

FREE PLANNING WORKBOOK

Wedding Planning Starter Workbook

Define the priorities, boundaries, and first decisions that give your wedding a realistic shape — before detailed planning begins.

FROM WEDDING DAY TO EVERYDAY

Build the Foundation First

This workbook follows decision dependency, not a monthly calendar. Complete each section only far enough to make the next commitment responsibly.

WORK IN ORDER

Earlier answers create the boundaries for later choices. If a decision is blocked, return to the information it depends on.

USE RANGES

A working budget, guest-count range, and date window are more useful at the beginning than false precision.

STOP BEFORE DETAILS

Do not use early planning to finalize decor, seating, stationery quantities, or other decisions that depend on later information.

BY THE END, YOU WILL HAVE

- ☐ Three shared wedding priorities
- ☐ A realistic guest-count range
- ☐ A venue search filter
- ☐ A first vendor shortlist

- ☐ A working spending ceiling
- ☐ A location and date window
- ☐ A clear planning support decision
- ☐ A planning window that fits your wedding

KEEP THIS DISTINCTION

This workbook defines the wedding. Your date-based checklist will manage the tasks after the foundation is stable.

Start Separately

Each partner should answer independently before discussing the shared list. Name outcomes, not decorative objects.

PARTNER ONE

01 What I most want to protect

Why this matters to me

02 What I most want to protect

Why this matters to me

03 What I most want to protect

Why this matters to me

PARTNER TWO

01 What I most want to protect

Why this matters to me

02 What I most want to protect

Why this matters to me

03 What I most want to protect

Why this matters to me

A USEFUL PRIORITY SOUNDS LIKE

Protect the guest experience, keep the total spend below our ceiling, have the people closest to us present, or invest in a lasting photographic record.

Create the Shared Filter

Merge the two individual lists into three priorities strong enough to resolve real tradeoffs later.

01

SHARED PRIORITY

We will protect this by:

02

SHARED PRIORITY

We will protect this by:

03

SHARED PRIORITY

We will protect this by:

NON-NEGOTIABLES

NICE-TO-HAVES

DECISION FILTER

Does this choice protect one of our shared priorities, or does it compete with one? If it competes, what are we willing to trade?

Set a Working Spending Boundary

Begin with money that is genuinely available. Keep planned amounts separate from quotes, contracts, payments, and remaining balances.

SOURCE	CONFIRMED AMOUNT	EXPECTATIONS OR RESTRICTIONS
Couple contribution	\$	
Family contribution	\$	
Other confirmed funds	\$	
Working total	\$	

WHAT MUST THIS TOTAL COVER?

- ☐ Ceremony and reception
- ☐ Attire and alterations
- ☐ Pre-wedding events
- ☐ Taxes and service charges
- ☐ Travel or lodging
- ☐ Post-wedding costs

RESERVE AND BUFFER
AMOUNT OR PERCENTAGE

WHAT IT PROTECTS

OUR SPENDING RULE

When a new cost appears, we will decide what changes to make room for it instead of silently increasing the total.

WORKING CEILING

Our current maximum total is \$. We will revisit it only if confirmed money or the scope of the wedding changes.

Build a Range Before a Final List

Count people, not invitations. Include partners, children, likely plus-ones, and family names that are genuinely under consideration.

GUEST GROUP	LIKELY	POSSIBLE	MAXIMUM
Couple's core guests			
Family group one			
Family group two			
Friends and colleagues			
Plus-ones			
Children			
Other			

WORKING ESTIMATE

The number you expect to plan around now.

COMFORTABLE TARGET

The number that best protects your priorities.

TRUE CEILING

The maximum the budget and venue search can support.

GUEST-LIST RULE

Which relationship groups are included, and which exceptions could cause the list to expand one household at a time?

Compare the Real Event Around Each Place

Choose a broad location before becoming attached to one venue. Compare travel burden, access, market availability, and planning practicality.

FACTOR	OPTION A	OPTION B	OPTION C
City / region			
Who must travel?			
Accessibility			
Venue range			
Vendor market			
Lodging / transport			
Relative cost			
Planning in person			
Priority fit			

OUR PREFERRED LOCATION AND WHY

KEEP SEPARATE

Do not treat assumptions about season, weekday pricing, or travel cost as facts until a venue or provider confirms them.

Choose Flexibility Before One Exact Date

Use a season or range unless a specific date is a genuine constraint. The venue often determines the final date.

FIXED CONSTRAINTS
WORK, TRAVEL, CULTURE, RELIGION, OR ESSENTIAL ATTENDANCE

PREFERENCES
SEASON, MONTH, WEEKDAY, DAYLIGHT, OR WEATHER

THREE WORKABLE WINDOWS

WINDOW	START	END	WHY IT WORKS	CONFLICT TO CHECK
A				
B				
C				

PEOPLE WHOSE ATTENDANCE CAN MATERIALLY AFFECT THE WINDOW

DECISION
Our usable date window is _____ to _____. Our flexibility is: high / moderate / low.

Define the Wedding at the Right Level

Early style should filter venues and formality. It should not create a decor shopping list before the space is known.

THREE WORDS FOR HOW THE WEDDING SHOULD FEEL

BROAD DIRECTION

FORMALITY

- ☐ Casual
- ☐ Semi-formal
- ☐ Formal
- ☐ Black tie

SETTING

- ☐ Indoor
- ☐ Outdoor
- ☐ City
- ☐ Country / destination

ENERGY

- ☐ Quiet dinner
- ☐ Social gathering
- ☐ Dance-focused
- ☐ Weekend experience

THE GUEST EXPERIENCE SHOULD FEEL LIKE

NOT DECIDING YET

- ☐ Exact color palette
- ☐ Centerpiece design
- ☐ Signage style
- ☐ Tabletop details
- ☐ Decor quantities
- ☐ Seating layout

Decide Who Owns the Work

The right level of support depends on complexity, time, contracts, logistics, and who will run the day — not simply how formal the wedding is.

FUNCTION	CURRENT OWNER	COMFORT LEVEL	GAP OR SUPPORT NEEDED
Planning strategy		Low / Mid / High	
Budget control		Low / Mid / High	
Vendor research		Low / Mid / High	
Contracts and payments		Low / Mid / High	
Guest logistics		Low / Mid / High	
Timeline and handoff		Low / Mid / High	
Wedding-day execution		Low / Mid / High	

SUPPORT MODELS TO COMPARE

- ☐ Self-managed
- ☐ Full-service planner
- ☐ Partial planning
- ☐ Coordinator
- ☐ Venue coordinator only

OUR SUPPORT DECISION AND THE EXACT FUNCTION IT MUST COVER

DO NOT ASSUME

A venue coordinator protects the venue's responsibilities. Confirm in writing whether personal timeline, vendors, setup, and couple logistics are included.

Build the Search Filter Before the Shortlist

Evaluate the total event a venue creates — not only the rental fee or the gallery photographs.

MUST HAVE	PREFER	CAN COMPROMISE

CONFIRM BEFORE A SERIOUS COMPARISON

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Capacity for the real layout | ☐ Total practical event cost |
| ☐ Weather backup | ☐ Accessibility |
| ☐ Catering and bar rules | ☐ Included furniture / rentals |
| ☐ Vendor access and setup | ☐ End time and sound limits |
| ☐ Parking / transportation | ☐ Insurance and restrictions |
| ☐ Restrooms and utilities | ☐ Cleanup and breakdown |

OUR VENUE CEILING

The venue must support approximately _____ guests and allow the complete wedding plan to remain within our working ceiling of \$_____.

Compare the Whole Event

Use real proposals and written answers. A lower rental fee can still create a more expensive event after required services and rentals.

CRITERION	VENUE A	VENUE B	VENUE C
Name / location			
Usable dates			
Real layout capacity			
Venue fee			
Required catering / bar			
Required rentals			
Staffing / service			
Weather backup			
Access / end time			
Estimated total			
Priority fit			

BEST CURRENT OPTION AND WHAT STILL NEEDS VERIFICATION

Identify Who Matters First

Do not use one universal booking order. Prioritize each vendor by dependency, scarcity, and importance to your specific wedding.

THREE FILTERS

Dependency: what must be confirmed first? Scarcity: who can serve only one event on your date? Priority: which service protects a shared priority?

VENDOR / FUNCTION	DEPENDS ON	SCARCITY	PRIORITY	RESEARCH NEXT?
		Low / Mid / High	Low / Mid / High	Yes / Later
		Low / Mid / High	Low / Mid / High	Yes / Later
		Low / Mid / High	Low / Mid / High	Yes / Later
		Low / Mid / High	Low / Mid / High	Yes / Later
		Low / Mid / High	Low / Mid / High	Yes / Later
		Low / Mid / High	Low / Mid / High	Yes / Later

OUR FIRST THREE VENDOR SEARCHES

- 01
- 02
- 03

Create One Current Source of Truth

The system can use several tools, but every type of information needs one official home, one owner, and one update rule.

RECORD	OFFICIAL HOME	OWNER	UPDATE RULE
Master checklist			When status changes
Budget and payments			After every cost change
Guest record			When guest information changes
Vendor record			After every quote or booking
Contracts and files			When a new version arrives
Calendar			Immediately after confirmation
Decision log			When a final answer is approved

ONE COMMUNICATION RULE

Final vendor decisions, payment confirmations, timeline changes, and instructions another person must execute will never live only in a text message.

WEEKLY REVIEW

- ☐ What changed?
- ☐ What is due?
- ☐ What is blocked?
- ☐ What are our top three actions?

Fourteen Decisions in the Right Order

Real planning can overlap, but the dependencies remain. Check the status only when the answer is stable enough to unlock what follows.

01	Priorities Defines what the budget protects	☐	08	Venue + date Confirms the event structure	☐
02	Budget Creates a real spending boundary	☐	09	Key vendors Secures scarce priority services	☐
03	Guest count Controls capacity and variable costs	☐	10	Attire Fits venue, season, and formality	☐
04	Location Defines the market and travel burden	☐	11	Stationery Uses confirmed date and logistics	☐
05	Date window Creates usable availability	☐	12	Day-of timeline Connects real vendor constraints	☐
06	Style direction Filters venues and formality	☐	13	Seating Uses actual RSVPs and room plan	☐
07	Planning support Assigns ownership before commitments	☐	14	Final counts Turns estimates into commitments	☐

Compare Time, Choice, and Flexibility

More time usually protects choice. Less time requires faster foundational decisions and more flexibility — not a lower-quality wedding.

WINDOW	BEST FOR	MAIN CONSTRAINT	MOVE FAST ON
18+ months	High-demand dates, destination plans, complex logistics	Risk of premature detail decisions	Priorities, budget, guest count, venue strategy
12 months	Most full-scale local weddings	Popular venue and vendor availability	Venue, date, planner decision, priority vendors
9 months	Couples ready to decide early	Less time for extended comparison	Venue and scarce vendors
6 months	Flexible local weddings	Overlapping deadlines and availability	Venue and date together, key vendors, guest communication
3 months	Small, simple, availability-led weddings	Limited choice and recovery time	Every structural decision immediately

THE COMPRESSION RULE

Accelerate upstream decisions such as budget, guest count, venue, and vendors. Do not finalize downstream decisions such as seating before the information exists.

Choose the Window Your Wedding Needs

Use the questions below to identify lead-time pressure. The answer is a planning strategy, not a judgment about the wedding.

01

Do you need one exact date or a highly sought-after venue?

More lead time protects availability.

☐ Yes ☐ No

02

Will many guests travel or attend several hosted events?

Travel and multi-day logistics add dependencies.

☐ Yes ☐ No

03

Are custom garments, builds, or production elements essential?

Custom work adds design, approval, and fabrication time.

☐ Yes ☐ No

04

Do you need extra time to compare several options for major vendors?

More comparison time increases the lead-time you should protect.

☐ Yes ☐ No

05

Would limited flexibility make date, venue, vendor, or design changes difficult?

A Yes here increases lead-time pressure.

☐ Yes ☐ No

READ THE PATTERN

More Yes answers mean more lead-time pressure. Use the table on the previous page to choose the longest realistic window your constraints require. Flexibility can shorten that window.

This is a planning guide, not a score or a judgment about the wedding.

OUR PLANNING WINDOW

MONTHS AVAILABLE

TARGET WEDDING DATE

OUR FLEXIBILITY

☐ High

☐ Moderate

☐ Low

The Wedding We Are Planning

Transfer the clearest answer from each section. This becomes the brief you can use before serious venue and vendor conversations.

OUR THREE PRIORITIES

WORKING BUDGET CEILING

WORKING GUEST ESTIMATE / TRUE CEILING

GENERAL LOCATION

DATE WINDOW

STYLE IN THREE WORDS

PLANNING SUPPORT DECISION

FIRST VENDORS TO RESEARCH

OFFICIAL PLANNING SYSTEM

READY FOR THE NEXT STAGE

The foundation is ready when these answers are clear enough to compare real venues, request meaningful proposals, and begin a date-based checklist without guessing.

Turn Decisions Into Movement

Choose only the actions that unlock the next commitment. Optional details should not compete with unresolved structural decisions.

NEXT ACTION	OWNER	DEADLINE	DEPENDS ON	DONE
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐

OPEN DECISIONS

NEXT PLANNING REVIEW

DATE

THE THREE QUESTIONS TO RESOLVE

KEEP MOVING IN DEPENDENCY ORDER

Resolve the answer that is blocking the most other work. Then update the plan and choose the next commitment from current information.

NOTES & LOOSE ENDS

Notes

Use this space for reminders, questions, and anything you want to revisit.