



Ceremony Planning Questionnaire

To help you focus your thoughts and generate ideas for the ceremony you've requested, please answer the following questions and return this to me. The next step will then be for us to talk in person or over the phone to create the ceremony. If you would like to symbolize something in the ceremony, but you aren't sure how, we can work together on that. These questions are a starting place. Please read through all the questions for an overview before you begin writing. If there is not enough room for your thoughts in the space provided, please continue on another sheet of paper. In that event, please number your responses to correspond with the question number.

Background

What the ceremony is about — Why

1. Describe any pertinent events or stories that led to the desire/need for this ceremony, e.g., the story of meeting your fiancé and deciding to marry (wedding), the circumstances leading to this new job (office blessing or ceremony of employment transition), the story of life employment and its significance (retirement ceremony), any wonderful stories about your pregnancy or the decision to have a child (baptism or new parent ceremony), etc.

Is there anything related to your story that you would like to share or symbolize in the ceremony?
If so, how?

2. Describe how you imagine your life will be different after the ceremony. What positive expectations do we want to help embody/manifest/catalyze with the ceremony? Describe the new phase you will now be 'moving into' in your life.

Is there any way this vision can be symbolized or incorporated into the ceremony? If so, how?

3. What does this life change (marriage, new job, motherhood/fatherhood, etc.) mean to you? How do you feel about it?

Are there any messages, rituals, symbols, analogies, songs, poems, etc., reflecting these feelings that can be shared in the ceremony? Who will share them?

4. What do you want to accomplish with the ceremony? (Legality, self-empowerment, closure, initiation, etc.)

5. Do you have any specific goals for yourself/yourselves in your (marriage, new job, parenting, retirement, etc.)?

Is there a way to incorporate those goals into the ceremony?

Specifics

When, Where, Who, How, What

When

6. When will the ceremony take place? (Date and time)

Is there any specific significance of the date and time, e.g., the season, a holiday, an anniversary, etc.? Why? Would you like that special meaning explained in the ceremony?

Where

7. Where will the ceremony take place? (Indoors, outdoors, church, home, office, country club, special location, etc.) If the location has special significance, what is that? Would this be explained in the ceremony? (E.g. a couple getting married at the place they met or became engaged.)

Who

8. Who else will be participating in the ceremony? How? E.g., Do you have children or other significant people whom you would like to participate in the actual ceremony? How might they take part?
9. Will there be witnesses, e.g., the two witnesses who sign the legal marriage certificate? If so, who? Will they be acknowledged in any way in the ceremony or listed in a program?

10. Who will be invited to attend the ceremony (family, friends, one's church community or other community, etc.)?

Will the ceremony be big or small (number of expected guests)?

Will it be public or private? (Some ceremonies are by invitation only. Some, such as funerals/memorials, may be listed in a local paper as open to the public for whoever knew the deceased in any way.)

11. Are there any loved ones who are unable to attend who you would like to acknowledge in their absence? If so, how?
12. Are you part of a community/organization that is a significant part of your life? Would you want to include something in the ceremony that is relevant or meaningful to that organization? If so, what? (E.g., at the memorial service/funeral of a member of the V.F.W., fellow V.F.W. members often share readings pertinent to that connection, take part in the eulogy, and do a 21-gun salute at the cemetery, if there is a grave-side service.)

How

13. What mood do you want to create with the words, actions and rituals, e.g., formal or informal, joyous or thoughtful and reserved, etc.?
14. Describe how you have imagined the ceremony in your mind when you think about it. Paint me a mental picture of how you would like it to be. (This may be different from the next question about the actual physical appearance of the place.)

15. What will the setting be like? If you know the layout of the ceremony location and know how you would like the area to be arranged, drawing a diagram of the layout you would like would be helpful. The following questions may clarify your ideas about this:

Will there be an altar? Will there be any ornaments or objects of significance in the setting? Any to be actively incorporated into the ceremony? If so, what and how?

Where and how will the guest be situated? Seated or standing?
If seated, will the layout be theater style or a circle or...?

Draw your diagram here:

16. Will there be ushers to seat the guests? If so, who (include relationship to you)?

17. How will you enter and exit? Will there be a processional and recessional?

18. What will you wear? Is there any significance to your attire that you would want explained in the ceremony?

What will you ask the guests to wear, e.g., a dress code: formal, informal, casual, “come as you are,” or specific colors or styles? (Examples: Black or white to a funeral — depending on the mood you want to create, blue jeans or hiking boots or golf clothes to a retirement ceremony, white attire for an ordination, etc.)

How will you communicate this dress code to those invited? (E.g., if you are printing formal invitations, you may specify that dress code there.)

19. Will there be any guests with special needs? How might those be met? (E.g., wheelchair access and good view for handicapped guests or someone to sign the ceremony for a special deaf guest.)

What

20. What religious or spiritual traditions do you honor, if any?

What traditions, if any, do your parents, children or other significant guests practice?

Are there any of these traditions, symbols, rituals, prayers, that you would like to include in the ceremony (whether from your spiritual/religious background or otherwise)?

21. Do you have any other specific ideas, wishes or needs for the ceremony that haven't been covered yet?
22. Would you like to include music? What? Where? When? Live or recorded music? If live, who will perform? If recorded, does the location have a sound system set up, or will you need to provide that?
23. Would you like to include any poetry or reading that is meaningful to you? What? Where? When? Who will read it?
24. Do you have any talents or hobbies that you would like to integrate into the ceremony somehow? What? How? (E.g., play or sing a song you've written for the occasion, share about the attire you made for the ceremony, read a poem you wrote pertinent to the ceremony, make a special ornament or decoration for the ceremony, etc. This may be something that is actively expressed in the ceremony — song, dance, poem — or passively present in the setting — ornament, poem in the program.)

25. Below is a list of some rituals and symbols which may be used in your ceremony. Would you like to use any of these or some other ritual or symbol in your ceremony? If so, how?
(As a reminder, these can be used in a traditional or nontraditional way, e.g., at a memorial service, if the deceased had a love of brownies and loved to make them for his friends, a brownie communion would be a meaningful and happy remembrance for everyone.)

anointing	banners	bells
bread	candles or candle lighting	wine
communion	flowers	meditation or prayer
group blessing	token or ring exchange	singing, serenading or chanting
casting a circle	vows (traditional or your own)	
smudging (burning incense for purification)		others

Extras

Reminders of details that may be appropriate for your ceremony.

26. Will you be creating a printed program for the ceremony?
27. Will you be placing an announcement of the event in any local newspapers or publications?
28. Will you be creating or ordering invitations for the guests?