

Robyn Ashley Weddings

NYC WEDDING OFFICIANT



Ready to *Officiate*

A one-evening preparation guide for your first time officiating: this week's plan, the ceremony in order with your cue lines, the paperwork, and a card for your pocket.

AS SEEN IN *Tamron Hall* / *Brides* / *The Knot*



Script in hand, a step back from the couple.

You said *yes*

Someone you love asked you to marry them, and you said yes. Congratulations, and welcome to the part where you find out what you agreed to.

I have coached first-time officiants through exactly this, and what I tell every one of them is that preparation matters far more than being a natural speaker. That is good news, because preparation is something you can do in an evening.

So this guide is one evening of work, laid out in order. You will fill in a page about your wedding, make one phone call, walk through the ceremony with your cue lines, and cut out a card for your pocket.

Expect some nerves on the day, since working officiants get them too. What you will have by the end of tonight is the certainty of knowing what comes next.

You've got this. Start with the page about your wedding.

Robyn

ROBYN WALKER · ROBYN ASHLEY WEDDINGS · NYC

Your wedding, *on one page*

Fill this in first. The names you type here carry through to the ceremony order and the pocket card, and everything else is what you will want in front of you when you call the clerk or text the coordinator.

The couple

First partner's name

How to say it

Second partner's name

How to say it

The word for each (husband, wife, partner)

How they want to be introduced at the end

When and where

Wedding date

Ceremony starts at

I arrive by

Rehearsal, date and time

County

State

Venue and address

The clerk

Clerk's phone number

What the clerk needs from me

The people I need to find

Coordinator or point person, and their phone

Who gives me the signal to start

Music

Photographer

Who holds the rings

Who is reading

Witnesses

Write each name the way it sounds, then say it out loud to the couple. Asking is always better than guessing.

One evening *to ready*

Set aside about two hours this week, and do these in order. Each one is small, and when the last box is ticked you are prepared.

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| ☐ | Ten minutes | <i>Make sure you are allowed.</i> In most states you need to be ordained to perform a marriage, and ordination online is free and takes a few minutes through American Marriage Ministries or the Universal Life Church. Save the certificate the day you get it, and let the next step confirm that your county accepts it. |
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| ☐ | Ten minutes | <i>The phone call.</i> Call the county clerk's office in the county where the wedding will happen and ask, "I'm ordained online and I'm officiating a wedding in your county. Is there anything I need to do before the day?" Most of the time the answer is nothing. A few places ask officiants to register first, and New York City is one of them. |
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| ☐ | Five minutes | <i>The license.</i> Ask the couple whether they have the marriage license yet, when it expires, and who is bringing it. Licenses can come with a waiting period and an expiry date, and both vary by state. |
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| ☐ | Thirty minutes | <i>The script.</i> Get the whole ceremony on paper, including the two parts you read exactly as written. Print it in large type, 16 point or bigger, with the names in bold, and keep the ring exchange away from a page break. |
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| ☐ | Forty minutes | <i>Out loud, twice.</i> Stand up, start a timer and read the whole script aloud. Then read it again about twenty percent slower, because that slower pace is how it will sound on the day. Aim for fifteen to twenty minutes in total. |
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| ☐ | Ten minutes | <i>Mark it up.</i> Highlight every name each time it appears. Mark where you pause, where you look up, and where you step aside. |
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| ☐ | Ten minutes | <i>The card.</i> Fill in the pocket card, print it, and cut it out. |
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Then, before the day

At the rehearsal. Walk the entrance at the pace people will move on the day, stand where you will stand, and agree on who gives you the signal to begin.

The night before. Pack your bag from the checklist near the end, and put the printed script on top of your keys.

Eat something before the ceremony. Adrenaline on an empty stomach is how people end up lightheaded at the front.

No script yet? The Officiant Kit has eight complete ones in different tones, each a print-ready file.

The ceremony, *in order*

About fifteen minutes from your first word to the kiss. The middle column is your cue line for each part, short enough to find at a glance.

PART	YOUR CUE LINE	WATCH FOR
The processional	<i>Nothing yet. You are already at the front.</i>	Wait until the couple is in place and the music has faded.
The welcome 1 minute	<i>“Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome. Please, have a seat.”</i>	Say “have a seat” out loud, or some guests will stand the whole time.
Their story 2 to 3 minutes	<i>“I asked them how this started, and here is what they told me.”</i>	Three true details, and your eyes up as much as you can manage.
A reading optional	<i>“They have asked [] to share something they chose together.”</i>	Step aside so the reader has the microphone.
The “I do” READ AS WRITTEN	<i>“ [], do you take [] to be your []?”</i>	Wait for each answer before you go on.
The vows 3 minutes	<i>“ [], whenever you’re ready.”</i>	Take a full step to the side, and hold the microphone if there is only one.
The rings 1 to 2 minutes	<i>“Place the ring on their finger and repeat after me. With this ring, I marry you.”</i>	Feed the line a few words at a time.
A unity ritual optional	<i>“They have chosen something to mark today.”</i>	Have everything set up before guests arrive.
The pronouncement READ AS WRITTEN	<i>“By the authority given to me by the State of [], it is my honor to pronounce you married. You may kiss.”</i>	Look up, and step out of the photograph.
The introduction	<i>“Everyone, please stand. It is my joy to introduce, for the first time as a married couple,” and then their names.</i>	Nod to the music. You leave last.

The two parts marked “read as written” carry the weight. In most states the law requires each of them to agree to the marriage out loud, and the pronouncement is the customary close that tells the room it’s done. Keep those two intact and check the exact requirement with the county clerk. Everything else is yours to shape.

Stand a little to one side. An officiant standing directly between the couple blocks their faces in the photos.

The license *and the paperwork*

Everyone watches the ceremony, but the signed license is what makes the marriage legal, and it only takes a few minutes if you know the steps.

Before the wedding

The couple gets the marriage license from a clerk's office, usually in the county where they are marrying. In most states it comes with an expiry date, and some add a waiting period before it is valid. Ask to see it at the rehearsal, and check that the names are spelled correctly and that the wedding date falls inside its dates.

Right after the ceremony

Sign it before anyone leaves for the reception. Read the instructions printed on the license first, since ink color and signing rules vary by state. Sign with your full legal name as it appears on your ordination, write the date of the ceremony, and use the title the clerk told you to use. In most states one or two witnesses sign as well, and some ask for none. Read every field once more before the license leaves your hands.

Getting it back to the clerk

Someone has to return the signed license, and the deadline can be as short as a few days. In many places that job belongs to the officiant, and in others it belongs to the couple, so agree on it before the day and write the date here. A call to the clerk a week or two later confirms that it was recorded.

What commonly gets a license sent back

The wrong date. Always write the date of the ceremony.

An officiant's name that doesn't match the ordination paperwork.

A missing witness signature, where witnesses are required.

A ceremony held after the license expired.

This page is general guidance, and marriage law belongs to each state and county. The clerk's office is the authority, and they answer these questions all day.



Sign with your legal name and the date of the ceremony, in the ink the license asks for.

License expires on

Witnesses needed

Who returns it

Due back by

Where it goes

If something slips, call the clerk early and say exactly what happened. They can tell you how to put it right.

For your state's wait period, expiry and witnesses, the Officiant Kit has a quick reference for all fifty states.

When something goes *off script*

Something small usually does, and the guests take their cue from you. If you stay easy about it, so do they.

You say the wrong name

Smile, say “Let me try that again,” say the right name, and keep going. One correction is plenty.

You lose your place

Stop, take a breath, look at the couple, and find your line. The pause feels far longer to you than it does to anyone watching.

The rings aren't there

Say “While we find the rings, let's all take a breath and look at these two.” Someone will bring them.

The microphone dies

Lower the page, speak to the back row, and ask someone in front to wave if they can't hear you.

You skip a part

If it was the “I do” or the pronouncement, go back and say, “Before we go on, there is something I need to ask you both.” Let anything else go.

You start to cry

Pause, breathe, smile, and carry on with a shaky voice if you have to. The lines that need to come out clearly are the “I do” questions and the pronouncement.

Someone feels faint

Stop and say “We're going to pause for a moment.” Carry on once they are looked after.

Guests walking in late? Finish your sentence, let them sit, and carry on without mentioning it.

For pace, pauses and nerves, Chapters 13 to 15 of the Officiant Kit are the ones to read.

The pocket *card*

Print on heavy paper, cut along the dashed lines, and fold each card down the middle. One goes in your pocket and one inside the cover of your binder.

The order

Welcome	"Please, have a seat."
Their story	Three details, eyes up.
Reading	If there is one, step aside.
The "I do"	As written, and wait for each answer.
Vows	Step to the side.
Rings	A few words at a time.
Unity ritual	If there is one.
Pronouncement	As written, eyes up, then step aside.
Introduction	Nod to the music.

Where I stand, and who has the rings

The names and the license

First partner

How to say it

Second partner

How to say it

Introduce them as

By the authority given to me by the State of

After the kiss, sign with your legal name and the date of the ceremony, in the ink the license asks for, have the witnesses sign if your state requires them, read every field, and hand the license to whoever is returning it.

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Cut along the dashed lines

Fold on the dotted lines

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The day *itself*

Tick these off as you go, so that none of it has to live in your head.

In the bag, the night before

- ☐ Two printed copies of the script, in large type
- ☐ The pocket card
- ☐ Two pens in the ink the license asks for, which is usually black
- ☐ My ordination certificate, on paper or on my phone
- ☐ Tissues, water and something to eat
- ☐ This page

Right after

- ☐ The license is signed by everyone who has to sign it.
- ☐ Every field is checked.
- ☐ The license is with the person who is returning it.
- ☐ I told the couple what happens next with the paperwork.

Thirty minutes before

- ☐ I am at the venue, and I have stood where I will stand.
- ☐ I know who gives me the signal to start.
- ☐ I have seen the license, and I know where it will be during the ceremony.
- ☐ Any witnesses the state requires know they are signing afterwards.
- ☐ I tested the microphone while looking down at my page.
- ☐ I read the names out loud once more.
- ☐ My phone is on silent and out of my hands.

Test the microphone looking down at your page. That is where your mouth will be for most of the ceremony, and the volume changes when you look up.

The Officiant Kit

Turn your cue lines into a ceremony *that sounds like them*



Inside the kit

- The five questions that get a couple telling you the story they skip at family dinners
- The famous line I'd cut from every ceremony, and the other things never to say at the altar
- The rehearsal plan that runs in 45 minutes, and the few minutes after it that most officiants skip
- The pacing trick that makes a nervous reader sound calm and sure

Show me what's inside



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