

FREE RECEPTION WORKBOOK

Wedding Reception Planning & Finalization Workbook

Build the reception around layout, guest flow, food service, bar operations, rentals, entertainment, timeline, transportation, and final confirmation - then move every task from booking to decision to execution.

LAYOUT • SERVICE • FLOW • BOOK • DECIDE • CONFIRM

Build the Reception Around Dependencies

Venue, guest count, and room flow shape seating, catering, rentals, service, entertainment, and the timeline. Finalize in the order that prevents downstream rework.

1 BUILD THE FLOW

Start with venue, layout, arrival, seating, service routes, and the ceremony-to-reception transition.

2 BUILD THE SERVICE

Connect catering, bar, rentals, entertainment, dessert, and transportation to the actual guest count and room.

3 FINALIZE

Sort every open task by the action it still needs: BOOK, DECIDE, or CONFIRM.

CORE RULE

Near the wedding, the job shifts from making more choices to confirming that the choices already made are executable.

RECEPTION BASICS

Reception venue: _____ Reception date: _____

Guest count: _____ Start: _____ End: _____ Same venue? [] Yes [] No

Meal style: _____ Bar model: _____ Entertainment: _____

Reception Decision Dependency Map

Record what each area must produce, what it depends on, and who controls the current version.

Area	Decision / output	Vendor / owner	Depends on	Status
Venue & layout				
Guests & seating				
Catering				
Bar service				
Rentals				
Music / entertainment				
Reception timeline				
Toasts / speeches				
Cake / dessert				
Lighting / decor				
Transportation				
Cleanup / handoff				

Plan the Reception as a Guest Flow

Support arrival, seating, dinner, bar access, dancing, vendor service, accessible circulation, and exit without bottlenecks.

Zone / function	Location	Capacity / need	Guest path	Service / vendor path	Issue?
Guest entrance					
Cocktail area					
Dinner seating					
Bar					
Dance floor					
DJ / band					
Cake / dessert					
Restrooms					
Exit / transportation pickup					

Plan the Ceremony-to-Reception Transition

If ceremony and reception share a venue, turnover timing, guest holding, and vendor access can affect the entire reception sequence.

TRANSITION BASICS

Ceremony ends: _____ Cocktail hour begins: _____ Reception seating begins: _____

Room flip needed? ☐ Yes ☐ No Guest holding location: _____

Transition task	Owner	Start	Finish by	Depends on	Confirmed?
Move / reset ceremony chairs					
Install reception tables / linens					
Move florals / decor					
Reset audio / entertainment					
Open bar / cocktail service					
Guest direction / signage					

Translate Catering Into Operational Decisions

This page captures the information required to run meal service - not a second menu-selection worksheet.

Catering item	Our decision	Deadline	Owner / vendor	Confirmed?
Service style				
Final guest count				
Dietary count / accommodations				
Vendor meals				
Meal service start				
Expected service duration				
Kitchen / prep access				
Table service / buffet setup				
Water / coffee service				

FINAL COUNT SOURCE

Authoritative guest list / RSVP export: _____

Plan the Bar as a Service System

Bar format, staffing, venue rules, guest count, water service, and timing all affect reception flow and guest safety.

Bar element	Decision	Owner / vendor	Time / deadline	Confirmed?
Open / limited / cash / other				
Number of bars / service points				
Staffing level				
Opening time				
Last call				
Closing time				
Water / nonalcoholic options				
Venue alcohol restrictions				
Restocking / ice / glassware				

Fill the Gaps Between Venue, Caterer, and Rentals

Rent only what other vendors do not provide. Confirm quantities against the final guest count and actual floor plan.

Item	Venue provides	Caterer provides	Rental needed	Qty	Delivery	Pickup
Tables						
Chairs						
Linens						
China						
Glassware						
Flatware						
Bar equipment						
Lounge / specialty						
Lighting / production						

Confirm Seating Only When the Inputs Are Ready

Use this page as a readiness check. Keep individual guests and seat assignments in the master guest-list and seating systems.

READINESS CHECK

- ☐ Final RSVPs are in
- ☐ Final guest count is current
- ☐ Venue floor plan is final
- ☐ Table types / capacities are final
- ☐ VIP / family tables are identified
- ☐ Accessibility seating is confirmed
- ☐ High chairs / child seating is confirmed
- ☐ Meal indicators are handled, if needed
- ☐ Vendor / catering export is generated
- ☐ Last-minute cancellation process is defined

SEATING HANDOFF

Master seating file / tool: _____

Version / date: _____ Owner: _____

Final table count: _____ Final seated guest count: _____

Who receives the final export? _____

Connect Entertainment to Technical and Timeline Needs

Booking the vendor is only one step. Confirm sound, power, placement, setup, cues, timing, and venue restrictions.

Need	Decision / detail	Vendor / owner	Setup / cue time	Confirmed?
DJ / band / entertainment				
Stage / booth location				
Power requirements				
Sound restrictions / curfew				
Microphones				
Dance floor				
Lighting				
Soundcheck				
Special songs / moments				

Build the Reception Event Sequence

Place fixed service points first, then fit entrances, speeches, dances, dessert, entertainment, and transitions around them.

Order / moment	Target time	Duration	Cue owner	Vendor dependency
1 Guest entry / seating				
2 Couple / wedding party entrance				
3 First dance / opening moment				
4 Meal service				
5 Toasts / speeches				
6 Parent / formal dances				
7 Open dancing				
8 Cake / dessert				
9 Last call				
10 Final song / exit				

Plan Speaking Moments as Timeline Events

A toast needs a speaker, order, cue, microphone, approximate duration, and a place in the service flow.

Speaker	Order	Introduced by	Approx. duration	Mic?	Cue owner	Confirmed?

TOAST PLACEMENT

Best point in meal / program: _____

Caterer, DJ, band, or microphone dependency: _____

Plan Dessert as Delivery, Display, Cutting, and Service

The reception plan needs dessert logistics - not a second cake-design worksheet.

Operational item	Decision / detail	Owner / vendor	Time	Confirmed
Delivery window				
Receiver				
Display location				
Refrigeration / storage				
Cutting moment				
Who cuts / plates				
Plates / forks / serveware				
Leftovers				
Top-tier destination				

Connect Transportation to the Reception End Time

Guests need a clear route to the venue and a safe, understandable way home - especially when alcohol is served or the venue is remote.

Route / service	Pickup point	Departure	Return / loop	Accessible?	Dispatch contact

END-OF-NIGHT TRANSPORT

- [] Last guest departure time is known [] Late / early option exists
- [] Vendor transport is separate, if needed [] Pickup area is clearly marked
- [] Dispatch contact has final timeline [] Transportation aligns with venue curfew

BOOK - Secure Contracted Vendors and Services

A BOOK task is not complete until the service is secured under the agreed process. Booking does not mean every detail is final.

Book task	Vendor	Contract / confirmation	Deposit	Deadline	Status
Reception venue					
Catering					
Bar service					
Music / entertainment					
Rentals					
Cake / dessert					
Transportation					
Other reception service					

NEXT ACTION

After booking, most services still move into DECIDE and later CONFIRM.

DECIDE - Give Vendors the Choices They Still Need

A DECIDE task changes how a booked service will actually be delivered.

Decision	Our choice	Who needs it	Decision deadline	Final?
Catering service style				
Bar format				
Seating format				
Lighting approach				
Signage / guest direction				
Toast order				
Reception sequence				
Cake / dessert service				
Transportation model				

CONFIRM - Lock the Final Operational Version

Reception planning now shifts from choosing to verifying. Confirm the version every vendor and decision-maker should use.

Confirmation	Owner	Vendor / venue	Deadline	Confirmed?	Final-week recheck
Final headcount					
Final seating / table layout					
Vendor arrival times					
Rental quantities / delivery					
Meal / bar service timing					
Music / speech cues					
Cake / dessert timing					
Transportation schedule					
Final vendor payments					
Setup / cleanup owners					
Final master timeline distributed					

Final Reception Confirmation Grid

Use this as the last operational pass in the final two to four weeks and again in the final week.

Area	Owner	Current version / source	Deadline	Confirmed?	Issue / action
Venue & layout					
Catering					
Bar					
Rentals					
Seating					
Entertainment					
Timeline					
Toasts					
Cake / dessert					
Transportation					
Setup / cleanup					

Reception Ready-to-Execute Check

The reception is ready when vendors and the coordinator can execute one current plan without reopening settled decisions.

FINAL VERIFICATION

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Layout works at the final guest count | ☐ Catering count and timing are confirmed |
| ☐ Bar staffing and last call are confirmed | ☐ Rental quantities and pickup are confirmed |
| ☐ Seating export uses final RSVP data | ☐ Entertainment setup and cues are confirmed |
| ☐ Reception event sequence is final | ☐ Toast speakers and order are confirmed |
| ☐ Dessert delivery and service are confirmed | ☐ Guest transport aligns with end time |
| ☐ Wedding-week payments have owners | ☐ Setup / cleanup owners are named |
| ☐ One final timeline has been distributed | ☐ Venue curfew and final exit are confirmed |

FINAL STATUS

[] READY TO EXECUTE [] OPEN ITEMS REMAIN

Open item / owner / deadline: _____

Final reception version date: _____ Final approver: _____

Reception & Finalization Notes

Use this page for unresolved vendor questions, service changes, transportation follow-ups, cue adjustments, payment handoffs, and final reception details that still need an owner.