

How to create a wedding photography timeline

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Timeline questions are probably the number one question I get from my clients. Creating the timeline can be such a challenge, as it can certainly be tough to figure out how to align the photography schedule with all of your other vendors, estimate the amount of time needed in each location, and ensure parent/formal photos get covered, as well. I will always happily help my couple create a timeline, but at the same time it is often difficult for me to spell it out completely, as, much like each wedding is different, each couple and their needs are also different. I thought it might be helpful to write a master post or two on this topic, so couples can use it to create their own perfect timeline.

The main factors you'll need to take account when planning your photography schedule are:

- comfort level with doing a “first look”
- number of locations you'd like to visit and priority level of each one
- travel time
- timing, quantity and location of family portraits

Let's go through these issues one by one:

FIRST LOOK

I recommend doing a “first look” if you are having both the ceremony and reception at one venue. In my experience, the last thing a couple wants to do after a full day of wedding preparations and ceremony is to then leave the party for an hour to take photographs. I can assure you you'll want to sip champagne and chat with your friends, and I want you to do the same, as well. A “first look,” or, a scheduled meeting between the bride and groom prior to the ceremony, is a wonderful way to have a memorable, intimate moment prior to the ceremony and still be able to dedicate enough time to beautiful, creative portraits, AND really be able to enjoy your party. If the bride or groom is completely against this, we can certainly do the portraits after the ceremony, but you may be pretty limited with locations, lighting and variety of pictures. Often the groom is the one from the couple that is most reluctant to see the bride prior to the ceremony, and completely understandably! It is something most guys think about throughout their life—seeing the bride walking down the aisle in her dress for the first time. However, in my experience, a “first look” can actually sometimes be even more special. It is a chance for you to really see each other, spend a few moments together, be emotional if you end up needing to be. I also find the groom still feels so excited/nervous when seeing the bride come down the aisle even if they see each other beforehand. Suddenly you are standing there with your friends and family surrounding you, sweeping music starts playing....; you will get caught up in it still, I promise!

LOCATIONS

Some couples want many locations for their wedding portraits; for others, one or two is more than fine. I usually like to do two if possible, perhaps getting some great urban photos along with some more nature inspired images, or an indoor location with some outdoor images, to provide a nice balance. Obviously, if many locations is a big priority for you, you will need to allocate more time to your schedule. What I do not recommend is letting “locations” get in the way of great portraits; for me, I’d rather choose two locations, spend some nice, more relaxed time in each, perhaps walking a few blocks to find some neat spots, rather than getting so wrapped up in hitting 6 different landmarks that everything feels rushed and the connection between the couple gets overshadowed.

TRAVEL TIME

If you are getting married in a city, you **MUST MUST MUST** budget appropriate travel time. In the summer, you should be particularly mindful of festivals, parades, concerts, etc. that might impact your travel or locations (in Chicago, particularly think: Taste of Chicago, Lollapalooza, Air & Water Show, Chicago Marathon). Aside from any large events that might interfere with travel time or routes, it just always takes a little while longer than many couples imagine to get from Point A to Point B, particularly if you have to find a place to stop a limo and load 10 people in and out of it at each stop. Be mindful of this, and consequently, schedule your locations in order of most important to least important, in case one needs to be cut due to travel or the wedding day generally running a bit behind.

FAMILY PHOTOS

Another issue to consider is the location, quantity and timing of family pictures. If the wedding will be at a church, we will typically spend 15-20 minutes after the wedding doing traditional pictures that the church altar (usually important to mom and dad). Church pictures, however, are not as important to some couples, and they would rather have them taken at their reception venue or elsewhere in the city, if it is more picturesque. If you are having a one-location wedding, some couples will opt to do family pictures prior to the wedding. For weddings with a small number of family photos/very small groupings, this is often appropriate; however, if you want a photo with all of your cousins and aunts and uncles, I typically will encourage couples to wait to do that until after the wedding, otherwise you might find yourself waiting on the perpetually late Cousin Tim, thus making Aunt Mabel anxious, and all in all it just feels a little more stressful than just gathering everyone together quickly after the ceremony. Lastly, if you are planning a wedding with a family to whom **MANY** posed family photos with every grouping under the sun are important, you will want to schedule more time.

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