind of gear you'll need to do weddings, they will describe the gear *they* have. This is gear it took them years to acquire. You won't need all that. You'd be surprised at what you can accomplish with a minimal amount of gear.

You'll need some basic camera gear, a decent computer with editing software, and a connection to the internet. Most importantly is the mind-set and attitude. You need to have a plan, and stick to it. You need to have your goals clearly laid out in front of you, and the desire to achieve those goals in order. How many people do you know that start several projects, and finish none of them?

You're going to have to get out there and hustle. You'll have to market yourself. The gear is not an important factor. You can get started just using a piece of crap camera. It's up to YOU and what you can do with a piece of crap camera.





## Camera Gear

I shot my first wedding with a DSLR camera that I bought used, with a “kit lens” 18-55mm zoom lens and a speedlight flash unit. That’s it. If you are already an experienced photographer, the camera you already have is probably sufficient. It doesn’t have to have a lot of bells and whistles.

First let’s talk about the camera body itself. It doesn’t have to be a certain brand. Canon, Nikon, Fuji, Olympus, Sony are all good brands. There's no such thing as the “best” brand for wedding photography. If someone pressures me for advice, I will say to look primarily at the top two brands, Canon and Nikon. The reason I suggest this is not because of the camera itself, but because these two brands have the most options and accessories available. If you have already made an investment in lenses, that is the brand you should stick with.

Let's say that you've decided to buy a new camera to start your new career as a wedding photographer, and you haven't decided which one to go with, my advice is to go to a camera store and pick up the different models. A photographer friend of mine says “one of the cameras will speak to you”. Choose the camera that feels the best in your hand, and has intuitive interface and menus for you.

I’ve had a lot of new togs ask me about the number of megapixels that a camera has. Megapixels are a selling feature that has little to do with the quality of photographs that you can create with it. The used camera that I started out with had a 10 Megapixel sensor on it. I made large size prints from it and they looked beautiful. You’ll need extra batteries and extra memory cards for it. One of the few things that will ruin your night is if you run out of battery juice or out of space on your memory card before the wedding is over. I carry four extra sets of batteries, and four 16GB memory cards. Set the picture mode for “Auto” with automatic white balance, and automatic ISO.

One piece of advice that the pros will tell you is an absolute is that you should have a backup camera. There is a lot of wisdom in this, but I will admit that I didn’t have two camera bodies when I first started.

If something mechanically goes wrong with your camera in the middle of the wedding, **you are screwed** without a backup. This is a risk you'll have to evaluate for yourself. One option is to borrow a backup camera for the day, or even rent one. You can rent a Nikon DSLR from [BorrowLenses.com](http://BorrowLenses.com) for \$36 for three days. I've rented all kinds of equipment from them, and they are a good company.

Camera lenses are the crack cocaine for photographers. I was more worried about my lens when I started out than my camera. After several years in the wedding business, I've invested in good glass. I wouldn't want to shoot a whole wedding with one kit lens, but I know that I've done it before. Using the 18-55mm kit lens means you'll have to get a lot closer for some of the pictures of the rings, and the kiss during the ceremony. The kit lenses are usually so horrible in low light, you'll need a flash (more on that in a bit). If you feel that you want a little more reach (distance) and you have the funds to get a lens before your first wedding, then find a used 55-200mm on Ebay. I picked one up for my second wedding and got it used for about \$150. It worked, but those types of lenses are really pieces of crap. It focused slow, and was useless in low light. You'll find that the really good glass that is fast in low light is very expensive, and once you get one, you'll wonder how you ever worked without it.

For me, getting a good exposure is not difficult. Using a flash, and using it well has always been difficult. This is the age of the [Strobist](http://Strobist), where photographers like David Hobby create art with light. On his strobist.com blog, he teaches the Zen of using flash, both on-camera and off-camera. As a beginning wedding photographer, you'll need a flash. If your camera has a built in flash, you'll need more than that. The flash is just as important as the camera itself, and this is one area where you can't go the cheapest route. You'll need a flash that communicates with your camera. This is sometimes called TTL (through the lens) technology. This means that generally, you'll need a flash that is the same brand as your camera. Look for a flash that balances power output with all the little extra gadgets and features. Don't buy the top of the line, and don't get the cheapest little one. You'll want the "middle of the road" workhorse dependable speedlight. In the Nikon world that would be the SB-700, and for Canon shooters the 430 EX II. I wouldn't buy a used one. People won't usually sell a flash like this unless it isn't working. You might be able to find a good deal on a refurbished unit at [B&H Camera in New York City](http://B&H Camera in New York City) (where I buy most of my gear).

## Software

If you are already an experience photographer, we'll also assume that you have a computer and some sort of software that you use to edit and correct your images. When I first started out, I used some free software called Picassa from Google. It works, but you'll quickly find that you need more. The two big players in this field are Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop. My advice is to get Lightroom and learn it forwards and backwards. It's pretty affordable ([under \\$100 from Amazon usually](http://under $100 from Amazon usually)) and will do most of your color correction, and even fix images where the exposure is not quite right. Once you get good with LR, there are a lot of artistic editing that you can do with it. There are a lot of YouTube videos to help you learn LR, or you can pick up Scott Kelby's book on Lightroom. A long term goal would be to invest in Photoshop and again learn everything you can about it. This is not a simple task, because PS is unlike any other software program I've ever used. It's the most complex, advanced, and insane editing program ever made. You should learn and use it because your competitors are good at it. Using Photoshop for wedding photography will be my next book.



Here's a good example of WHY you need to be good with Photoshop. I was shooting a bridal portrait session at a historical Spanish Mission. I wanted to have her veil blowing in the breeze. Except that there was zero breeze that day. We tried having the groom throw the veil into the air, but the veil kept coming off her head. In the end, I had him just hold the veil, and then in post production I cloned him out of the picture.

There is a lot of debate over the format that your camera creates images in. Most cameras can output the images in either RAW or JPG format. The RAW format gives you a lot more creative room for corrections and adjustments than JPG. If you are going to be using Lightroom, then choose RAW. If you use one of the free programs like Picassa, shoot in JPG format.



## Website

You'll need a website. Your website becomes your main portfolio, and a means to advertise to people. If you are not skilled at website development, barter with a nerdy friend who is. A good website is worth its weight in gold. Although you could create a Facebook site to display your work instead of a website (more on that later in the social networking chapter), this is one of those areas where it's important to do it right and not be cheap. Perception in this business is very real. I had one bride tell



me that when she was shopping for a photographer, she considered the togs who had their own website as being more professional and the ones with a Facebook or Flickr site to be the amateurs. She didn't even consider the amateurs.

First get a domain name. I use [Godaddy.com](http://Godaddy.com) to register the domain name and also to do the hosting. Another company that is popular among photographers to host the website is [Bluehost](http://Bluehost). Since I do mine all with Godaddy, I don't know much about Bluehost. It will cost you less than \$20 to register a domain name for a year. Try to get a catchy domain that will be easy for people to remember. The price to host that domain varies depending on what kind of features, storage and bandwidth that you need. You can always start out with the economy plan and then upgrade later if you need it. Shop around for the best deal on hosting plans.

Once you have your domain and a hosting site, you'll work on the content of your site. The most popular setup these days for wedding photographers is to use a Wordpress theme that is designed for photography. You can literally be setup with a cool slideshow of your gallery within hours. There are hundreds of sites that have free Wordpress themes. It's not free, but one theme that I like is from a company called [Photocrati](http://Photocrati). It has a lot of built-in features and is easy to setup.

## Portfolio

Your portfolio contains examples of your work. You'll need two versions: Your online version (your website) and the version that you have with you when you meet prospective bridal clients. When I started out, I carried an art portfolio that was a leather binder that had clear plastic sleeves with 8x10 prints of my best work. I always recommend 10 pictures. Make sure they are your best, artistic and interesting images. No, it doesn't have to be just wedding related. If you have some really good portraits, use that in your port too. Just make sure they are "Wow" images. I don't carry my leather binder anymore, I use an iPad. Eventually you'll also want to carry two wedding albums with you.



## Advertising

When you are just starting out as a wedding photographer, it's very tempting to want to advertise your services. The sad truth is that very little of the traditional advertising mediums out there are going to be effective for you at the bottom tier of the wedding industry. You want maximum return on investment, and you'll be disappointed more often than not. The top three ways to get the word out to the public that you are available for their wedding are Google Adwords, Craigslist, and printing flyers and hanging them around the community where you live.

These things that I'm telling you are based on my experience which is in a very large metropolitan area in Texas. If you live in Missoula Montana, you might be able to advertise on the radio or newspaper for a small price, and get a huge reaction. The way I see it, you have to go where the people who will hire you are looking. These days, most brides, and especially those who want a cheap deal on their photography, are going to look online. Strangely enough, my first year of doing weddings, I got the most inquiries from my ads that I placed on Craigslist.org. Put your listing in Services Offered/Creative Services. Again, if you're not comfortable creating an html-based ad with pictures, make friends with a creative nerd who can help you.

I've had limited success with Google's Adwords. It's a complex method of advertising that uses your keywords to target specific customers. When you do a Google search, the adwords are the short boxed ads that show up on the right side of the page. It can also become expensive. The good thing with Adwords is that it will let you set up a budgeted amount per month, and it won't let your ad go over that amount.



## How Much Do You Charge?

Do a little research before you create your first Craigslist ad. Find out what the bottom-of-the-barrel pricing is for wedding photography in your area, and **that** will be your starting price. In my area, that number was only \$200. There were several ads by students studying photography in college who couldn't even spell all the words correctly. Of all the \$200 wedding offers, mine was the only one with a website. I'm not certain if it was the website, the fact that I used decent grammar, or my witty ad, but I would get emails every week. I could have booked those \$200 weddings all year long.

Go to Craigslist for the nearest city in your area, and click on Services → Creative. Click on a few of the wedding photography ads. There's your competition. If your situation is like mine, it won't take much to make a better ad on Craigslist than the ones you see.

This is where I would get some hate mail from other photographers. One tog (who was a middle-tier guy in the wedding business here) told me that people like me were ruining the business for guys like him. I checked out his website. His pricing for a wedding started out at a little over \$4,000. He felt that I was taking customers away from him. I contend that his clients would not give me a second look. The customers who were hiring me for \$200 either couldn't afford his prices, or didn't put a high priority on photography in the scheme of things.

Let me give you a perfect example. One of the clients who booked me on a \$200 wedding was Nolan and Marcella. They were both 20 years old. Nolan worked as a cook in a nice restaurant. Marcella was a college student who was studying to be a nurse. They were engaged, and in love. They didn't have wealthy parents who were paying for their wedding. They were paying for their wedding out of their savings. The pastry chef at Nolan's restaurant was doing their cake. Some relatives were doing the cooking for the reception dinner. Even their rings were simple and inexpensive tokens of love. Does Nolan and Marcella deserve to have good wedding pictures? Of course they do. By booking me, I wasn't taking the business away from the guy that charges four grand. I was fulfilling a need that the middle-tier wedding photographers didn't want. The \$200 would usually barely cover my expenses for the day. What did I get out of it? I added some beautiful pictures to my portfolio, and with each wedding that I would shoot, I'd learn a little more about the work. In looking over those weddings that first year, you can see the composition getting better each time.



*Marcella*

Be creative and personal in your Craigslist ad. Don't advertise the fact that you're just starting out. You could phrase it as "I'm new to this area." Use some photographs in your ad. If you haven't shot your first wedding yet, find a couple who will let you photograph them like an engagement session. You don't need a lot of pictures in your ad, but you need something. Be creative.

One photographer that I know, created a Craigslist ad and used pictures of neighborhood kids having a little mock wedding. You've never seen anything so cute as a little five year old girl wearing a veil. It won't take much to be more creative and artistic than most of the other ads on Craigslist.

Once you post your ad, create another one. I have five different ads that I rotate on CL. Let one ad run for five days, and then post ad #2. Tip: CL won't let you run the same ad, you'll have to write each one differently.

## Bartering

I'm a big believer in the barter system. It seems that there are always a lot of people and businesses that need photography work, and for some reason they are reluctant to pay the going prices for it. During your first year, one of the most important things you can do is become friends with the business players in the wedding market, and offer your services to them – for free – in return for services from them. My first barter trade was with a makeup artist. She was getting married and didn't have money for a photographer. I offered to shoot her wedding in exchange for seven makeup sessions that I could offer clients as incentives to book me. She agreed. It was a mutually beneficial trade. She still sends me business, and I still send her clients.



I knew a lady who was the manager for a popular wedding venue. Her website looked like crap. I offered to photograph her venue, and help her re-design her website, in return she would make me the preferred photographer. She keeps some of my work displayed on her wall, and shows brides my albums. Not a month goes by that I don't get a client from her. See how it works? I've done pictures for bakers, florists, limo companies, and wedding planners. It's all about relationships, networking, and getting the word out there. You grease their palms, and they grease yours. Tit for Tat.





## First Gig



You'll naturally be nervous when the day comes that you have your first wedding shoot. You have to love and embrace adrenaline in this business because there's always a lot of it. Things happen during the day at a fast pace. You have to be ready all day long. You must anticipate changes in light, and be in the right spot at the right moment. Doing a lot of preparation and study will help with your nerves.

A good friend of mine describes weddings as “Controlled Chaos” and that’s pretty damn accurate. A wedding is a fluid event. One part flows quickly into the next. There are no time-outs, and they will not wait for you if you are not ready. Some of my early mistakes were not anticipating the “flow” very well. I was changing the batteries on my flash when someone told me “Hey, they’re cutting the cake!” I almost missed it. One of my mistakes that day was that my extra batteries were in my camera case. Your batteries and memory cards need to be in your pocket. Practice changing both in a hurry, and in low light.

## Location Scouting



*This massive church did not allow flash*

About a week before the wedding date, go to the wedding venue, and scout out the place. Call ahead and let them know what you’re doing. Most of the churches and wedding venues have worked with photographers who scout the location ahead of time, so they will understand. If the venue is a church, and ESPECIALLY if it is a Catholic church, talk to the priest or church lady and ask what kind of rules they have regarding photography during the ceremony. Most of the time, they will be pretty laid back and tell you that you do what you need to do to get the shots. However, I have done weddings at two Catholic churches where they have strict rules about where the photographer must stand during the ceremony, and some churches will not allow any kind of flash during the ceremony.

If you don't have a good low-light lens, and they tell you "no flash", you may think you're screwed. You can still get some decent shots. Take a tripod in the church. Open up your aperture as wide as it will go for that lens (usually f4 on the crappy lenses) and bump up the ISO as high as your camera will go. For my first camera, that was ISO 1600. The slowest shutter speed you'll want to use with a tripod is 1/20 second, and 1/60 hand held. At those settings, your pictures may still be dark and grainy. You may have to convert everything to black and white in post-production.

Take a few dozen pictures in each area when you are scouting. Take notes on what settings the camera chose when AUTO mode was on. See if you can get better exposure by changing the shutter speed or aperture. Take notes on where you'll need to be standing to get a good shot of the bride and groom. Walk around outside and see what's available for group shots, and portraits. Take lots of notes, and lots of test pictures.

## Time-Line

At least one week before the wedding, you need to contact the bride and go over the time-line. You can do this on the phone, or email, Skype, or whatever, but it's information you need. Usually your bride will have all this information handy. She's been worrying about the time-line for over a year. Find out what time and where she will start her "bridal prep". This includes getting her hair styled, make-up, getting dressed, jewelry, etc. Depending on the area and the culture, she may do her prep at home, a hotel, friend's house, or at the venue.

I've noticed that younger brides want the pictures of the prep. Some of the older brides won't. You'll need to talk to her about it, and see how she feels. Assure her that you won't take pictures of her that are not flattering (like hair in curlers) and remind her that years from now she'll enjoy seeing pictures of the stress as she got ready.





Find out when everyone is arriving at the venue. If she didn't schedule time for you to take pictures of the bridal party before the ceremony, remind her that it's good to pencil in some picture time before the ceremony starts.

Make sure you have phone numbers for all the players. Have a phone number for the groom, best man, the Mom, maid of honor, and the officiant. You never know who you might need to call if you have a problem getting to the venue.

When discussing the time-line, make sure she has allotted time for the formal portraits after the ceremony. Find out when the reception starts, what time is the first dance, cake cutting, etc. Even though most events tend to run a little behind schedule, you'll at least have an idea of what's coming up next. You may not be the most organized at this point, but the bride will be impressed that you gathered up the information.



## Study the Masters

Sometimes the most useful advice will seem like the silliest. You can take this with a grain of salt, but it is absolutely true. You can learn how to photograph a wedding like a professional by studying the work of pros that you admire. When I was considering getting into this business, I began searching the web for interesting wedding images. Some of it was crap. Some, however, made me say “Wow” out loud, and sit back and just stare. Be prepared to be intimidated. There are some wedding images out there that should be hanging in a museum. I fully believe that you will learn a lot by studying these modern day masters.



Ask yourself how they got the shot. Natural light, or flash? Posed or candid? The best photographers are also the best at posing people for portraits. Study how the light falls on the face, and where the shadows are. This is not something that you will learn overnight. Use these pictures to inspire you, and motivate you to be great someday. Accept the fact that you will probably suck at this for a time. There were times when I'd look at the work of Tony Hoffer and I'd want to throw my camera in the trash screaming "I SUCK!!" I still suck when I compare my work to Hoffer's, but I don't let it bother me as much these days because I get better every year.

At the end of this book I'll give you the names and websites of some wedding photographers who will blow you away with their awesome-ness. Just don't let it get you down. Learn from the masters. Have patience. This will also give you a sense of the "style" that you will want to emulate.

When I first started, I kept a notebook that had some of my cheat notes and also pictures that I had found that I wanted to try and duplicate. Keep these pictures from the masters handy. I had them in my jacket pocket. A little inspiration goes a long way.



## YouTube Instruction

Remember the chapter on the “Right Way” to learn this business? How the pros would encourage you to become an apprentice and work for a few years carrying equipment like they did? Well, welcome to the age of the internet and Youtube. You can watch hours and hours of videos that are instructions on how to shoot weddings. You can literally follow professionals as they go through the day of shooting a wedding. If something is confusing, you can rewind, and watch it over and over. By the time I’d shot my first wedding, I felt as if I’d attended 20 or 30 weddings as an assistant for a pro photographer! All you have to do is go to YouTube and use the search phrase “Wedding Photography” to get thousands of videos. The biggest problem you’ll have is going through a lot of bad ones to find the really valuable ones. Here are two of my favorite sets to get you started:

[How we photograph a wedding – Part 1 by Dave Nunn](#)

[How to shoot a wedding – Part 1 by Matt Granger ThatNikonGuy, part 2, part 3, part 4, part 5, part 6, part 7](#) and similar to this book, [How to get started](#)

Both of these sets take you through an entire wedding. Of all the tutorials I’ve watched, I think I learned more from these than any else. There are lots more out there. [KelbyTraining.com](#) has a video by Cliff Mautner that has some good stuff, if you can get past the fact that Mautner is a little creepy. Although I haven’t seen it yet, the website fstoppers.com has just produced a 14 hour DVD tutorial on wedding photography. It’s a little expensive but might be worth the price. I’m entirely convinced I could learn brain surgery if I watched enough YouTube videos on it.

## Notes

Some people take notes, some don’t. I keep a little notebook with me when I’m shooting. I make sure that I write down the names of the major players at the wedding. I make a note of the bride’s

mother, her sister, the grandma that flew across the country to be there. This helps you when you are doing the group portraits so you don't miss anyone, and you can address them by name. It's a trivial thing, but I get a lot of compliments over the fact that I remembered grandma's name throughout the wedding. They don't know that I'd be lost without my notepad.

Some togs like to use a shot list. In the beginning I did. These days, I know the shots by heart. Put together a shot list, and check them off as you complete each one. You can download a generic shot list from the web or create your own. Here's a decent one that I found: [50 Must Have Wedding Photos](#)



## Checklist

One of the habits that I got into a long time ago is a checklist when I'm getting my gear ready to leave for the wedding. Make sure that you have plenty of batteries, and that they are all fully charged. Check your memory cards, and format them in camera. Take a picture with your camera before you leave. This will ensure that you won't get to the venue and find you left the memory card or the battery for your camera on your desk. Here's another tip that I hope you never need: If you have a business card, the first picture or test picture should be of your business card. That way if you lose the camera or memory card and it's recovered, the police or good citizens who find it will be able to look at the images on the memory card and figure out who owns it.

I always pack a few non camera items: snack and granola bars, pen and notepad, safety pins, duct tape, lens cleaning cloth, tool kit, scissors, and a step stool or small ladder. You'll use the ladder to take the group shots. It always helps the composition if the photographer is a little higher than everyone's eye level.





### **Dressed for Success**

This is another one of those nasty debates. I believe and recommend that the photographer should be well dressed. “Well dressed” has a different meaning in Kansas than it does on the beach in Key West. If the guests are wearing suit and tie, then I believe the photographer should be too. One prominent tog in my area wears a simple black button-down collar shirt with dress black slacks and nice shoes. He always looks stylish. Even when you are just starting out, don’t show up at a wedding dressed like a slob. People will judge you by the way you dress. Don't be THAT guy that shows up in shorts and sneakers. (I'm not exaggerating, - I've seen it)

You want to be comfortable and still look professional. Remember that you may be getting on the ground and climbing ladders. Find some dress shoes that are comfortable and have a black rubber sole. You'll need to be in “Ninja Mode” during the ceremony. You need to be able to move around QUIETLY.

Being in South Texas, I learned early on to bring an extra shirt. Sometimes my shirt is soaked in sweat and I have a fresh one to change into for the reception. If it looks like rain bring rain boots and an umbrella.



### Arriving At the Venue

Arrive at the venue a minimum of 2 hours prior to the ceremony. This will give you time to check all your equipment. I always make a point to go around the venue and introduce myself to the venue people and the other vendors who will be setting up. When you meet other vendors, (the cake person, the DJ, the caterer) ask them for their card and give them one of yours. After the wedding, if you got any pictures of them, send it to the address on the business card.

When the bride arrives, I explain to her that I want to do the detail pictures while she begins to get her hair and makeup ready. You'll need shots of the dress, the shoes, the jewelry, her bouquet, and the decorations around the reception area. When you finish with the detail shots, take the dress and shoes back to the bride, and ask if you can photograph her getting her hair and makeup ready.



## Bride Getting Ready

The pictures of the bride getting ready can be artistic and full of emotion. Catch candid shots of the bride looking in the mirror. When the time comes for her to put on the dress, tell her that you'll step outside the room. When they tell you that she is in the dress, try to get some shots of the bridesmaids or maid of honor helping her with her dress. The best way to get ideas for the getting ready shots are to look at other photographer portfolios. Always remember to be a gentleman and not make the bride uneasy about having you in the room.



It's very popular right now among candid "photojournalist" shooters to get some artistic shots through mirrors. You can focus on the bride's image as she looks into the mirror putting on her earrings or adjusting her hair. This will be one of those situations where you are going to want a fast lens that can open wide in low light, because you will ruin the picture using a flash.

Not all brides will want you to take pictures of them until their makeup and hair are perfect. I always make sure they are okay with it before I start snapping pictures. Watch what's going on with the bridesmaids and anticipate the moments. Those little last minute talks between the mother and her daughter always make great cherished images.



## Groom and Groomsmen

Although not as popular as the pictures of brides getting ready, you should also try to get some shots of the groom and his party getting dressed and ready. You'll usually find that they are not as nervous as the bridal party, and you can sometimes get good pics of the guys having a drink together, playing cards, or watching a football game. Watch for those rare emotional moments like the father of the groom helping him with his tie or boutonniere.



## Ceremony

When it's almost time for the ceremony, take your position at the venue. I always try to get some shots of the guests arriving. I'm sure every photographer has his own way of doing the ceremony, but this will give you an idea of how I do it. From this point on, there is no right or wrong way. You'll have to trust your artistic eye.

I should also mention that sometimes you'll be competing with guests who think it's okay to walk in front of the bridal photographer with their smart phone so they can get the shot. This is where your people skills will be put to the test. It doesn't bother me that they are taking pictures, but I won't allow them to spoil my shot. If they are in my way, I'll give them a friendly tap on the shoulder and tell them "I'm sorry, but if you stand there, you'll be in my shot." Be professional and authoritative. I've never had a problem, but I've heard stories of some photographers who have all kinds of difficulty with this.





My “spot” at the beginning of the ceremony is in the center of the aisle near the first or second row of guests. Even with a bad zoom lens, that’s usually close enough to get a picture of the faces as they stand together at the altar. Before the bride makes her entrance, watch the groom, and look for those emotional glances around the room. You should know who the players are, his parents or grandparents, her mother, etc. There are lots of good opportunities for candid moments in the few minutes before the bridal party makes their entrance.



When the bridal party begins coming down the aisle, try to get a good shot of each person. This can be tricky since they will be walking, and how fast your camera can focus on a moving target becomes an issue. Even if you mess up on any of the bridesmaids, be damned sure you get a good shot of the flower girl or the ring bearer. Those are money shots.

One trick that I have learned is that when the bride begins coming down the aisle, I get down low. Everyone else will be standing, so I crouch down as low as possible, shooting her at an upward angle. However, do not shoot from a low angle if the bride is overweight. It doesn't look flattering. If the bride is a big girl, then your best and most flattering angles are going to be shooting downward. Sometimes I'll stand on a chair as she walks by.

Here's a tip: Before the ceremony, when the bride is getting ready, I'll talk with her and the father or whoever is walking her down the aisle. I'll tell them to pause for just a second at some point and just glance at each other one last time. Tell the father to give his daughter one last few words. If he does, it usually gets an emotional response. Be ready to fire the shutter when the moment is right.



Another shot is to spin around and get the groom as he sees his bride coming down the aisle. In old fashioned traditional weddings, he hasn't seen her in her dress, and the look that you will get on his face is priceless.

It's a harder shot to get, but one that I always try is to frame the groom's face (in focus) as I shoot over the bride's shoulder as she approaches him. Shots like this are adored by the bride, and will look great in your portfolio.

I have two very important bits of advice for during the ceremony: move around; but don't miss the important events that sometimes happen fast – the rings and the kiss. It's important for you to move quietly and quickly around the altar area. Be in Ninja mode.

One mistake I made in the beginning, and still do, is taking too many duplicated shots during the ceremony. I'd come home with 10 shots that were almost identical. If you got that one good shot of them standing in front of the priest with their backs to the audience, you don't need additional versions. It's always better though, to take too many than too few.

Non-denominational weddings can go quickly; as fast as 10 minutes total from beginning to end. Catholic weddings can last 20 or 30 minutes with lots of praying, kneeling and singing. In your research

beforehand, you should check with the priest or officiant and ask about the sequence of events. In one of the worst weddings I ever shot, I got caught moving from the side to the center aisle when I hear the preacher say “By the power vested in me, I now pronounce you...” I literally ran to try and get to the center aisle for the kiss. If you miss the shot, they’ll never let you forget about it. This is one of those reasons why weddings can be so intimidating. So many things can go wrong, and brides are notorious for telling everyone if they are unhappy with the photographer.

My best advice, is watch for the emotional moments. Know who the family players are and where they are sitting. Get the major shots: Holding hands, the ring exchange, and The Kiss. It’s also important to get a shot of the couple signing the marriage certificate.

## Group Portraits

Getting the group portraits can be intimidating and difficult for some photographers. You are going to have to direct people, and use your commander voice to line up the groups. This is where you grab your shot list notepad, and hopefully you’ve made friends with the maid of honor or the best man who is going to help you wrangle the appropriate family members in place.



For the large group photo, this is where you will curse yourself if you don’t have a ultra wide angle lens. Use what you have. Start with the large group photo. All family members and members of the wedding party. Bride’s family on one side, groom’s family on the other.

To be honest, I hate taking large group shots. It’s the worst part of the day for me, and I know a lot of people in the bridal party would rather skip it too. It’s one of those necessary pain in the ass things that we must do, because all the grandma’s and aunts would be butt-hurt if there wasn’t a group picture.



Group tip: For each group shot, take two frames. Do the countdown, squeeze the shutter, and then pause for a second or two, and take another. You'll get fewer people blinking, and a slightly more relaxed look on the second shot.

Once you finish the big group, begin doing the smaller groups: bride and her family, groom and his family. Don't ever forget the shot that has just the bride and her parents, and the one with the groom and his parents. Those are incredibly important, and I've heard of several photographers that sometimes forget it. (oops!)

As you finish the family shots, you release people to go and enjoy themselves at the reception. The last group will be the bride and groom with the wedding party (bridesmaids and groomsmen) As you become better at this business, it is the shots like these that will allow the really creative photographers to shine. This is where you can have fun, and do some creative work. Find a location around the venue that you scouted previously, and have fun with it.



After you release the wedding party, it's time to do some formal portraits with just the bride and groom. There's not much that a book like this can do to help you with this part. You'll either be very good posing the couple, or the shots will look awkward and stiff. There's a real art to posing a couple.



You can learn some good poses by looking at the master's portfolios, but sometimes it's best to let the couple just be themselves, and just let their affection come through the lens.

The one obligatory shot is the full length formal pose that shows her dress from head to toe. Most togs turn their camera to portrait aspect for this shot. If you time it right, and the sun is going down, you can get some fantastic backlit sunset shots.

You should take your time and get the shots you need, but keep in mind that the bride and groom have a lot of guests back at the reception, and they are waiting to eat. That may not be a big deal where you're at, but here in Texas, it's a big deal. I've gotten better over the years about finishing up all the group shots, and the couple's formal portraits in about 30-40 minutes. I've heard of some togs who take over an hour, and when the bride and groom do finally arrive at the reception, there is nearly a riot. Don't take too long.

## Reception

Here in the South, the reception is usually at the same location as the ceremony. I know in some places, there is a change of location. Sometimes this will give you a little time to check your batteries, change out memory cards, and put your flash on your camera. I always take just a few minutes to look over some of the shots that I got from the ceremony, and breathe a sigh of relief. The hard part is mostly over.



Remember when I told you about the "Right Way" to become a wedding photographer, and how that would involve being a second shooter? Here's the part about the top-tier big money professionals that really pisses me off. A lot of the big time professional shooters go home after the group shot. They leave the reception to the assistants and the second shooters. I hope I never get like that. I think the receptions are fun (but then I like watching drunken party dancing!).

At the reception, you should get the shot of the bride and groom arriving and entering the reception hall. This is a great opportunity to go around to the tables and take what I call “table shots”. (I know, creative naming system I have, eh?) I try to introduce myself and ask if I can take their picture. The one thing that I don’t recommend is to take any pictures while people are eating. You won’t get any good shots, and people look at you a little funny when they have a mouth full of chicken.

Here are a couple of tips for getting some killer shots during the reception: During the toasts, stand behind the bride or groom and get the face of the person making the toast over the shoulder of the bride or groom.

During the ‘First Dance’ ask the DJ not to turn down the lights. If they do, your flash is going to blind the couple, and they can get irritated with you. Move in close as they are dancing. Move with them as they turn so that you keep your composition. Again, look for the emotional moments on their face.



When the bride tosses her bouquet, stand in front of the bride, with the single ladies behind her. If you camera can do a fast burst or continuous shots, set it up so that you can fire off a burst as she’s throwing the flowers. Since you don’t want a shallow depth of field, you’ll need an aperture around f8. You’ll have to experiment with the shutter speed. A little motion blur actually adds to the image. I’d set it from around 1/30 to 1/80<sup>th</sup> of a second.



*The garter toss can be a great shot too*

The dancing at the reception is another one of those settings where I tend to take more pictures than I need. You'll be expected to include dancing pictures of the B&G and the guests, but don't go overboard

At some weddings, the bride and groom will leave the reception to go to a car or limo (or big pickup here in Texas) to leave for the honeymoon. Sometimes they plan on having the guests throw rice, bubbles, or sparklers. On the sparklers, I'm always fascinated by this. Sparklers are a pain in the ass to get the exposure correct. I'm always worried that one of the sparklers will light up the bride like Michael Jackson's hair. I'm worried, but trust me, I'd be snapping pictures of it. Here's a link to a studio in New Orleans that does great sparkler effects: <http://studiotran.com/?postID=1058&sparkler-fun-tips>

You should find out if there is an exit event (like the sparklers) and if so, you can set up for it. Otherwise after you have your dancing pictures, you should check with the bride and see if you can do anything else for her, or if anything else needs to be photographed. I've learned that the bride's brain has been turned to mush at this point, so not much that she says will make a lot of sense. I just always check with her to make sure she's happy with me. I let them know when the pictures will be available, and that I'll send an email or call them.

It may sound like common sense, but make sure you have all your gear packed up and loaded in your car. After shooting for 10+ hours, sometimes it's easy to forget things. I once almost left my camera bag at the reception.

## Editing

After the wedding comes the editing. Early on when I first started out, I got some good advice about editing: Don't be tempted to give unedited images to your client. Every now and then, I will see a new photographer advertising this on Craigslist. It's sloppy and unprofessional. It's also for someone who is either too lazy to edit the photographs, or they don't know how. It doesn't matter how good you are, there are going to be a number of shots where people's eyes are closed, motion blur, or just an awkward pose. You are going to need to cull the bad ones, and correct the good ones. If a bride receives a disc with 400 incredible and artistic photographs, along with 100 that weren't very good or not in focus, which do you think she'll remember when she tells her friends about the photographer? Always deliver quality over quantity.



*No one wants to see bad behavior in their wedding pictures.*

Like I mentioned in an earlier chapter, the most efficient program out there for correcting, culling, and editing is Adobe's LightRoom. If you don't have it, it should be on your priority list for purchase after you start making some money. Once you get good at LightRoom, you'll be able to edit and cull your images in just a few hours. Today, I can edit 3000 images in about 3 hours. If you don't have LightRoom, get a free copy of [Google Picasa](#).

There's another editing program that some of my friends rave about, called "Gimp". I've never used it, but some say that it's very powerful and it's Freeware.



## LightRoom Vs. Photoshop

If you haven't used either program, it's easy to confuse the two. They do two different jobs entirely. In my workflow, I use LR to adjust exposure, white balance, contrast, convert to black and white, crop, and shadows (fill light). Lightroom is also good for removing small blemishes, pimples whatever. When a photograph needs some "repair" then I'll pull up Photoshop. With PS, you can remove a whole person from the picture. Got a glowing red Exit sign over the doorway? PS can remove it easily. I also use PS to do artistic edits. I'll pick a handful of pictures from the wedding to do some artistic edits with.

I'll mention this again too: Photoshop is not the kind of program that you can load on your computer, and just play around with it to learn it. It's the most complex program I've ever used. I took a college level class over three months, and just touched on a few of the capabilities that it can do. It's worth having, and worth learning.

LightRoom is fairly easy to pick up on. You can purchase it for around \$100, and there are a hundred Youtube videos where you can learn to use it. The best thing about LR is that you can correct one shot, then apply those corrections to hundreds more by cutting and pasting.





## Delivery Of Images

It's a popular question on some of the wedding photography blogs and forums: How many pictures do you deliver to the couple? It depends on a lot of things. It depends on how much time you spent on the wedding day, and how many pictures you took. Someone took a poll of wedding photographers and found that *on average* a wedding photographer delivers 100 finished images for every hour of shooting. I'm pretty close to the average. For a six hour wedding, I usually take around 1200 images, and out of that, I'm happy with delivering 500 finished photographs. I have heard of some photographers who really over-deliver, handing over 2,000 files to the client. You might even have the client ask you about this before the wedding. I always just smile and tell them that I only deliver the best images that tell the story of the day.



Regardless of what format you shoot in, you should deliver the images in JPEG format. I deliver the images in two sizes: the original high resolution size, 4256 x 2832 pixels, and also in Facebook size at 960x639.

When I first started out, I delivered the images on a CD or DVD. This has a few problems. Within six months, expect to hear from your bride asking if you can make her another disc because the one you gave her doesn't read in her computer anymore. Now I deliver my finished images on a USB flash drive. I used to buy the cheap 8GB in plastic from Best Buy. As I got more successful I found a company that printed my logo on the flash drive, and it comes in a metal presentation case. (Google search <https://www.google.com/#q=branded+flash+drives&safe=off> )

You'll also want to deliver a copyright release to your bride so that she can take the flash drive to a photo lab and have prints made. Most print labs don't ask for the copyright release, but I'm sure there

are a few that still do. My copyright release says that the couple can make prints for personal use, but that the photographer still retains the copyright on the images.

Don't drag your feet on delivering the images. My contract states that I will deliver the edited images within 7 days of the event. I've heard too many stories from brides who hired a photographer, and then months later are still waiting to see pictures from the wedding. Your reputation when you are starting out is priceless. Guard your reputation carefully. If you tell the bride the images will be ready in a week, deliver them in 5 days.



When I deliver pictures from a wedding I try to deliver in person. If that's not practical, then I'll mail it along with a nice letter thanking the client. I'm not shy about asking for a review or testimonial. I write "I want your experience to be a positive one. If you didn't receive five star service, let me know what I can do to make it a five star. If you are happy with my services, it would be a great favor to me if you could write a short review. Future brides want to know how you felt about my service."

I always try to give the bride something a little extra: something she wasn't expecting. I usually design a little montage of pictures that she can use on her Facebook as her cover image. Sometimes I'll make a print and put it in a little frame. You don't have to spend a lot of money on it. Just something they weren't expecting can really bring a smile to their face, and make an impression.

## Getting Paid

Like I mentioned in the previous chapter, don't expect the money to come rolling in. You are going to work for free and for dirt cheap in the beginning in order to get your portfolio going. When the day comes that a bride books you for her wedding, and you've agreed to a price, now what? My advice is to get a deposit. In the beginning when I was doing the \$200 weddings, I would get \$100 as a deposit, and they would give me the remainder either the day of the wedding (when you arrive) or they would send it via PayPal a few days before the wedding. Never shoot a wedding when the couple have failed to pay you. Carry a receipt book with you, and give them a receipt if they give you cash. Get an account set up on PayPal where you can send out invoices. Set up an account at Square.com so that you can take credit cards. After you start getting paid gigs, set up a business bank account so you can keep your photography money separate from personal money.



## Networking

Success in this business comes down primarily to one word: networking. You must get the word out that you are a Wedding Photographer, so that people know about you. You can do that through advertising, but that's a gamble, and an expensive gamble. Don't be one of those guys who spends a few thousand dollars on an ad or commercial and doesn't get any response from it. Networking is where it's at. Networking means referrals, word of mouth, and social networks.

Every wedding that you photograph has dozens of potential customers there. All the bridesmaids want to be a bride, and pretty damn quick. Make sure you made a good impression on her bridesmaids. I usually jokingly ask them when they are getting married. You want every guest at that wedding to look at your work on your website. In the old days, networking meant handing out business cards to people. Those days seem to be gone with the wind. Today (like it or not) networking is Facebook.

## Social Networking With Facebook

Facebook wasn't much just a few years ago. Today, just about every bride that I work with has a Facebook page. Here's how it works. You'll take pictures at her wedding. Then you'll post a select few of those pictures on your FB site, and tag the bride and groom. Immediately, all her friends, bridesmaids and family will see those pictures on their FB feed. Some of them will "share" the pic and it quickly becomes viral among hundreds or thousands of friends and friends of friends. Has there ever been anything where I could take a picture, and within 24 hours, thousands of people have seen it? I'm pretty savvy when it comes to nerdy technology, and it still makes my head swim.

One key element here.... It doesn't help you if your name isn't on those pictures. Remember when I said that you'll need a software program like Lightroom or Photoshop? This is one of those moments. You'll need a way to watermark your images. In the beginning, watermarks were used to prevent people from stealing your image and passing it off as theirs. That's going to happen if you are good. I don't lose sleep over it. I put my watermark on all images that I put into the Facebook stream. I want people to see where that picture came from. You can't put a value on that kind of advertising. But Facebook is going to try.

On the watermark: Only put a watermark on images that are destined to go on Facebook. Do NOT put a watermark on images that the client has paid for. This is something that many amateurs do, and it is just not classy. If you are doing a free wedding for a friend, then by all means slap that logo on every image.



*Remember to "Tag" the bride and groom so their friends will see it.*

As I write this, it's September of 2013, and Facebook wants to limit the reach of the pictures that you post, unless you pay Facebook to promote the image. I have a one finger response to that. By the time you read this, it may have changed, or gotten worse. For now, every wedding I shoot, I try to have some pictures from it on Facebook within 24 hrs. I tag everyone, and share it with people. It's working. As soon as possible, you'll need to create a FB artist page. Update it often. A handful of your best pictures from every shoot should be posted.

## Blog

One element of social networking that I'm learning is blogging. There is some debate among wedding togs that you can create a wordpress blog and not have a regular website. I have both. I'm not sure at this point if I made the correct choice or too many. I will say that the whole concept of blogging about your wedding shoots was made popular by a Zen Master that you should add to your list of masters to study. That would be [Jasmine Star](#).

I have a love/hate relationship with Jasmine Star. She's never heard of me, but Boy, do I know her. Every bride I've talked with has heard of Jasmine Star. She's a "Rockstar Wedding Photographer". She may not be the top photographer in the wedding world, but she's the master of blogging and social networking. For that, I give her kudos. She is one of the most sought after wedding photographers in the Los Angeles area. She has photographed weddings of the rich and famous.

She is the undisputed queen of marketing. How long has she been shooting weddings? Umm... since **2006**. Her rise to fame and fortune took all of about 4 years. She took the Justin Bieber Express train. Don't get me wrong. She's very good. (well, she's at least mediocre) After watching [the video on her website](#), I'd hire her too. Do you think she worked as someone's assistant for years before becoming a



wedding tog? No, she took her own version of the Fast Track. Success in this business is more about timing and marketing than it is about taking pictures.

Don't just glance over her blog. Read it. Study it. Absorb it. "J\*" has tapped into the mind of the modern bride, and **she gets it**. This is the way blogging should be done. Create your own blog. Make it a reflection of your personality the way that Jasmine did. (if you don't have a personality, well, then you are shit out of luck, my friend) Update your blog as often as you update Facebook. Hell, everytime I update my blog, I link it on my Facebook account.

Some of my bridal customers read my blog before hiring me. They tell me that after reading through the blog, they feel like they know me a little better. It makes them feel a little more comfortable giving money to someone they know, than to a stranger. This makes a lot of sense, so I try hard to update my blog frequently, and not be afraid to go off-topic every now and then and write about something that isn't related to photography. The old rules of etiquette apply here however, if you're smart you'll avoid topics on politics, sex or religion.



*Almost an image that I threw away because of the motion blur. I like the focus in her eye.*

## Wastes of Time & Money

One of the reasons that I wanted to write this E-Book was to warn people about the mistakes I made along the way, and the dollars I wasted on stupid stuff that I thought would be beneficial. Once you begin advertising that you are a wedding photographer, you'll be viewed as a potential customer for companies that feed off photographers.

1. Don't pay for listings. The first one that got me was [WeddingWire.com](http://WeddingWire.com). You can create a basic listing for free, but they will start hitting you up to get you to pay for a membership that can cost hundreds of dollars a month. There are several others out there similar to Weddingwire, like SnapKnot, and "The Knot". From what I've been reading online, these companies are losing money and popularity. Brides have gotten smarter and more technologically involved than they were a few years ago. Today's bride can research her dress, photographer, venue, caterer and florist without the help of Weddingwire.

2. Wedding Shows or Bridal Fairs. In my area, these are hit or miss. They have a huge show twice a year in San Antonio where thousands of brides walk around sampling cake and looking at dresses. The problem with the big shows is that they usually cost a lot of money to rent a space, and you'll be a little fish in a big pond with lots of heavy hitter photographers. The last show that I went to, was not in the city, but one of the smaller suburb locations. It was a much smaller show, and there were only three photographer booths there. One of the togs was a top-tier guy who charges 3-6 thousand dollars per wedding, but he is that good. The other two were just starting out, and didn't have much of a booth, so I got a lot of attention and booked two weddings immediately after the show. So, not all wedding shows are a waste of money. You can make it work if you do some homework and you're choosy about which ones you attend.

3. Print Advertising. This is another one of those things where your mileage may vary. If you live in a fairly large city, you've probably noticed that the newspaper is shrinking. Many have predicted that even the large newspapers will cease printing operations in the next few years. The problem is sad, but no one reads newspapers anymore. I certainly don't. I used to be like my grandfather, and read the morning paper with my breakfast and coffee every morning. Now I log online and check my email, and Facebook, and the online version of the newspaper. Everywhere I look, the word is on the street that print advertising isn't working like it used to. Even the wedding magazines are hurting. As tempting as it may seem, I don't think any money that you spend on a printed ad is going to give you much return on your investment.

Think about the demographic for the customer you want to reach. She's a young 20-something that is about to become engaged. Get inside her head. Where does she spend time? On the computer, and on her phone. You are better off building a network of friends in the industry who can pass your name on to the brides, or let you know when someone has become engaged. One area that is not a waste of time or money is developing relationships with the people who run the popular wedding venues.

## Venues

Think about this logically. What happens next when a girl becomes engaged? Well, first she's going to call her mother and all her friends. Next, she and her fiancée or mother are going to go look for a venue. Venue dates get filled up quickly. That is always the FIRST item that brides take care of. They can't talk to any other vendors until they have the date. So they are going to research venue locations online, and then they may narrow it down to two or three and go visit them. Wouldn't it be nice if that venue office had one of your 16x20 canvas wrap prints on the wall? And wouldn't it even be better if there was a brochure with your name on it in that office? And wouldn't it be like solid friggin GOLD if the manager of that venue told the bride, "you know, there's a photographer that is really good and he's worked at this location before..." what would that be worth to you?



Yeah, it's **that** good. That is where you put your time and money at this point. Just how do you establish that kind of relationship with the venue manager? Here's how I do it. If you've never shot at that venue before, send them an email and tell them how nice the venue looks, and how you would love to work there someday. Don't expect a reply. Then one day you might drop by the location and introduce yourself. I always show up around 11:30 and ask if I can take them to lunch. Ask the manager for advice on how to market yourself in that area, and which wedding planners she has worked with. When it's all done, and you've had a pleasant lunch, thank her for the time and the advice. Then ask her if she'd be willing to let you display one of your bridal portraits at her venue office. She may say that they'd have to evaluate your work, discuss it with the venue people, find space, yadda yadda yadda. Tell her that you just happen to have one of your portraits with you, and you'd be glad to let them evaluate it, and if it doesn't match their style, then you'll be happy to come back at a later date and pick it up.

If she says no, then again thank her for her time, and go on about your business. If she says “yes” then hand her the canvas gallery wrap (I like [canvas gallery wraps](#) because they look great and don’t need a frame) with a small stack of business cards, a few of your brochures, and an envelope. In that envelope is a crisp \$100 bill with a little note that says “I look forward to working with your venue, here is a display fee for the portrait”

I can hear some of you already turning your nose up. Some of you are mumbling about a kickback. Yes, it’s perfectly acceptable in the wedding business to give a little kickback when you get a referral from a venue. In this case, you’re getting your foot in the door. You’ll give them a little envelope every time you do a wedding there. You may get the call later that they cannot display your portrait. Some venues are locked in with “preferred vendors” meaning that the photographer that works there a lot doesn’t want to see anyone else’s print in the office. You’ll win some, and you’ll lose some. But when you get your foot in the door of a really hot venue, the bookings will roll in. Some of these venues book weddings every single week of the year and Christmas. What would it be worth to work 5 of those? See what I mean? It’s solid GOLD.





## Investing Back

Here's where the Fast Track plan starts to get really fun. Set up a business account at your bank. The only money that goes in or out is money from your wedding business. You are not going to spend any of the money you make with weddings for a while. Sound harsh? Yes, but you need to invest back into your business. As you grow, you'll be increasing your pricing.

Start by making a wish list of stuff that you will need for the business. Put it in order of priority. The most important things you need at the top of the list, with the price tag. Each time you work a wedding, you deposit the money into your account. When you have enough money for the item at the top of your wish list, you get it, and then cross that item off. The important thing here is knowing the difference between the things you need, and the things you **WANT**. Do not list the things you want. List the things you must get in order to do the job better.

Here's an example of the things I had on my list for that first year:

Backup Camera Body

Gallery Website Hosting so customers could proof pictures and buy prints

24-70mm f2.8 lens (great for low light)

two speedlights and two lightstands



*Having a fast f/1.8 lens is handy for low light*



## Gear Upgrades

The beauty of working the FastTrack plan is that you can start out with pretty crappy equipment, but as you progress, and work more weddings, you'll be able to upgrade your equipment. A lot of new photographers get hung up on the gear, and you'll hear the expression over and over, "It's not the gear that makes you good, it's the photographer behind the camera." Since gear is an important part of the business, I've put together an ultimate gear kit. This is very similar to the basic kit that all the professionals carry with them.

- Two full-frame high-ISO camera bodies.  
In the Nikon world a good example of this would be the D3s. The most popular Canon camera among pro wedding photographers would be the 5D Mk III.
- Four Speedlights with radio trigger/transmitters.
- 24-70mm f/2.8
- 70-200mm f/2.8
- 50mm f/1.4
- 85mm f/1.4
- 105mm macro for doing extreme close-ups (rings)
- light stands and softboxes for speedlights.

One word of caution on the gear. Don't make the mistake that a lot of newbies make, and go into debt to finance your ultimate set of gear. Stick to this plan, and you will have the money for all of this gear by your second year of business.

The lenses that I mentioned are also in the order that I would try to get them. The 24-70mm zoom is a beautiful lens that is fast in low light. For most wedding photographers, this is the workhorse lens. It's perfect for the prep pictures, portraits and the reception. For the ceremony, I prefer working with the 70-200mm. It has enough zoom that you can be 30 feet away from the couple, and still get a good shot of the rings being exchanged.

My favorite portrait lenses are the 50mm and the 85mm. These work beautifully when there is very little light in the room.

## Next Rung On The Ladder

Your first objectives were to get two gigs under your belt and put together a portfolio. Once you have some examples of your work, you begin advertising and marketing. Watch your email. Don't let an inquiry sit in your email inbox for more than a few hours. Answer your emails and call brides back immediately. Now you have bookings on your calendar. Contracts are being signed, and you're getting paid.



After one year as a budget photographer, create a new pricelist. When I started my second year, my basic wedding package was advertised for \$600. I began to offer a portrait session with that, and by that time I had a gallery with Zenfolio and they were letting me sell prints. I would offer a 16x20 print with the engagement session that the bride could display at the wedding. For a while I wondered if I would get as many inquiries as I did when I started out. I started getting twice the amount of inquiries. Some of them would even ask me, "Why are you so inexpensive?" I didn't tell them it was because I was new. I just smiled and said it was because "I don't do it for the money... I just like wedding photography."

Consider adding a wedding album to your packages. These are not hard to design, and they look beautiful. It adds value to your services. You'll need a sample album to show prospective clients. Most companies that print albums will let you buy a "Sample" or "Studio Album" for half price. The only difference is that it will have the "Sample" wording stamped inside the cover.



Second year, be cautious. That's when I got suckered into advertising programs that were rip-offs. Keep doing ads on Craigslist, and Facebook. Do your networking. Make friends in the industry. Make friends with at least two other wedding photographers, and offer to help them out if they ever need a second shooter. If you get an inquiry about a date and you're already booked, send them to one of your friend photographers. Good karma always comes back to you. Start building up some reviews and testimonials from customers. Post those reviews on your website. Carry business cards with you whenever you go out on a gig. Remind people that you'll make it worth their time if they send a bride to you. When someone does send you a client, reward that person with a \$50 gift card at a popular restaurant.

At the start of your third year, you need to review your work, and compare it to other photographers in your area. When I started my third year, I doubled my pricing, and I was still a little cheaper than most of the photographers in this area. If you are not seeing the quality of your work improve with each wedding, you may need to evaluate your skills.

## Web Support

The good news is that there are a lot of photographers out there who are in the same shoes you are, trying to break into the wedding business. If you are not a member of some of the discussion forums that are mentioned in the last chapter, you should be. These are great resources, ideas, and tutorials on everything. The bad news is that there are some out there who only want to break your spirit and enthusiasm because they are not doing it the way that you are.



It wasn't so many years ago that Wedding Photography was sort of an embarrassment among professional photographers. I heard a pro once joke about his business of doing portraits and editorial pictures, saying "if my business ever fails, I guess I'll have to resort to doing wedding photography..." Ha ha ha... very funny. Today that's not the case. Shooting weddings has gone up several notches in esteem among those who make a living with a camera. Weddings may be a lot of things, but it is consistent. People are still getting married, but I see a lot of guys who only shoot portraits not doing so well.

When I came up with my ideas about this Fast Track system of being sort of a "Budget Wedding" tog as stepping stone up the ladder of success, I was ridiculed for it. Some members of a photography forum called me "The Wal-Mart Photographer". That wasn't how they got into the business, so it was wrong. So my advice to you is to use these websites to help you, and learn from them, but I wouldn't plan on telling everyone your method, unless you want to be called names too. It's sort of like elementary school playground politics with cameras. The bullies want to make fun of anyone who is different than they are.

I hope that if you enjoyed this e-book that you'll send me an email and tell me how it's going for you. I would love to see examples of your work, and will be glad to give you honest critique that will help you

become better. Doing wedding photography is a lot harder than most people think. After you do your first wedding, you may be tempted to say that it's not for you. I hope that you'll give it more than one try. Weddings are chaotic, unpredictable, full of problems, stressful and at the same time, the most fun you can have with your clothes on. You have to love it. When I look back over the last few years, it was a lot easier taking pictures of motorcycles at Sturgis; but not nearly as fun.





## Resources and Links

### DVD Training

I am mentioning this here because it looks very interesting. A website called Fstoppers.com has created a DVD training series for wedding photographers. It's appropriately called "How to Become a Commercial Wedding Photographer" It's 14 hours worth of training. I've seen some of the clips, and they are good. The cost is \$300. I have a feeling this would be very beneficial to someone who is just starting out. Check out the promo video: <http://vimeo.com/56412583>

### Contract

One simple rule. Never work without a contract. Trust me on this, because I got burned once. The contract is good for you and your client. It manages expectations. It puts in plain English what they are getting and how much it is costing. It also spells out when money is due, and what will happen if someone cancels. Strangely enough, I've had three clients cancel a wedding. It happens.

You can find simple contracts on the net. Or if you have the money, you can hire an attorney to draw one up for you. The contract I'm using now and sharing with you is made up of things I found in five other contracts. I cobbled it together. I'm not an attorney, so your mileage may vary.

I found a program at the Apple Store that runs on my iPad. It allows me to meet with clients, fill in a simple client database, and it plugs in their name in all the blanks. The program is called Portable Contracts and it's made by instaproofs. Check it out at [portablecontracts.com](http://portablecontracts.com)



# WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY CONTRACT

This contract constitutes the agreement ("Agreement") between <<Profile Contact Name>> ("Photographer") and <<Client Name>> of <<Client Address>>, <<Client City>>, <<Client State>> <<Client Postal>> and <<Client Phone>> ("Client") for wedding photography services on <<Wedding Date>> ("Wedding Date") at <<Wedding Location>> and reception photography services on <<Reception Date>> ("Reception Date") at <<Reception Location>>.

PHOTOGRAPHY SERVICES: Photographer will provide the following photography services:

- One (1) photographer will photograph an engagement portrait session (Client bears the burden to schedule an engagement session with Photographer at a mutually agreeable time and place).
- One (1) photographer will photograph Client's wedding event at <<Wedding Location>> for <<Wedding Contract Hours>> hours beginning two (2) hours prior to the wedding ceremony on the Wedding Date.
- One (1) photographer will photograph Client's wedding reception at <<Reception Location>> for <<Reception Contract Hours>> hours beginning 30 minutes prior to the reception's starting time on the Reception Date.
- Engagement photography proofs will be made available for review and purchase online within 7 days of the portrait photography session.
- Wedding photography proofs will be made available for review and purchase online within 7 days of Wedding Date.
- Reception photography proofs will be made available for review and purchase online within 7 days of Reception Date.
- A la Cart Items:

<<A la Cart Details>>

PAYMENT DETAILS: Client agrees to pay Photographer <<Total Payment>> ("Payment") for Photographer's services outlined in Agreement, broken down as follows:

Package: <<Package Name>>; <<Package Price>>

Travel Fee: <<Travel Fee>>

A la Cart Items: <<A la Cart Price>>

Sales Tax: <<Sales Tax>>

Total: <<Total Payment>>

PAYMENT SCHEDULE: Client agrees to pay Photographer according to the following payment schedule. Non-payment or late-payment shall constitute a material breach of this Agreement, and may result in the cancellation of this Agreement:

- Non-refundable Retainer: <<Retainer Payment>>; due upon the signing of this Agreement
- Final Payment: <<Final Payment>>; due on or before <<Final Payment Date>>

PRESENTATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS: After careful review of the photographs taken pursuant to this Agreement, Photographer will edit and present to Client only those photographs that, in Photographer's sole judgment, best relate to the story of the events. The photographs will be presented to Client on CD, DVD, thumb drive, or other media mutually agreed upon. The images will be in .JPG format. The size of the images will be approximately 800 pixels by 600 pixels, and are suitable for uploading to websites or social media such as Facebook. The image size presented on disk is not suitable for commercial printing. Large format, high resolution size files are available from the Photographer, and will be available for download from Photographer's website at additional cost.

PRINTS: Prints of photographs taken will be available for purchase on Photographer's website at additional cost.

IMAGE SIZE, COLOR, STYLE AND COMPOSITION: All image sizes are approximate. The photographer will provide a pleasing color balance but cannot guarantee exact color matching. It is sometimes not possible to record on film or in print the exact color as seen by the human eye.

ARTISTIC STYLE: On its own behalf, and on behalf of the subject: Client acknowledges that it is familiar with the Photographer's portfolio and is requesting Services with knowledge of the Photographer's style; that Photographer's work is constantly evolving; that Photographer's services are of unique and artistic nature; that the photos may be different from photographs taken by the Photographer in the past; and that in creating the photos, the Photographer shall use his personal artistic judgment to create images

consistent with his personal vision of the Event, which vision may be different from the Client's and /or the Subject's vision of the Event. Accordingly, Client acknowledges that the Photos shall not be subject to rejection on the basis of taste or esthetic criteria.

**LIQUIDATED DAMAGES:** Client acknowledges that upon signing this Agreement, Photographer will reserve and will not make other reservations for the Wedding Date reserved by Client. If Client fails to perform duties pursuant to this Agreement for any reason including, but not limited to, canceling or postponing the wedding, the retainer fee will not be refunded to Client for any reason. If Photographer is able to contract another wedding assignment of at least equivalent value for Wedding Date, and Client has made Payments in addition to the original retainer fee, Client will be refunded the full sum of the additional Payments that have been made to date. However, if there is any deficiency in the value of the new booking relative to this Agreement, or if no replacement booking has been made, Client is responsible for liquidated damages equal to the sum of the deficiency and shall make payment in full to Photographer at least 10 days prior to the previously agreed upon Wedding Date. If the liquidated damages are less than the sum of Client's previous additional Payments, Photographer will refund the remaining balance of the Payments to Client. Photographer warrants that reasonable efforts will be made to secure a replacement assignment of at least equal value.

**PHOTOGRAPHER EXCLUSIVITY:** The Photographer shall be the exclusive still photographer retained by the Client for the purpose of photographing the wedding and reception. Wedding and reception guests and family members of the Client shall be permitted to photograph the events as long as they do not interfere with the Photographer's duties and do not photograph poses arranged by the Photographer. Client agrees to inform attendees of and to enforce these restrictions. Wedding guests with cameras are responsible for ruining a significant portion of images at every wedding. This may happen if they physically get in the way to block our view of the events, or because they are in the background, or because their flash goes off at the same time as our cameras - any one of which will result in ruined or missed photo opportunities for us. If you hire a coordinator, please tell them that we will provide them with any images they like. If they wish to hire a special photographer to cover their design creations, this person must be contracted through R Spears Photography in order to prevent any conflicts and to allow total sharing of images. It is hereby agreed that NO other professional (paid) photographer (or news photographers) will be invited or allowed to shoot pictures at this wedding.

**VIDEOGRAPHERS:** Occasionally videographers use powerful spot lights that will inevitably result in ruined images as these lights will turn on and off at unpredictable times, and they produce small spots of intense light which are impossible to expose for in a still photograph. Background lighting and other stationary light setups will not cause this problem because they do not change rapidly. It is agreed that client assumes all risk for loss of images caused by amateur photographers, videographers, or moving spotlights.

**MEALS FOR PHOTOGRAPHER(S):** Wedding activities happen quickly once they begin, and there are few if any opportunities for even short breaks, much less full meals. Shooting an entire wedding day is exhausting and we need to stay hydrated and keep our energy up but will not have time to leave the events and get our own food or drinks. Because of this, we require that you provide our meals at the same time as yours, and at a location that is within sight of you and your guests so we don't miss anything important. We like to get very comfortable visiting and blending in with your guests throughout the day, so it feels very natural to be seated at a guest table. This allows us the best chance to keep shooting during the meal and very often we can catch some really nice candid of people laughing and talking during the evening meal. Please don't forget to tell your coordinator about these details because they will most likely be responsible for seating everyone, and they tend to want to hide us away in some distant back room.

**SPECIFIC COVERAGE:** All photographs taken pursuant to this Agreement will be made in Photographer's professional discretion. Client will furnish Photographer with a list of any persons, groups, or occurrences requested to be photographed, if any, at least one week prior to the Wedding/Reception Date. Photographer recommends that Client designate a coordinator to identify certain persons to photograph. Photographer will use its best efforts but makes no guarantee that it will capture specific photographs or occurrences during the events covered by this Agreement.

**PERMITS/PASSES:** Client agrees to obtain all necessary permits or passes required for photo locations. Client understands that some locations may have exclusivity clauses that prohibit outside photographers. Client agrees to confirm and to provide Photographer's photographic access to the photo locations.

**LIABILITY LIMITS:** Although Photographer shall take due care to perform photography services pursuant to this Agreement, Photographer's liability for any loss, damage, or failure to deliver photographs (including for acts of God, terrorism, accident, illness, equipment failure, or any incident of unpredictable misfortune) shall be limited to Payments made pursuant to this Agreement. Photographer will not be liable for missed photographs due to time constraints or other non-controllable occurrences and situations that may arise during the events covered by this Agreement.

**SUBSTITUTE PHOTOGRAPHER:** Photographer may substitute another photographer to take the photographs pursuant to this

Agreement in the unlikely event of Photographer's illness or other emergencies. In the event of such substitution, Photographer warrants that the photographer taking the photographs shall be a competent professional.

**COPYRIGHT:** As the author of all photographs made pursuant to this Agreement and as provided by law, Photographer retains the copyright in and to the photographs. The parties agree that the photographs are not works made for hire in accordance with 17 U.S.C. § 101, and that Photographer retains those exclusive rights in the photographs provided by 17 U.S.C. § 106, including the rights to reproduce the copyrighted work, prepare derivative works based on the copyrighted work, distribute copies of the copyrighted work to the public, and display the work. Any portion of the work delivered to Client is for Client's personal use only and cannot be sold or reproduced without Photographer's prior written consent.

**CLIENT'S USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS:** Client may use the photographs taken pursuant to this Agreement for personal, non-commercial purposes. Client agrees to not permit or assist with any commercial use or sale of the photographs without prior specific written consent of Photographer. Client may not create copies of the photographs, digital or otherwise, without Photographer's prior written consent.

**MODEL RELEASE:** Client grants Photographer and Photographer's heirs, agents, legal representatives, and assigns the irrevocable, perpetual, and unrestricted right to use the photographs taken pursuant to this Agreement in all forms, media and manners, in conjunction with Client's own or a fictitious name, for advertising, trade, promotion, exhibition, or any other lawful purposes. Client waives any right to review or approve: the photographs themselves, the use of the photographs, or the matter that may be used in conjunction with the photographs, now and in the future. Client waives any right to royalties or other compensation arising from or related to the use of the photographs. Client's guests at the wedding and reception shall be deemed as having consented to the use of their names, images, or likenesses by Client and Photographer, and Client agrees to indemnify and defend Photographer from all claims that may be submitted by Client's guests against Photographer in relation to the photographs taken at the events covered by this Agreement. Client releases, discharges, and agrees to hold harmless Photographer and Photographer's heirs, agents, legal representatives, and assigns from any liability by virtue of any blurring, distortion, alteration, optical illusion, or use in composite form, whether intentional or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the taking, processing, or publication of the photographs.

**RETENTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS:** Photographer will retain copies of the photographs taken pursuant to this Agreement for a minimum of 36 months following the Wedding Date.

**JURISDICTION AND ARBITRATION:** The laws of <<Profile State>> govern this Agreement without regard to conflicts of law provisions. Client consents to the exclusive jurisdiction of the state and federal courts sitting in the state of <<Profile State>>. All unresolved disputes arising under this Agreement shall be submitted to arbitration in <<Profile State>>. The arbitration shall be conducted under the rules then prevailing of the American Arbitration Association. The arbitrator's award shall be binding and may be entered as a judgment in any court of competent jurisdiction. Notwithstanding the foregoing, either party may refuse to arbitrate when the dispute is for a sum less than \$5,000.

**MISCELLANEOUS:** This Agreement incorporates the entire understanding of the parties. Any modifications to this Agreement must be in writing and signed by all parties. If any provision of this Agreement is held to be invalid or unenforceable by law, the validity of this Agreement in whole shall not be affected, and the other provisions of the Agreement shall remain in full force and effect. No waiver of any breach of any term or provision of this Agreement shall be construed to be, or shall be, a waiver of any other breach of this Agreement. No waiver shall be binding unless in writing and signed by the party or parties waiving the breach. The paragraph, section, and article headings used in this Agreement are intended solely for convenience and reference and shall not in any manner amend, limit, modify, or otherwise be used in the interpretation of any of the provisions of this Agreement.

The parties have read this Agreement and agree to all of its terms. Each person signing as Client below shall be fully responsible for ensuring that Payment is made pursuant to the terms of this Agreement.

<<Client Signature>>

<<Witness Signature>>

<<Profile Signature>>



### **The Masters (in no particular order)**

Some of these are nationally recognized, and some you've never heard of. These are the names in my 'inspiration' folder when I want to see what real talent looks like.

[Joe Buissink](#)

[Sal Cincotta](#)

[Ryan Brenizer](#)

[Jim Colman](#)

[Tony Hoffer](#)

[Jason Prezant](#)

[Inku](#)

[Jasmine Star](#)

[Lee Morris](#)

[Nels Akerlund](#)

[Kurtis Kronk](#)

[375 Photography – Atlanta GA](#) ← awesome video

[Elizabeth Messina](#)

[Jose Villa](#)

[Sean Flanigan](#)

### **Equipment Vendors**

[B&H Camera, New York City](#)

[Adorama – New York City](#)

[KEH.com New and Used equipment](#)



## Gallery Proofing Sites

[Zenfolio](#)

[Smugmug](#)

## Forums for Photographers

[Digital Photography School](#)

[Fred Miranda](#)

[Talk Photography](#)

[DPreview](#)

[Strobox - Create, Share, Learn](#)

[Digital Camera World](#)

## Advice Pages

[Must Have Wedding Shots](#)

[weddinggawker | see the day](#)

## YouTube

[DSLR Basics: Stops and Metering - YouTube](#)

[Doug Gordon's Flow Posing for Wedding Couples](#)

[Posing Wedding Couples with Jasmine Star](#)

[Shooting the First Look with Joe Buissink](#)

## Books You Need

[Digital Wedding Photography – Glen Johnson](#)

[500 Poses for Photographing Brides](#)

## Photographer's Insurance

[Hill and Usher](#) Contact Richard Reyes

## Blogs

[Top 100 Wedding Blogs](#)

[The Wedding Photographer](#)

[Jasmine Star Photography Blog](#)

[Joe McNally's Blog](#)

[Outdoor Country Wedding: Adam & Betsy at Highland Manor | Floridian Weddings](#)

[Steve Bowman](#)

[Studio Tran](#)

[Zach Arias](#)

## Website Themes

[Full Frame WordPress Theme | Graph Paper Press](#)

[Photocrati](#)

[Wedding Template- ThemeForest](#)

## Photo Labs

[Bay Photo Lab](#)

[whcc.com albums](#)

[American Color Imaging Professional Photo Lab](#)

[AsukaBook albums](#)

[Meridian Professional Imaging | Great Prints. Great Prices. Easy Ordering. It's that Simple.](#)

[MyPublisher!](#)

[Mpix.Com](#)

[Artsy Couture](#) These guys have great canvas wraps at low prices

[GotPrint: brochures and offset printing](#)

[Blurb.com](#)

[Zenfolio](#)

[Houston Printing Imaging](#)

## Photography Tutorials

[Introduction to Shutter Speed in Digital Photography](#)

[Digital Photography Tips and Tutorials](#)

[New School Of Photography - The Front Page](#)

[Stops and Metering](#)

[Wedding Secrets | Photography Gems](#)

[The Wedding Contract - Free Download](#)

[Miami wedding - Wedding idea shots](#)

[This is how we do Weddings.... on Vimeo](#)

[6 Portrait Lighting Patterns](#)

[Photography Histograms Explained - YouTube](#)

[Light Modifiers—AdoramaTV from Adorama Learning Center](#)

[Control the Light and Improve Your Photography: Part 3 — Studio Portrait Lighting](#)

[Lightroom Presets – Adding a Sunflare Effect « « Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Killer Tips Adobe](#)

[Photoshop Lightroom Killer Tips](#)

[Exporting - Watermarking your photos | Learn Lightroom 4 | Adobe TV](#)

[Posing Guide: Weddings](#)

[Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Killer Tips « Online Photoshop Lightroom Tutorials and Tips with Matt](#)

[Kloskowski Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Killer Tips](#)

[110 Great Resources for Photographers](#)

[Basic SEO for Photographers | Photography Tips from XposurePro | Photography Business](#)

[Digital Photo Pro](#)

[BeyondMegapixels](#)

[WedPix: Wedding Photography Articles](#)

[change eye color](#)

## **Wedding Albums**

[The Album Cafe | Photoshop Templates for Photographers](#)

[Studio 100](#)

[Blurb Books](#)

[ForeverArts - Photo Books & Photo Arts](#)

[Shutterfly](#)

[Sweet Memory Albums](#)

[WHCC](#)

[Miller's Design Market](#)

[ArtisanState - The Professional's Photo Book](#)