

Honest answers to common wedding photography questions

The cake has been cut, the bouquet tossed and the dress lovingly packed away. Your wedding day may be over but it will never be forgotten and your wedding photos are the one tangible item that remains to remind you of every moment of your precious day. There really are no second chances with wedding photographs so choosing your wedding photographer is one of the most important decisions you will make.

So what do I need to know?

The photographer is a very important part of your wedding day. Because they work very closely with you they can have a huge impact on how well the day goes and how well it is recorded for posterity. The better photographers do more for you than just take photos. They will help with planning, timing, the fine details, calming nerves and many other things. Establishing a good, open and honest relationship with your photographer is critical.

It is important to understand a bit about the industry, it's basic business practices and how things work before setting out to find your ideal photographer. We hope the following inside information will help you to make a wise choice.

There are so many photographers - how can I simplify finding the right one?

Choosing the right photographer comes down to two basic things: First, and most obvious, is you must love their work. Look for a photographer who's work moves you in some way, who's style you like. The second factor to consider is personality. You will spend a large part of the day with them so you will need to make sure you feel comfortable and relaxed with your chosen photographer. A good test is: "could I be friends with this person even if I weren't hiring them as my photographer?"

Referrals are always a good place to start as are the many online bridal directories. From these sources create a shortlist of 2 or 3 photographers. Any more than that and you will just end up confusing yourself.

You cannot pick a photographer from a price-list or brochure so make an appointment to see each of the photographers on your list. Spend an hour or so with them if possible. Then you can base your decision on:

- *their style*
- *creativity*
- *quality of the photos & albums*
- *compatibility*
- *qualifications of the photographer*

All photographers are qualified aren't they?

Unfortunately no! Anyone can set themselves up as a wedding photographer - no qualifications are needed to become a so-called "professional." Your average wedding photographer probably actually has a "day job" during the week and does weddings on the weekend to earn some extra cash. There are however photographers who do possess qualifications and these are the ones you should consider. It is advisable to check any photographers professional status, particularly whether or not they are a member of the Australian Institute of Professional Photographers (AIPP).

Why do I need to hire a professional when my friend has a great camera & has offered to shoot my wedding?

It's not the camera that takes the photos it's the photographer. Although a friend may be a very good amateur photographer, they will not have the experience, knowledge, training and back-up equipment that a professional has. Wedding photography requires a highly specialised set of skills that takes years to master. A professional can produce consistent results regardless of the various challenges that weddings present. They know how to make the best use of light and can adapt quickly to the constantly changing circumstances. The very best professional photographers will not just "take" photos but will "create" images using their skills in composition, lighting & direction.

A professional wedding photographer is used to handling the dramas that occur during the wedding day. They can cope with the pressures and demands of limited time, and they are adept at dealing with people in a calm manner. A professional will also provide an outsiders creative eye and storytelling ability in documenting the day. They know how to finish off your photos properly rather than just giving you snapshots from the camera. Most professional wedding photographers have invested hundreds of hours perfecting their craft. Ask yourself, is it worth the risk hiring an amateur or cheap photographer?

How far in advance do I need to book?

The earlier the better. It best to start looking as soon as you've set your date. During the peak seasons of Spring (Sep-Nov) and Autumn (Feb-Apr) good photographers are highly sought after and often heavily booked a year or more in advance. Make your decision and book as soon as possible to avoid disappointment.

How much should I budget?

This was probably your first question about wedding photography, right? It is hard to know what to budget as very few photographers advertise their prices. This is because every wedding is different and most photographers will customise packages to suit the client. Remember too, a quoted price is probably only a starting point for coverage and perhaps a basic album. There are lots of extras you may want after the wedding that end up adding to the cost. It is important thing to understand that like most things in life you get what you pay for. The different prices between photographers will be a reflection of their qualifications, experience, skill, and creative style. Of course quality of product and level of service will also be reflected in the price.

Here is a rough guide to what you can expect to pay:

\$1000-\$2000 - friends, part-time/amateur/newer photographers with poor to average skills.

\$3000-\$5000 - starting price for full-time professional photographers with good to very good skills and standard products.

\$5000-\$10000+ - highly skilled and experienced professionals with more creative flair and luxury products.

Before you set your budget consider the following wise words: "It is unwise to pay too much, but it's worse to pay too little. When you pay too much you loose a little money, that is all. When you pay to little, you sometimes loose everything.... The common law of business balance prohibits paying a little and getting a lot - it can't be done. If you deal with the lowest bidder, it is well to add something for the risk you run. And if you do that you will have enough to pay for something better." - John Ruskin, Artist & Philosopher

Why is wedding photography so expensive?

Wedding photography today is expensive for many reasons, though relative to the price of your reception or even your gown it is very good value. Good professional photographers use the highest quality equipment, materials, labs and albums. The running costs and overheads of a high quality photography studio are significant. Professional quality cameras and lenses cost tens of thousands of dollars & need to be maintained and/or replaced regularly. There is also high powered computer equipment needed to process today's high resolution images.

Wedding photography is a highly skilled job requiring years of training & experience. Your photographer will likely charge commensurate with how much they have invested in their craft and the level of their skills.

Your photos and wedding album will be an original work of art, involving time-intensive processes that require skill, talent and artistry. For example a typical wedding photojournalist may take thousands of photos at your wedding. They then spend hours, days or even weeks, editing, processing and retouching images, custom designing album layouts, preparing and manipulating photos for print etc. You may only see your photographer for 10-15 hrs before during and after the wedding but this is usually only a very small portion of the total time spent in creating your images and the final album. The total time spent may end up being in excess of 60-80 hrs.

Is it cheaper to have an off-season or weekday weddings?

Yes, it can be. Vendors and photographers often offer discounts during times when they are not as busy.

Why do I have to pay up front?

It is normal practice for your photographer to ask for a deposit or retainer of anything up to 50% of the wedding fee and the rest of the money before the wedding. The reason for the retainer is to ensure that the photographer you have chosen will be exclusively available to you on your chosen day. Also your photographer starts working for you from the day you sign your contract, helping with planning & organising, location scouting etc. Wedding photography is a unique service and paying beforehand is the photographers insurance. The photographer has turned away many other weddings to do yours and if a couple separated before or shortly after (which is more common than you might think) the wedding day the photographer would be left with a lot of unwanted photos and a huge loss of income.

Should I sign a contract?

Absolutely! This is your assurance that the studio will honour it's commitment to you. It also confirms in writing everything that is agreed upon by both parties so that there are no misunderstandings. If a photographer does not offer a written contract do not hire them.

What happens after I book?

You should receive written communication from the studio confirming your booking. If there are any aspects of the wedding that may effect the photography you should discuss them with your photographer who may have some helpful suggestions to make. The studio should contact you closer to the wedding day to discuss the final details such as timing, locations, ideas and any requests you have.

Should I give my photographer magazine clippings of certain poses I like or a list of photos I want?

Every photographer has a different working and shooting style. Some are happy to see examples of photos you like to get an idea of the feel you are after or for inspiration but generally these are only useful as a guide. Trying to specifically copy the pose in another photo is an exercise in frustration and can actually hamper a photographer from doing their job. For instance it is hard to capture the spontaneity of the day if trying to copy or set up someone else's poses. Long lists of photos can cause problems too - they could miss capturing a special moment while being distracted ticking off and worrying about a large checklist. In the end it is impossible to really copy another photo anyway, as the original was taken under different light, in different circumstances and with a different couple! Or it may be a studio shot that took hours and complex lighting arrangements to capture. Since your photos will be unique to your day it is usually better to trust your photographer to do their job. It will be more enjoyable for you to simply let them do their work as events unfold.

How much time should we set aside for photography?

This will vary from wedding to wedding. It is a good idea to discuss with your photographer what would be appropriate prior to locking in times with your church and/or reception venue. Things to keep in mind are the size of your bridal party, travel to locations and type of car being used (some vintage cars are extremely slow!) As a guide, 1.5 - 2.5 hours (excluding travel) is a good amount of photographic time after the service to get the family groups, bridal party and have a location shoot. It is better to have too much time than not enough. Remember, if anything makes you run late during the day the photo shoot is usually where time is taken to get back on track. So having some contingency time up your sleeve is a good idea.

What is photojournalism & why does every photographer seem to claim shoot in this style?

Photojournalism is not new, but is currently a popular style for many brides, so some photographers advertise this service even if it is not their dominant style. It literally means documenting a wedding like a journalist without any posing in the traditional sense or otherwise interacting in any way. This way of shooting often creates more natural looking images that capture the true emotion of the day and the real personalities of the people involved. However, it does have some drawbacks. The results are completely dependent on the subject. If the moments are not happening the photographer can only capture mundane images. That is why even those who claim to be wedding photojournalist are not usually "purely" so. Sometimes a photographer needs to give subtle direction or interact with a couple to help create the seemingly "candid" moments. The best photographers are skilled in doing this in a way that their images look documentary in style even if they were somewhat posed or "directed".

But what if I hate posing for photos?

While many couples prefer to have their wedding captured candidly it is not necessarily the best way to shoot the whole day. Candid photos can be taken while you attention is on something else, during the ceremony, while interacting with guests etc. But there are other times during the day that you will need to be directed or posed for good results. A good photographer will be skilled in making people feel comfortable. They will be able to create an atmosphere, mood or feeling that allows them to pose you in a fluid and flattering way, in a way that will make your images look "candid." This is why it's good to pay for an exceptional photographer. Purely candid photos, while they may be emotional, are not always the most flattering. We usually prefer looking at candid photos of others rather than ourselves!

What is the best time of day to take photographs?

That really depends on the weather. On a cloudy day it doesn't really matter. On a sunny day the best time is the last hour before sunset. Regardless of what type of day, it is always important to be aware of the movements of the sun and the direction of the light. This is something your photographer should take into consideration and advise you about on the day. It is best to use locations where the light is most flattering.

How long will our photographer stay with us on the wedding day?

Photographers are usually happy to negotiate the specific coverage requirements for each client. A common approach is to start an hour or so before the wedding to get shots of the bride getting ready and stay until the beginning of the reception. However, most photographers would be willing to do more or less depending on your requirements!

What about red-eye & glasses?

Red eye is caused by amateur flash technique and will not be an issue for a professional photographer. Glasses can present a few challenges to a wedding photographer such as unwanted glare which can effect the final image. However there are tricks that a photographer can use to minimize these issues. Non-reflective lenses can be a great help.

I have certain features that usually don't photograph well. Can they be fixed in my wedding pictures?

We all tend to be a bit self-conscious about aspects of our appearance. If you are concerned you can discuss it with your photographer before the wedding so that they can suggest angles and poses that are the most flattering to you. Some things can be fixed in post-production, but major time-consuming adjustments may cost extra so it's best to get you looking as good as possible on the day. Be careful to hire a photographer that offers this kind of service as many budget studios do not.

Can I be photographed to look thinner, taller, prettier, or smarter?

Yes, yes, yes, and no! ☺ But again only by a good quality, highly skilled photographer!

Do we need to feed our photographer?

This depends on how long your photographer is with you at the wedding. If you are requiring full reception coverage then you will need to feed them. Usually your reception venue can provide a simple "crew meal" if you organize it with them.

My wedding is a long way off - what happens if we get sick or have to cancel the wedding? Some photographers will keep your deposit no matter what. Others will be more flexible depending on how close to the wedding you cancel. Often deposits can be transferred to new dates if the photographer is available. Check these details in the contract before signing.

What happens after the wedding?

In most cases the studio will produce a set of proofs. These may be either in print form, an album or on disc. You will use these to choose which images you want to have professionally printed as enlargements and/or which images will go into your album. A custom designed album is the best and most polished way to finish off your photos. Most photographers view the album as a major part of the creative process and will have a variety of albums to choose.

What about the negatives?

Every studio will have a slightly different policy on negatives. Usually these can be purchased when you have your album or after some specified time-frame.

SOME SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR FUSION:

How far will you travel to photograph our wedding?

We shoot weddings all over Australia and even international destination weddings. We cover Canberra and the surrounding regions at no extra cost: the south coast, the snowy mountains, the southern highlands etc. We will consider requests to travel further depending on availability and the client will be responsible for airfares and other travel expenses.

If you have to travel and/or stay overnight to do our wedding, what extra costs are involved?

We will negotiate this with you at the time of booking depending on what is involved. We will try to keep travel expenses to a minimum but for interstate weddings we usually require airfares (best price seats) or vehicle expenses and two nights accommodation (min 4 star).

What equipment do you use?

We always use the latest technology to make sure the quality of your images and products is the absolute best available. Our equipment currently includes the following:

- Nikon D3s Digital SLR's
- Nikon 50mm f/1.4 lenses
- Nikon 85mm f/1.4 lenses
- Nikon 24-70 f/2.8 lenses
- Nikon 70-200mm f/2.8 VR II lenses
- Nikon 10.5mm fish-eye effects lens
- Tamron 90mm 1:1 Macro lens
- Tokina 12-24mm f/4.0 lens
- Sandisk Extreme Pro Compact Flash cards
- Apple Mac Pro Intel Xeon Quad-Core computers with 30" Eizo high-end professional hardware calibrated monitors & Epson Pro Printers

How many photographs will be taken on the day and how many will we get?

Generally we take 3000+ photos which we edit down to 500-1000 for your final proofs.

Do you take requests from our friends or family?

Yes, any of your guests can ask for a photo at any time and we will be pleased to accommodate them if we can.

Can my uncle who is a keen photographer come on our photo shoot as well?

Many photographers will not allow this and have strict rules about what photos family or guests can take at any stage during the day. We are generally happy to have your guests shoot over our shoulder or take other photos as long as they don't interfere with our work. For the photo shoot we strongly advise against anyone else coming along as it is usually too much of a distraction to photographer and subjects.

How & when do we get to see our photos?

Your pictures are sometimes ready for viewing as soon as you get back from your honeymoon if you are getting married in a quieter time of the year. Due to the amount of work involved in post-production we generally take 4-6 weeks to produce your photos in the peak season. When you return we will invite you over to view your images as a slide-show on our beautiful 27" Apple iMac display. Don't forget to bring the popcorn! Then you will be able to take your proof disc home to look at your photos for as long as you want.

Ph. 0402 270 490 - 1/7 Sydney Ave. Barton ACT 2600 - www.fusionphotography.biz

How much digital manipulation goes into our pictures?

Most photographers will give your proofs that are basically untouched photos directly from the camera and will only work on the particular images you choose for your enlargements or the album. Fusion is a full service studio and every image you get has been lovingly developed by hand and assessed for colour accuracy and tone so you get a refined and finished product. Most images are also "tidied" to some extent, for example removing skin blemishes or applying subtle airbrushing, cleaning up distracting elements to improve composition etc. We also process a number of images as black and whites, apply various tints and special effects and even hand colour selected photos.

Can I keep the original raw, untouched files of my wedding images?

Some photographers allow this, but we don't see the point of giving you a half finished product. It's like asking to have your wedding cake delivered without the icing! Generally these files will be no use to you anyway, requiring very specific professional software to even view them. These files also need adjustment before printing & this requires certain technical skills to do correctly. We do not consider the raw files as "finished" and will only give you a finished product. If you need to go back to the original file to adjust something or develop it in a different way then we will do this for you.

Can I make copies of the CD or DVD of my wedding photos?

No, copies of your image discs must be supplied by the studio so that we can place the relevant copyright and usage information on the discs, however there is no charge for extra discs.

How long will my wedding photos last?

The longevity of your images depends on their proper storage and care. Digital images should be backed-up regularly. Prints can last up to 200 years depending on the paper/ink combination if proper professional products are used and if stored in cool, dry conditions. All our products and albums are archival quality that will give you at least decades of life. Your album will be a family heirloom that you can pass on to successive generations.

How much input will we have in the design of our wedding album?

You can choose the images to go in your album along with our guidance. We will have an initial design session with you to discuss selection of images, key images, style of layouts etc. before proceeding with the custom design of your album. You can have as much or as little input as you desire. Designs are then submitted for your approval before going to print.

How long does a custom album take to arrive?

There is a lot of time-consuming work in designing and manufacturing a custom album. Our albums are assembled by hand by skilled craftsmen. From the initial design to delivery may take approximately 8-12 weeks depending on the number of changes and workload.

How many photos can we fit into our album?

Older style matted albums tend to fit less than modern storybook style albums with collages etc. It also depends on how clean or cluttered you like your layouts to be. As our albums are all custom designed with you it really depends on the design. Generally 50-70 photos is the average in a basic size album and extra page spreads can be added in as needed.

Any more questions?

We hope we have answered all your questions. If you have any others we haven't thought of, please contact us on 0402 270 490.

Ph. 0402 270 490 - 1/7 Sydney Ave. Barton ACT 2600 - www.fusionphotography.biz