

Considerations When Selecting an Officiant

The words spoken at your ceremony should reflect what the two of you believe and feel to be true. So, it is important to ensure that you choose the Officiant who best demonstrates the ability to carry out your desires. Here are some tips on what to consider when selecting an Officiant.

Who is recommending the Officiant?

If you receive a referral from a close family member, there may be a strong expectation that you simply accept the person as the one who will marry you. Referrals from friends or people you find on your own usually have fewer "strings attached." In any event, remember that this is your wedding day, and while your families are welcome to share their ideas and opinions, the final decision must rest with the two of you.

How flexible is the Officiant?

If you want a non-traditional song played during the ceremony, will the Officiant forbid it? Are you free to add your own vows or other special, romantic touches? Do you want a little humor in the ceremony? Even if you don't know what kind of wedding ceremony you want, are you confident that the Officiant will allow for changes as the wedding day approaches? Will the Officiant work with you to develop a ceremony which honors your religious and/or non religious traditions and beliefs? Will the minister allow flash photography during the wedding (usually this will help make the pictures look better)?

What is the Officiant's background?

The government doesn't issue licenses to ministers, so an Officiant's experience with weddings is important. How many has he or she performed? Does the Officiant have references you can contact? Does the Officiant have credentials he or she can show you?

What is the spiritual or religious perspective of the Officiant?

Many ministers subscribe to the doctrines of a particular faith. If you are not of the same faith, do not be shy about letting them know what your religious values are in the first meeting. Whether you're a born-again Christian or non-religious, even if the two of you are in very different places in the spiritual journey, let the minister know. Can the minister work with you to create a ceremony that is true to your beliefs, or do you feel that the Officiant has an agenda to fit you into his or her particular denominational preferences? Will the minister work well with your beliefs?

What moral criteria does the Officiant expect you to meet?

If you and your fiancé are living together, already have children, are expecting a child, or if either of you have been through a divorce, it is important to tell the prospective Officiant your situation during your first phone conversation. Some officiants will reject you immediately, or express other expectations and it is better to find this out soon. Consider these factors when deciding if this is the Officiant you want.

What about premarital counseling?

Some couples want counseling, and others do not feel it is necessary. Some ministers offer excellent counseling programs, but others may pressure you into "counseling" programs that ask you to sign a tithing agreement or make a commitment to join a particular church and attend faithfully every week. Counseling programs are only as good as your willingness to deeply participate. Some people definitely benefit from them, but many do not, especially if you are simply fulfilling an obligation by attending the sessions.

How many meetings will you have?

Some officiants say no meeting is necessary, that he or she will just show up for the wedding and you can run your own rehearsal. Others want you to go through extensive premarital counseling. Some will offer one or two preparatory meetings and a rehearsal. Some are even unwilling to meet with you in person if you are just "shopping around." What do you want? Can the Officiant meet your wishes? Will the Officiant be available to talk by phone as questions arise?

Will the Officiant run the rehearsal?

An experienced Officiant at your wedding rehearsal can be very helpful, but he or she may not be available at the scheduled time. If the minister is unable or unwilling to attend the rehearsal, will other arrangements be made for someone to lead your wedding party through the steps? For more elaborate weddings, it is important to have someone available to guide you and your attendees through the ceremony, so that you know what to expect. Also, ask the minister if it is okay for the two of you to face one another during the ceremony (your guests will be able to see your faces instead of your backs).

How will the Officiant be dressed?

Some officiants will wear a suit (black suits are best, because they blend in with any color scheme). Others wear robes. Ask to see the robe, or at least a picture, to see if it looks suitable for your wedding day. If it is the wrong color for your wedding, or if it has prominent religious symbols which might offend some family members, ask the Officiant if he or she would consider wearing a plain suit instead.

How elaborate will the ceremony preparations be?

Many officiants have only one ceremony they offer. Be sure you get to read their ceremony and make sure it harmonizes with what you want said at your wedding. Ask if they also have an impromptu sermon they will add, or if what you see is what you'll get. Others have a few simple choices (with the option of you adding some of your own ideas) so you can create the ceremony that most speaks to you. Still others want to sit down and design an elaborate, customized wedding just for you. Ask how long they think the ceremony itself will take; this is important information for your facility, photographer, caterer, etc. You may prefer something simpler than what the Officiant is offering, or more flexible: whatever you want let the Officiant know up front.

Do you feel taken care of?

Many people feel that they have to meet a minister's standards, and in some religious traditions this is entirely valid. But remember, the original meaning of the word "minister" is "servant." Is the minister serving your needs on your big day? Are you comfortable in the minister's presence, or do you always feel like you are hiding things so as not to arouse his or her disapproval? Do you feel that you are jumping through hoops to win your prospective Officiant's favor? Find a minister who is eager to serve you, and your wedding day will be a beautiful one for everyone.

