



## TEN TIPS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR PHOTOS

BY: KENDRA DOLSON / [LITTLE BLUE BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY](#)

Pst - new brides and grooms! How's wedding planning going? I know that you probably haven't planned many weddings before – so I am here to help! As a wedding photographer, it's no secret that I have done the whole wedding thing a few times, and I am here to offer a little bit of insight into your day in the interest of your photos.

Here are ten ways that you can help your photographer get the best wedding photos possible.





**One. Getting ready space.** Getting ready photos are always some of my favorite photos of any elopement or wedding. As I am a natural light/candid photographer, I just swoon over those beautiful intimate shots of the bride and/or groom preparing for the best day ever with closest friends and family. However – there are a few things that can make these photos a little less swoon-worthy.

**A CLUTTERED SPACE.** Most of the time, I simply work around totes of clothes and shoe boxes and respect the fact that nearly every wedding day is pure chaos, BUT unsightly fast food wrappers and brightly colored trash and clutter can make getting ready photos a challenge. Help your photographer out by keeping clutter to one small corner of the room and throwing away fast food cups and wrappers. It will save time after the photographer arrives and help your photos to be as beautiful (and clean) as possible!

**LIGHTING AND WALL COLOR.** Natural light/window light is so important! Wall color is a close second. White or light neutral colored walls help so much and really photograph beautifully. Just as clutter and trash can make your getting ready photos less clean, so can bad lighting and wall color. As a natural light photographer, the first thing I do when I get to an indoor location (such as a hotel room or bridal suite) is turn off all the lights. This might seem weird, but indoor lighting is often very orange compared to window light and will cast yucky colors, creating weird skin tones and a muddy looking set of photos. The same goes for crazy colored walls – red, bright green, orange, brick, orangey wood, or other brightly colored walls will leave additional color cast and create a less than clean looking set of photos. My suggestion is to choose a very clean, neutral setting for the “getting ready” portion of the day. White and gray are always a safe bet, and hotel rooms (or a good Airbnb) often have fabulous window light.

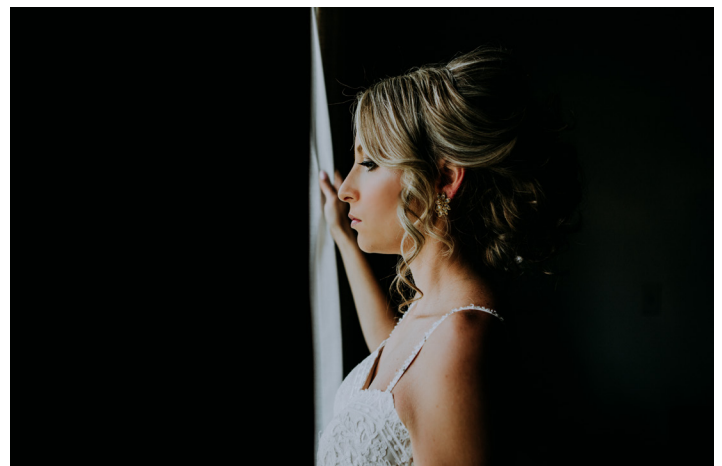
In the past, when choosing a hotel for boudoir photos, I simply check out the room photos on the hotel’s website to view the color palette, and I pick the room that is most neutral with the best window light – bonus points if there is a window near the bed! Plus – good light will also help out your makeup artist! Don’t think that a hotel is your only option – I love when a bride will get ready in her family home where she grew up or somewhere else sentimental. Last year, a bride did this, and we hung her dress next to her parents’ wedding photo, which made the “standard dress photo” a little more meaningful.

**SO WHAT IS COVERED DURING THIS GETTING READY TIME?** First thing when I arrive, I will ask for the dress, shoes, flowers, jewelry, stationary (such as wedding invites and programs), and any other accessories (clutch, perfume, rings, etc.), and I will spend 15 minutes photographing all of these items wherever I think the light is best. That might mean I take everything outside or maybe I will set everything up by the nearest window. I may also slip out to take photos of any décor and the grounds if we are already at the ceremony/reception venue.

After that, I will take candid photos of everyone getting ready, maybe a few of all of the girls in their fancy robes, and really just be a fly on the wall as the next half hour unfolds.

I may pop out to take some photos of the guys getting ready for 15 minutes if they are in the same place, and I may take this opportunity to take posed groom + groomsmen shots as well.

Then comes time for the bride to get her dress on + a few bridal portraits + posed bride and bridesmaid photos, if there is time.



**Bonus tip:** Bring details like wedding invites and other personal items with you when getting ready. While I focus mainly on emotion in my photos, I also love little detail shots! You can also ask your florist to leave a few petals and extra flowers and greenery behind to include in and dress up these shots!



**Two. Have a first look.** I know this isn’t always a popular idea, and it is totally fine if you are set on not seeing each other until you walk down the aisle, but here are a few reasons you might want to do a first look:

**IT FREES UP SO MUCH TIME** and allows you to actually attend your cocktail hour. As you will see in the sample timeline a few points down, having a first look means that you get the bulk of your photos done before the ceremony, meaning your makeup and hair are still fresh, and you can mingle with guests and have a drink instead of spending an hour taking photos.

**LESS STRESS** – the one thing that every bride and groom have told me after their first look is how freeing it is! There is less pressure on the “first look” as you see each other at the end of the aisle, and you can face the rest of your wedding day together. There is so much stress and anticipation surrounding the ceremony itself, and by doing a first look, you will feel so much more relaxed, and quite frankly, have better photos. You also know that after your ceremony, you can chill and party rather than pose for an hour of photos.

**THE EMOTION.** I highly suggest that the first look by just the two of you with your photographer. This way, you can be real with each other. I have seen far more emotion and tears during first looks than during any ceremony (you know, when you have 100+ eyes on you).



If you are having a first look, ask your photographer for location suggestions! Often, first looks fall during the worst, most harsh sun times of the day. What does this mean? It means make sure you choose a location that has at least some shade, and take advantage of your photographer's knowledge of what makes a good photo – show them potential locations and ensure they are confident that your selection will allow for the best photos.



**BRIDAL PARTY PHOTOS WORK BEST BEFORE THE CEREMONY**, and so do family photos. After the ceremony, it is often difficult to get everyone together for photo time. Grandparents are already making their way to the reception, and your wedding party is probably heading for the bar.



**Three. Ask your photographer if they have preferred vendors** – especially videographers. Also ask if they have vendors who they will NOT work with. I have worked weddings alongside some pretty awesome vendors...and also some not so awesome ones. Why? I have worked with vendors who hindered my ability to produce photos like those in my portfolio and others who have helped! If we have worked together in the past and know that we make an awesome team – why not take advantage of a proven wedding team?

**Four. Ceremony space.** Obviously your ceremony space is an important decision, one that requires a good deal of thought and consideration. Once again, you can ask your photographer. Look at his or her portfolio. Which wedding ceremonies stick out to you and why? Do you like the colors? Do you like the light? Do you like the background? Here are a few key things to take into consideration when selecting your ceremony spot: **LIGHT AND SUN POSITION.** Often, your venue coordinator will know where the sun typically falls during ceremonies. Things that make photographing a ceremony very difficult are: direct sun/spotty sun on part of the wedding party, but not the whole thing (maybe the bride is in full blazing sun, but the groom is in full shade), sun at the “high noon” position (basically directly overhead so that it creates fabulous black hole shadows over everyone's eyes in photos) – or if you are indoors, low light, or orange light (or colorful or dark walls and/or ceilings) and rules and regulations that limit the photographer's ability to use flash or go in certain places.

**RULES AND REGULATIONS.** Many ceremony venues have rules and limitations for photographers. Be sure to inquire about these before booking as it will determine the kind of photos that you are able to get from your ceremony. Your photographer may not be allowed to use a flash (which may be completely fine if there are windows), or your photographer may not be able to go past a certain point – in some cases, your photographer may not be allowed to enter the ceremony space at all! Evaluate your photo priorities, and determine what works best for you.





**Five. Family photo space.** During family photo time, I suggest a clean, uncluttered background that is close to a solid color or pattern. If you are getting married in a church, it may be best to do the photos outside on the steps if the lighting or wall color isn't great inside.

**Another suggestion: Limit family photos to 10 groups.**

Consider which family groupings are most important to you, and stick to that. Family photo time is often the most exhausting and frustrating portion of the day (for everyone). I always send out a questionnaire a few weeks before weddings for brides and grooms to fill out. Included in that questionnaire is a place to list all family members wanted present for photos. This is a great way to save yourself stress on the actual wedding day – make your list of 10 groups, and get that list into the hands of your photographer. Here is an example of a list of 10:

- Bride and groom with **both sets of parents**
- Bride and groom with **bride's parents**
- Bride and groom with **groom's parents**
- Bride and groom with **bride's immediate family**
- Bride and groom with **groom's immediate family**
- Bride and groom with **bride's immediate family + grandparents**
- Bride and groom with **groom's immediate family + grandparents**
- Bride and groom with **groom's grandparents**
- Bride and groom with **bride's grandparents**
- One extra combination – obviously, things can change if there is divorce, remarriage, etc.

**Six. Timeline.** This probably should be number one. In order for you to truly get all of the photos that you want, you first need to allow time for those photos! This seems like kind of an obvious thing, but I have photographer friends who were only allotted 5 minutes for bride and groom portraits – needless to say, the couple were a little disappointed at the lack of variety in poses and locations in their beautiful photos. I am writing this to help you avoid those feelings of disappointment. So what should your timeline look like? Typically, here is how long various photo sets take:

**Getting ready: 90 minutes**

**First look: 30-45 minutes**

**Family: 20 minutes**

**Bridal party: 20 minutes**

**Bride and groom photos: 30-60 minutes**

Allowing this amount of time for each group will greatly help your photographer get all of those beautiful photos that you have seen on their website and portfolio. To see that put into action, here is a sample of a basic timeline:

**2:00 GETTING READY**

**3:30 FIRST LOOK**

**4:00 FAMILY PHOTOS**

**4:20 BRIDAL PARTY**

**5:00 CEREMONY**

**6:00 BRIDE AND GROOM PHOTOS**

**6:30 WEDDING PARTY ENTRANCE TO RECEPTION**

**8:30 CAKE CUTTING + FIRST DANCES**

Of course, you may not choose to do things exactly in this order, and every wedding is different, but this is a great start to having a smooth day!

**A side note:** You might be wondering why there is time for a first look and also bride and groom photos following the ceremony – recommend both! Why? For one, who doesn't want more photos, right? Plus, this gives you the option to have multiple locations, AND you are so much more relaxed after the ceremony, which always results in better, more beautiful photos. I also suggest keeping this photo time in mind when planning your entire wedding timeline! It's no secret that bride and groom portraits are my favorite, and they will be what you hang on your wall and share on Facebook, so try to allow at least 30 minutes for these photos. This will allow you to have different background and a variety of poses + more time + more photos!

Bonus tip: The closer to sunset or sunrise, the better! The lower the sun, the softer and more beautiful the light. (Ahem, less chance for super dark black hole shadows over your eyes and harsh highlights and shadows).

**\*\*I should note that this is my timeline as a photographer – and I usually show up near the end of hair and makeup time. A makeup artist friend of mine highly recommends allowing two hours for hair and makeup for the bride + an hour per person for makeup. That means if you have 4 bridesmaids, allow for 5 hours for makeup for yourself and all 4 girls + 1 more hour for hair per person (if you have one makeup artist and one hair stylist). If you want it done in less time, request to hire an additional makeup artist + hair stylist to cut the job in half!**

**Seven. Take advantage of good light!** While your ceremony time might not allow for the best light/time of day for portraits (directly before or after), there is usually time right after dinner when you might consider going back out for a few more shots at golden hour! Allowing a little time for this might also be very important if other events ran off schedule earlier in the day, and maybe you weren't able to get very many bride and groom portraits before the reception – did you know that some reception venues will bill the couple extra if they are late to their reception entrance? Do a little Googling and find out when sunset is, and plan a little time right around then for 15 minutes or so of photos!

Because this next photo wouldn't have happened if we hadn't slipped away after dinner! >>



**Eight. Feed your photographer at the reception.** Usually, by the time dinner and the reception roll around, we have been on our feet for 5 or 6 hours! A fed photographer is a happy photographer, and a happy photographer takes good photos.

**Nine. Have an unplugged wedding.** This is such a big topic that I have written an entire article about it on the next page.

(Go read it!)

(Not yet – I have one more point).

**Ten. Relax and enjoy your wedding day!** This is more important that you might think – a happy and relaxed couple photograph well, especially for those candid moments in between posed photos. You want to look back on your wedding photos and see the joy and happiness that you felt – so allow yourself to feel those emotions and let them shine through your photos. Really and truly, I want my couples to forget that I am there and allow me to simply capture the natural interactions between them and their closest friends and family!

## WHY HAVE AN UNPLUGGED WEDDING

With advances in technology, we have seen more and more cell phones on the wedding scene. It's no secret, really, but what many people don't realize is how big of an impact these devices can have on your photos. I could go on and on about this subject, but there are a couple key things to think about when considering having an "unplugged" wedding.

**First - what is an unplugged wedding?** It is a wedding where, at the request of the bride and groom, guests are asked to turn off their cell phones and other picture taking devices and put them away. Why? A couple reasons.

**AS A BRIDE AND GROOM, YOU WANT YOUR GUESTS TO BE FULLY PRESENT** rather than looking at a phone screen. This seems obvious, but I have seen countless photos of what was supposed to be a sweet, emotional moment, ruined by a phone. I have taken "first look" photos where the bride makes her entrance, and what was supposed to be a photo of a reaction (say, from the mother of the groom, for example) ended up being a photo of a cell phone in front of a face.

That might not bother you too much, but here is a word from a bride who did ask her guests to shut off their phones and her thoughts on the matter:

"As a bride who asked my guests not to use their cell phones during the ceremony, I asked because I had seen the photos of people using their phones and my thought was 'they are more interested in getting a good photo than actually listening to our vows and witnessing our first kiss- a moment that we wanted them to share with us and they aren't even fully paying attention.' We invited the people we wanted to share the most intimate moment of our lives with and if we had allowed cell phones during our ceremony, it would have felt like they weren't there for us in the way we would have wished.

In addition, before we got into the ceremony part, our officiant had us turn around and face everyone and essentially acknowledge that we were all there together and this most amazing thing was about to happen. And I got to see everyone's faces and tears and we all shared that together. I get chills thinking about it. That wouldn't have happened if people were looking at their phones."

So how did she communicate this to her guests?

"We had a note in our programs. It said 'We are so honored that you have taken the time to witness our commitment to one another and the beautiful moments that will unfold today. We invite you to be fully present with us during the ceremony and kindly ask you to turn off all cell phones and cameras.' Our officiant also was good about it and cracked a joke saying that the bride and groom had expressed the wish that everyone would be fully present with them during the ceremony and please reserve your cell phone use for the reception. Professional photographs were being taken and will be shared with all the guests. And if anyone needed counseling services regarding cell phone use, he'd be around after the service to discuss this most serious matter or something like that. It was funny and everyone laughed and it wasn't a big deal at all. No one complained."

You might think that your guests (or you) will be able to pay attention while snapping a quick photo- but I know first hand how much focus and attention it takes to get the perfect shot. If you are focusing on taking a photo- that is where your focus is.

**GUESTS WITH PHONES AND CAMERAS WILL GET IN THE WAY.** I guarantee it. Whether it is a guest hanging out into the middle of the aisle and blocking my shot or someone asking the bride and groom to stop and pose during our allotted time for photos, I have seen many brides and grooms who have been shorted photos (or received partially blocked photos) because of guests with phones or cameras.