

# wedding etiquette guide



Etiquette makes it easy to choose gracious wording for your wedding correspondence and to organize a celebration that guests will long remember. The tips in this booklet have been carefully compiled from our archive of expert information and creative ideas. Refer to them as you personalize your Martha Stewart Crafts™ wedding products, an assortment that includes coordinated invitations, note cards, place cards, programs, and favors, as well as punches, stamps, and themed embellishments. For helpful templates, suggested wording, and to easily customize and print your stationery, visit [marthastewartcrafts.com/print](http://marthastewartcrafts.com/print).

## wedding invitations

Addressing, stuffing, and posting your invitations requires advance planning and attention to detail. Organize about a month before your desired send-out date. This should be six to eight weeks before your wedding date, allowing guests adequate time to respond and ensuring that you will get a reliable head count a week or two before the event.

### Addressing a Wedding Invitation

Your guests' names should be written in full on outer envelopes—no nicknames or initials. Use the appropriate social titles as well, such as addressing married couples as "Mr. and Mrs." It gets a little tricky when husband, wife, or both have different professional titles. If the husband is a doctor, for example, the titles will appear as "Doctor and Mrs."; if the wife is a doctor, her full name would come first, as in "Doctor Sally Carter and Mr. John Carter."

Spell out all words in an address on your envelopes. Write "Street" rather than "St.", for example, and "Saint Paul, Minnesota" rather than "St. Paul, MN". House numbers smaller than twenty should also be spelled out, as should all words in the return address. The preferred place for printing the return address is on the envelope's back flap.

### Names and Titles

#### MARRIED COUPLES

**FORMAL** — A formal envelope incorporates social titles and the husband's first name on the outer envelope, and only the titles and last name on the inner one.

All the words, including the state and the house number—if it is less than twenty—are written out.

**INFORMAL** — To some couples, omitting wives' first names feels too old-fashioned; including the first names of both husband and wife after their titles is appropriate. The house number, even though it is less than twenty, can be written as a numeral for a less formal feeling. And in keeping with a more personal style, the couple are addressed by their first names on the inner envelope.

**DIFFERENT LAST NAMES** — When a husband and wife have different last names, the wife's name is traditionally written first. Connecting the couple's names by the word "and" implies marriage. For an unmarried couple that lives together, names should be written on separate lines without the word "and." On the inner envelope, both are addressed by their titles and respective last names.

#### FAMILIES AND SINGLE GUESTS

**WITH CHILDREN, FORMAL** — The outer envelope is identical to that of a couple without children—its writing, which is for the purposes of the post office, should be as simple and clear as possible. On the inner envelope, the name and title of each invited guest in the household is written out. A boy under the age of 13 is "Master," not "Mr." Girls and young women under age 18 are called "Miss."

**WITH CHILDREN, INFORMAL** — Parents' first names are both used on a less traditional version of the outer envelope. For the inner one, the parents' and children's first names are written without titles.

**SINGLE GUESTS** — For a single woman, either "Ms." or "Miss" is appropriate; many people find the former preferable. The guest's name is the only one that appears on the outer envelope. On the inner envelope, however, write the guest's name followed by "and Guest." If you know whom he or she will be bringing, it's more personal to include that person's name on a separate line.



**TIP:** You can take your invitations to the post office and request that they be hand-canceled. Machines print bar codes on the envelopes, but hand-canceling—just marking each stamp—keeps invitations neat and prevents damage that machines can cause.

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## save-the-date cards

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Save-the-date cards are helpful, particularly if many guests will have to travel to the wedding, if it will take place during a busy holiday weekend, or if accommodations nearby are scarce. Send save-the-date cards four to six months before the wedding, or even earlier if extensive travel plans must be arranged.

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## thank-you notes

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Buy thank-you cards early, so you have them on hand. When you open presents, immediately record who gave you what, either in a log or right on the gift cards. Ideally, you should acknowledge every present immediately; writing a note the day you receive it is best, but sending it within two weeks is also acceptable. Of course, the period surrounding your wedding is a busy time; if you fall behind, just make every effort to send a thank you as soon as you can—but no later than three months after the event.



**TIP:** Ask what stamps are available at your local post office, or browse through a wider variety at the U.S. Postal Service website: [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com). "Love" stamps, in one-ounce and two-ounce rates, are always available, so you can match the stamps on your invitations and reply cards.

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## the wedding program

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A wedding program has no strict format. The most basic program guides guests through the ceremony, listing the order of the service as well as titles and authorship information of readings and songs. The names of the officiant, attendants, and others who have a role in the wedding are usually included as well.

To further personalize the program, after each participant's name, add a brief description of his or her relationship to the bride and groom; this will introduce them to your guests. You can pay tribute to deceased relatives or close friends by printing a dedication to them in the program or explaining that a certain activity—a candle lighting, for example—is being done in their honor. You might also include a favorite poem or quotation that expresses your feelings, or write a few words of thanks to demonstrate your gratitude to family and friends.



**TIP:** To be sure programs aren't missed, display them in a place each guest will pass when entering the ceremony, have the ushers distribute them as the guests are being seated, or leave one on each seat beforehand.


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## wedding favors

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Favors are gifts for your guests, sweet tokens of appreciation for their participation in one of life's most joyous occasions. Almost anything you like can be made into a favor as long as it is pleasing, portable, and available in multiples. Food-themed favors are always well received. Heart-shaped cookies or chocolates, for instance, are simple and quite fitting; nuts, fruit, and loose tea are unusual and delightful. Novel favors that take a creative approach can be a wonderful way to carry out an overall theme or color scheme.

The best favors are those that double as decorations for a reception or shower. When arranged on a table surrounded by pillar candles or piled high, one on top of the next in baskets or bowls, favors can brighten an entry hall, embellish a traditional table setting, or create impact in an otherwise bare alcove. A side table adorned with artfully arrayed favors can be so attractive that you may need to remind your guests that these small decorations are meant to be taken home when the party ends. It's all in the way they're presented. Favors may be small, but done right, they're a part of the wedding your guests won't easily forget.

 TIP: Though often presented at place settings or displayed on a table by the door, favors can be offered in another way that is both impressive and economical: grouped together as centerpieces. Even if you spend a bit more on the favors themselves, you will most likely save money overall by forgoing traditional floral arrangements.

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## guest book tips

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### Selecting the Writing Instrument

Perhaps you'll want to provide an heirloom fountain pen to add a bit of nostalgia to the signing ritual. On the other hand, groups of colored pencils and markers are just the thing to inspire the artist in each of your guests. No matter which type of pen or pencil you set out, make sure it's easy to work with. A calligraphy pen, for instance, might be difficult to wield for those who aren't used to its unusual tip. Also, have backups available; assign a bridesmaid or groomsman to check periodically that pencil leads haven't snapped or pens run dry, so you don't miss out on any good wishes.

### Signing the Book

How you handle the actual signing of the guest book depends on the size and style of your wedding. For small, intimate celebrations, it's appropriate to set the guest book out on a table and let guests sign it at their leisure during the reception. For a large wedding, you might leave the book out until halfway through the reception, then recruit someone to take it from table to table so that guests who haven't signed yet will have an opportunity to do so. This is an excellent job for an outgoing young attendant or relative.



TIP: To personalize a ready-made guest book, try affixing your invitation to the cover or embossing the bottom corner of each page with your monogram.

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## place cards and seating cards

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Place cards may seem like a tiny detail, but their role is important. At most weddings, many people will be meeting for the first time, and place cards can help guests feel more at ease—it's nice for them to have an assigned seat rather than scrambling to find a spot. And for guests who have just met, place cards are friendly reminders of neighbors' names.

Typically, seating cards display a guest's name and table number and are arranged on a special table near the entrance to the reception. Even though the cards are practical, they have a romantic past. In Edwardian times they were known as escort cards—instead of a table number, they bore the hand-written name of the lady each gentleman would escort to dinner.

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## announcements

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For people whom you are unable to invite to your wedding, you can send a printed note telling them of your marriage after it happens (the desire is to share your happy news; they are in no way obliged to buy a gift). Small weddings and elopements are the most common events for which printed wedding announcements are sent. The cards are usually mailed by a bridesmaid or other friend or family member the day after the ceremony to those not included on the guest list.



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