

Choosing Your Wedding Officiate, Clergy or Justice of the Peace

The person you choose to perform your wedding ceremony is a very important part of your day. Here are a few tips to help guide you in choosing the right officiate for your wedding.

Do you want a religious or a secular ceremony?

The first major decision in choosing your officiate is whether to go with a religious or secular ceremony. This will determine who should do the job - a minister or clergyman; versus a justice of the peace or other secular officiate.

Secular officiate options

A Justice of the Peace is a legally certified person who can perform wedding ceremonies. You can obtain a list of these people from your local county clerk's office. This is the same place where you apply for your marriage license.

You can also get married at City Hall in a no frills ceremony before a judge or other qualified official. The city hall office can tell you exactly what you need to know to schedule such a wedding.

You can even get a friend or relative to marry you for the bargain price of \$35. This is possible through an organization on called the Universal Life Church or through a one-day designation of deputy commissioner of marriages (available in some states). You will want to check with your county clerk to make sure these options are legally recognized.

Just be sure you trust the individual, if you go the route of having a friend or relative perform your marriage ceremony. You'll want them to take your wedding seriously and to do a good job performing their duty, so it should be taken lightly. On a positive note, this option can be a lot of fun, especially with themed or fantasy weddings.



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Religious officiate options

If you are getting married in a church or house of worship, you may already have a minister at the church that will perform the wedding ceremony. However, if you are getting married at a place other than a house of worship, you will need to find someone.

Denomination is a consideration because you will probably have to do some pre-marital counseling or exercises before your officiate is to perform your wedding. Make sure this person's denomination matches your beliefs.

Religious ceremonies vary based on the denomination and traditions of the religion. You will need to discuss these options with your prospective religious officiate. Be sure that the ceremony they are willing to perform, matches what you want to do on your wedding day.

For instance, be sure you can write your own vows if you so choose to do so and let your officiate know if you want a short or more involved ceremony. Readings and hymns may be added or trimmed from the ceremony at your discretion.

Some faiths perform communion as part of the wedding ceremony. Be sure this is an option you want and are comfortable with before hiring your religious officiate.

Make sure there aren't any religious limitations before you hire your officiate. Some religions don't allow for divorced couples to remarry in that faith. Some religions may have restrictions on who can perform readings or other parts of the ceremony. Be sure to cover all of these details with the minister or other clergy member.

Choosing who will perform your wedding ceremony is a very personal decision that should be made by the bride and groom. Be sure the two of you are on the same page before you choose your officiate.

