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# **Digital Wedding Photography**

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- Build a portfolio and connect with clients
- Start a wedding photography business

**IN FULL COLOR!**

**Amber Murphy**

*Professional wedding  
and portrait photographer*



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FOR  
**DUMMIES®**

**by Amber Murphy**



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## *About the Author*

**Amber Murphy** is a professional wedding and portrait photographer who is known for bringing a fresh and unique perspective to the art of photography. Her work moves past the traditional stiff posing and incorporates the distinct personalities of the people she photographs. Amber holds a bachelor of arts degree in communication and is a member of the Wedding Photography Association (WPPI) and Professional Photographers of America (PPA).

Amber currently lives with her family in Boise, Idaho.



## *Dedication*

To Andrew, my best friend, soul mate, and husband. Thank you for all of your encouragement and support. I couldn't have gotten this book done without you!

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## **Publisher's Acknowledgments**

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# Contents at a Glance

---

<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b><i>Part I: Getting the Big Picture: Becoming a Wedding Photographer</i></b> .....	<b>7</b>
Chapter 1: The Wide-Angle View of Wedding Photography .....	9
Chapter 2: Basic Photographic Equipment and Know-How .....	21
Chapter 3: Understanding Lighting and Composition Techniques .....	45
Chapter 4: Capturing a Wedding's Excitement and Emotions .....	65
Chapter 5: Exploring Photographic Styles .....	83
<b><i>Part II: Lights, Camera, Action: Capturing the Wedding Day</i></b> .....	<b>95</b>
Chapter 6: Preparing Your Gear and Yourself .....	97
Chapter 7: Shooting Scenes to Frame the Wedding Story .....	107
Chapter 8: Herding Cats (Also Known as Shooting Portraits) .....	119
Chapter 9: Getting the Must-Have Moments .....	135
<b><i>Part III: Creating the Package for the Newlyweds: Editing and Album Design</i></b> .....	<b>165</b>
Chapter 10: Back at the Studio: Getting Organized and Preparing to Edit .....	167
Chapter 11: Editing Your Images .....	181
Chapter 12: Making Your Photos Available on DVD and Online .....	203
Chapter 13: Compiling and Designing the Wedding Album .....	219
<b><i>Part IV: Building Your Portfolio and Business</i></b> .....	<b>241</b>
Chapter 14: Putting Together Your Portfolio .....	243
Chapter 15: Crafting an Effective Business Model .....	251
Chapter 16: Getting Your Name Out There .....	265
<b><i>Part V: The Part of Tens</i></b> .....	<b>277</b>
Chapter 17: Avoiding Ten Common Wedding Photography Mistakes .....	279
Chapter 18: Ten Tips for Working with a Second Shooter .....	285
<b><i>Index</i></b> .....	<b>291</b>

# Table of Contents

***Introduction* ..... 1**

- About This Book ..... 1
- Conventions Used in This Book..... 2
- What You're Not to Read..... 2
- Foolish Assumptions..... 3
- How This Book Is Organized ..... 3
  - Part I: Getting the Big Picture: Becoming a Wedding Photographer..... 3
  - Part II: Lights, Camera, Action: Capturing the Wedding Day ..... 3
  - Part III: Creating the Package for the Newlyweds: Editing and Album Design ..... 4
  - Part IV: Building Your Portfolio and Business ..... 4
  - Part V: The Part of Tens..... 4
- Icons Used in This Book ..... 4
- Where to Go from Here..... 5

***Part 1: Getting the Big Picture: Becoming a Wedding Photographer*..... 7**

**Chapter 1: The Wide-Angle View of Wedding Photography . . . . . 9**

- Grasping the Scope of the Wedding Photographer's Job..... 10
  - Getting involved before the wedding day..... 10
  - Telling stories through pictures ..... 13
  - Taking a variety of photos ..... 14
  - Processing your photos ..... 16
  - Knowing your other responsibilities ..... 17
- Developing Skills You Need to Excel..... 18
  - Feeling passionate about photography ..... 18
  - Helping people feel at ease..... 19
  - Getting comfortable with your camera, lenses, and more ..... 19
  - Sharpening your business acumen..... 20

**Chapter 2: Basic Photographic Equipment and Know-How . . . . . 21**

- Stocking Up on Tools of the Trade..... 21
  - Choosing your cameras ..... 22
  - Gathering a selection of lenses ..... 26
  - Investing in lighting equipment ..... 28
  - Looking at light modifiers ..... 29
  - Identifying other items you may need ..... 30

Getting Yourself Up to Speed on Exposure and Camera Settings ..... 31  
 Exploring the basics of exposure..... 32  
 Becoming familiar with camera settings..... 37  
 Growing Comfortable with Your Gear and Developing Your Skills..... 43  
 Practice, practice, practice..... 43  
 Apprenticing with a pro ..... 44  
 Attending photography workshops ..... 44

**Chapter 3: Understanding Lighting and Composition Techniques . . . 45**

Lighting: Making Every Hour Magic Hour..... 46  
 Distinguishing hard light and soft light..... 46  
 Using natural light..... 48  
 Creating your own light..... 53  
 Overcoming common lighting challenges ..... 55  
 Composition: Using Different Techniques to Produce  
 Stronger Images ..... 58  
 Trying the rule of thirds..... 58  
 Considering your background..... 59  
 Cropping in-camera ..... 61  
 Giving your subject room to move..... 62  
 Guiding the viewer’s eye with lines ..... 63

**Chapter 4: Capturing a Wedding’s Excitement and Emotions . . . . . 65**

Fast Moves: Capturing High-Action Moments..... 65  
 Preparing to shoot action ..... 66  
 Choosing techniques for action photography ..... 67  
 Time for Your Close-Up: Catching Quiet Moments and Expressions ..... 71  
 Selecting apertures ..... 71  
 Focusing on the eyes ..... 73  
 Changing your angles and framing ..... 76  
 Playing with lighting ..... 76  
 Here’s the Key: Depicting Pivotal Moments and Unexpected  
 Occurrences ..... 78  
 Anticipating the pivotal moments ..... 79  
 Being ready for the unexpected..... 80  
 The Art of Symbolism: Taking Pictures That Tell Stories ..... 80  
 Understanding symbolism in photography..... 80  
 Identifying the importance of symbolism..... 82

**Chapter 5: Exploring Photographic Styles . . . . . 83**

Recognizing Different Styles of Wedding Photography..... 83  
 Traditional: Planning and posing great shots ..... 84  
 Photojournalism: Capturing what really happened ..... 86  
 Artistic: Getting creative..... 89  
 Fashion: Highlighting the bold and the beautiful ..... 91  
 Mixing and Matching Styles to Create the Story Your  
 Newlyweds Want..... 92

## ***Part 11: Lights, Camera, Action: Capturing the Wedding Day*..... 95**

### **Chapter 6: Preparing Your Gear and Yourself . . . . . 97**

Making a To-Do List and Checking It Twice .....	97
Making sure that your own equipment works .....	98
Picking up and testing rented gear .....	99
Packing your camera bags.....	99
Creating a shot list.....	100
Knowing where you're going and what to do when you arrive.....	101
Taking care of yourself.....	101
Getting Ready for the Four Acts of Wedding Photography.....	102
Documenting the preparation .....	102
Planning for portraits .....	103
Staying on your toes at the ceremony .....	104
Arriving early at the reception.....	105

### **Chapter 7: Shooting Scenes to Frame the Wedding Story . . . . . 107**

Beginning with the Basics of Scenes .....	107
Understanding the purpose of scenes .....	108
Knowing what scenes include .....	108
Seeing both the big picture and the details.....	110
Identifying Key Scenes and How to Photograph Them .....	110
The preparation .....	111
The ceremony .....	114
The reception .....	116

### **Chapter 8: Herding Cats (Also Known as Shooting Portraits) . . . . . 119**

Taking Charge .....	120
Minimizing confusion with a schedule and a list of names .....	120
Appointing a wrangler.....	121
Staying flexible .....	121
Using your outside voice .....	121
Getting the Key Images .....	122
Bridal portraits.....	122
Groom portraits .....	124
The couple's portraits.....	125
Wedding party portraits .....	127
Family portraits.....	128
Handling Stiffness and Stress during Portraits .....	132
Guiding subjects through natural portraits .....	132
Staying focused .....	134

### **Chapter 9: Getting the Must-Have Moments . . . . . 135**

Backstage Preparation: Capturing the Key Shots Before the "I Do's" .....	135
Photographing the bride before the ceremony .....	136
Getting a peek at the groom before the ceremony.....	140

Capturing the First Look .....	141
Taking product shots: Flowers, rings, and other things .....	144
Going to the chapel: The vehicle shots .....	146
It's Showtime! Shooting the Ceremony .....	147
Putting the processional in pictures .....	147
Catching key moments during the ceremony .....	148
Marking the departure .....	152
Let's Celebrate! Staying Busy at the Reception .....	154
Getting the detail shots .....	154
Introducing the newlyweds and the wedding party .....	158
Listening to the toasts .....	158
Cutting the cake .....	158
Capturing the first dance .....	161
Dancing with Mom, Dad, and guests .....	161
Tossing the garter and the bouquet .....	162
Saying goodbye: The couple's departure .....	163

## ***Part III: Creating the Package for the Newlyweds: Editing and Album Design* ..... 165**

### **Chapter 10: Back at the Studio: Getting Organized and Preparing to Edit. .... 167**

Creating a Workspace That Works for You .....	168
Getting the right gear .....	168
Setting up a productive work environment .....	171
Transferring Images to Your Computer and Keeping Them Safe .....	171
Using a card reader to download pictures .....	171
Backing up your photos .....	173
Organizing photos into folders .....	174
Importing photos into Lightroom .....	175
Getting Ready for the Next Shoot .....	178
Cleaning your camera .....	178
Zeroing out your camera .....	179
Formatting your memory cards .....	180

### **Chapter 11: Editing Your Images ..... 181**

Culling the Shoot .....	181
Grouping Your Pictures into Useful Categories .....	183
Editing and Adjusting Your Photos .....	187
Correcting white balance .....	187
Adjusting tone .....	189
Boosting color and adjusting clarity .....	191
Cropping and straightening images .....	193
Saving Your Images to Your Hard Drive .....	196
Considering a few final changes .....	196
Exporting your photos .....	200

**Chapter 12: Making Your Photos Available on DVD and Online . . . 203**

Examining Your Options.....	203
The pros and cons of burning images onto a DVD.....	204
The pros and cons of posting images online.....	204
Burning and Sending a DVD to Your Clients .....	205
Organizing the photos for the DVD .....	205
Deciding on the look of the DVD .....	206
Burning the DVD .....	206
Creating a well-branded package to send to the couple.....	207
Placing Your Images on the Web.....	208
Sending your clients' images through PASS.....	208
Displaying images with an online hosting service.....	213
Showing off your photos on Facebook.....	217

**Chapter 13: Compiling and Designing the Wedding Album . . . . . 219**

Choosing Your Album Company and Design Program .....	220
Finding and registering with an album company .....	220
Selecting a design program .....	221
Curating Images for an Album .....	221
Consulting with the Couple.....	222
Let the Second Edit Begin!.....	224
Retouching.....	224
Sharpening images for print .....	230
Saving images in Photoshop.....	232
Creating and Finalizing the Page Design.....	234
Choosing an album style.....	234
Laying out the images .....	235
Showing the album proofs to the couple.....	238
Sending the files to your album company .....	238
Shipping the Finished Album to Your Newlyweds .....	239

***Part IV: Building Your Portfolio and Business..... 241*****Chapter 14: Putting Together Your Portfolio . . . . . 243**

Realizing Why You Need a Portfolio .....	243
Gaining Knowledge and Creating Your Portfolio.....	244
Practicing often to develop a range of skills .....	244
Looking for mentors .....	246
Gaining “second shoot” experience .....	247
Choosing Photos and Placing Your Portfolio Online .....	248
Putting your best work forward.....	248
Discovering places to put your portfolio online.....	249

<b>Chapter 15: Crafting an Effective Business Model</b> . . . . .	<b>251</b>
Setting Up Your Wedding Photography Business . . . . .	252
Writing a business plan . . . . .	252
Choosing a location for your business . . . . .	253
Creating your wedding packages and establishing your pricing . . . . .	254
Creating a budget . . . . .	256
Looking at Legal Matters . . . . .	259
Establishing your business legally . . . . .	259
Acquiring business insurance . . . . .	261
Writing and managing your wedding contracts . . . . .	262
<b>Chapter 16: Getting Your Name Out There</b> . . . . .	<b>265</b>
Defining the Look and Feel of Your Company . . . . .	265
Using Social Media Outlets . . . . .	266
Creating a business page on Facebook . . . . .	266
Tweeting up a storm . . . . .	268
Pinning your work on Pinterest . . . . .	268
Blogging your weddings . . . . .	269
Building and Marketing a Website . . . . .	269
Knowing where to start . . . . .	270
Keeping your web design simple . . . . .	271
Making SEO work for you . . . . .	271
Relying on Word of Mouth . . . . .	272
Collaborating with Other Wedding Vendors . . . . .	273
Getting to know other vendors in your area . . . . .	273
Putting together a styled shoot . . . . .	274
Getting Published . . . . .	275
Submitting your work to wedding blogs . . . . .	275
Sending your work to wedding magazines . . . . .	276
 <b>Part V: The Part of Tens</b> . . . . .	 <b>277</b>
 <b>Chapter 17: Avoiding Ten Common Wedding Photography Mistakes</b> . . . . .	 <b>279</b>
Arrive at the Wedding with a Plan . . . . .	279
Stay Out of the Way during the Ceremony . . . . .	280
Train the Couple on the Kiss at the End of the Ceremony . . . . .	280
Take Advantage of Sufficient Lighting . . . . .	281
Be Aware of the Background . . . . .	281
Give Good Direction during Group Photos . . . . .	282
Get Permission to Shoot at Offsite Locations . . . . .	282
Avoid the “I’ll Just Fix It Later” Approach . . . . .	283
Edit Images with a Light Hand . . . . .	283
Give the Couple Their Photos in a Timely Manner . . . . .	284

**Chapter 18: Ten Tips for Working with a Second Shooter . . . . . 285**

Choosing Someone Reliable..... 285  
Spelling Out the Details in a Contract..... 286  
Knowing What Gear Your Second Shooter Has ..... 286  
Outlining the Proper Attire ..... 287  
Understanding Your Second Shooter’s Skill Level..... 287  
Planning Ahead to Maximize Coverage ..... 287  
Being Specific about What You Want Your Second Shooter to Do ..... 288  
Obtaining Your Second Shooter’s Images Before the Day Is Done ..... 288  
Recalling What It Felt Like When You First Started ..... 288  
Giving Recognition to Your Second Shooter..... 289

***Index*..... 291**



# Introduction



**S**o there you are, at a sunset ceremony in the little chapel down by the creek, where you've always dreamed of photographing a wedding. The doors in the back open, and you raise your camera to start capturing what you're sure will be award-winning shots of the bride as she enters. At that moment, you realize you have forgotten batteries for your camera. It won't turn on, and to make matters worse, you aren't wearing pants. Everyone is looking at you! The granny in the front row is having a heart attack! And then you wake up in a cold sweat, terrified that someday you'll find yourself unprepared, ruining a couple's wedding day.

I've had variations of this dream before almost every wedding I've photographed. Shooting weddings is stressful. A lot is on the line, and people have high expectations. But that's no reason to panic!

Wedding photography, unlike other forms of portraiture, certainly comes with some added stresses, but none are insurmountable when you go into a wedding prepared. This book is designed to help with that. Because being prepared makes pretty much everything more enjoyable and more successful, I focus a lot of attention on helping get you ready to shoot a wedding. I also help you look ahead at potential situations you may experience so you can devise appropriate plans for reacting. I include instructions, directions, suggestions, and guidance aplenty. Enjoy!

## *About This Book*

*Digital Wedding Photography For Dummies* gives you a comprehensive look at the skills needed to photograph and process a wedding, from beginning to end. In this book, I break down all the details of shooting weddings and some of the key points of photography in general, in simple and easy-to-understand terms. My goal is to help you to be prepared for the next (or first) wedding you plan to shoot. Whether you're an amateur helping your friends save some money by taking their pictures for them or you're an established photographer looking for a different take on what you've already been doing, you'll find something useful in here. If you're considering photographing your first wedding, maybe you'll find a new passion. After my first wedding job, I was hooked!

This book follows a natural progression from beginner to advanced topics, starting with an overview of basic photography principles and followed by an in-depth look at what to take with you on a wedding day and how to get great results while shooting. I also explain what to do after the wedding and give you a few ideas of how to turn your passion into a business, if you so desire.

You don't have to read this book cover to cover (although I won't complain if you do!); simply find the details you need and put away the book until you need it again.

Writing *Digital Wedding Photography For Dummies* was especially satisfying because I was essentially able to write the book I wished were available when I first started out as a photographer. I hope it gets you going, literally and figuratively, on your way to shooting great weddings!

## Conventions Used in This Book

Throughout this book, I use the following conventions to ensure that the text is consistent and easy to understand:

- ✓ The photos in the book are followed by information in small print that looks like this: *35mm, 1/150 sec., f/2.4, 200*. These terms describe the settings at which the camera was set when I took that picture. The first number is the focal length of the lens, the second is the shutter speed, the third is the aperture, and the fourth is the ISO. (Flip to Chapter 2 for details on these settings.)
- ✓ New terms in the book appear in *italics* and are followed by a simple definition.
- ✓ I use **bold** text to highlight key words in bulleted lists and the action steps in numbered lists.
- ✓ All web addresses in the book appear in `monofont`.
- ✓ When this book was printed, some web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that I haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So when using one of these web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist.

## What You're Not to Read

What you read (and what you don't read) is really up to you! I absolutely love wedding photography and put as much useful information into this book as I possibly could, but I realize that some information may not be relevant to everyone. So feel free to skip anything that you already know or that you don't find helpful. You can also pass over the shaded boxes known as *sidebars*, which usually contain technical information about a particular topic in a chapter. (The same goes for any text marked with the Technical Stuff icon.)

## *Foolish Assumptions*

I assumed a few things about you as I wrote this book:

- ✓ You love weddings and want to start photographing them.
- ✓ You may want to go into the wedding photography business full-time.
- ✓ You either already own, or are looking to purchase, a digital SLR camera.
- ✓ Your knowledge of photography is anywhere between complete beginner and advanced.
- ✓ You want to learn the ins and outs of wedding photography and how to do the job well.

If any or all of those descriptions apply to you, you'll find the information you need in this book.

## *How This Book Is Organized*

In order to make the information in this book easy to understand, I broke the content down into five parts. You may notice that the information follows a natural progression from basic information to principles to follow while shooting a wedding to the editing process after the big day. However, you should always feel free to dive into any part, chapter, or section that is useful to you, no matter what order it's in!

### *Part I: Getting the Big Picture: Becoming a Wedding Photographer*

This part is where I go over the information that lays the groundwork for the rest of the book. I cover what to look for when purchasing your photography equipment and tips on how to use it along with an overview of specific techniques you need in order to capture a wedding effectively, including those related to lighting and composition.

### *Part II: Lights, Camera, Action: Capturing the Wedding Day*

This part is the place where I get down to the nuts and bolts of shooting a wedding. I include a detailed checklist of things to do before the day arrives,

and then you find out all about capturing the wedding day itself. I give you a lot of example pictures and outline how you can achieve similar results. If you like lists, Chapter 9 gives you a detailed shot list so that you can be sure to photograph all the important moments of the day.

## ***Part III: Creating the Package for the Newlyweds: Editing and Album Design***

In this part I cover what to do after the wedding is over. I take you through downloading and backing up all your images, editing them, and delivering them to your clients (a couple of ways), and I discuss a few things to consider as you design the wedding album.

## ***Part IV: Building Your Portfolio and Business***

Here you find a few chapters devoted to making wedding photography into a business. I go over how to put together a portfolio and ways to get your portfolio seen by prospective clients. I also outline all the nitty-gritty details of starting a wedding photography business, from establishing a business identity to getting your work published.

## ***Part V: The Part of Tens***

In true *For Dummies* fashion, this part of the book is where I share useful information that is broken down into concise ten-item lists. Here you discover ways to avoid common mistakes and how to work with a second shooter.

## ***Icons Used in This Book***



You'll probably notice the following little icons scattered throughout the text. Their job is to point you to ideas and information that I think are important.

This icon points to key information that you want to make sure you don't forget.



Every once in a while, I include information that's interesting but not a necessity. Feel free to skip this info if you don't want to get into too much photography jargon.



This icon highlights information that can save you money, time, or frustration. It may also point out creative ways of getting certain shots or handling specific situations you encounter on a wedding day.



This icon is like a little red flag that alerts you to situations that can damage your gear, your photos, or even yourself.

## *Where to Go from Here*

Where you go from here really depends on what information you want first. If you already have a camera and basic knowledge of how it works and want to jump right in to shooting a wedding, you can start with Chapter 7. If you want more information on building your portfolio, check out Chapter 14. And if you want a solid grasp on wedding photography from beginning to end, start with Chapter 1 and read on through!

# 6

## Digital Wedding Photography For Dummies

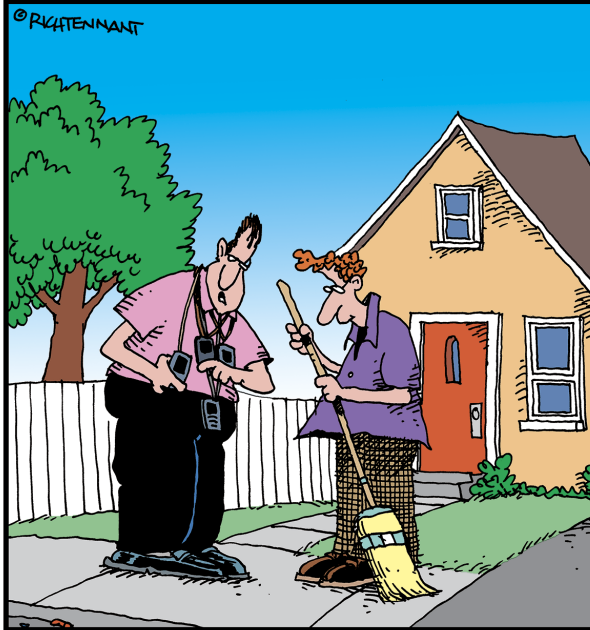
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# Part I

# Getting the Big Picture: Becoming a Wedding Photographer

The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

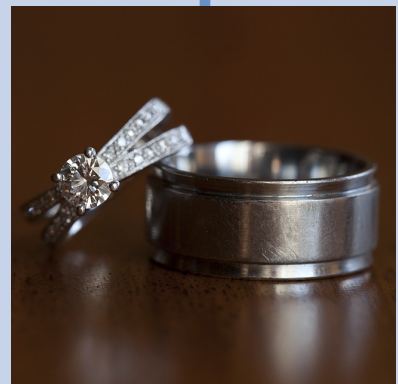
By Rich Tennant



"I think I'd be a very good wedding photographer. I have people skills, I love photography, and I've got the equipment - an iPhone 4, a Nokia E71, a Sony Ericsson, a Samsung Solstice a887..."

## *In this part . . .*

**B**efore you can dive in and start shooting pictures of gorgeous brides, dashing grooms, and everything a wedding day entails, a few foundations need to be laid first. In this part I cover it all. I give you an overview of what the wedding photographer's "toolbelt" looks like, from camera equipment to editing software. I also cover some basic photography concepts, such as lighting and composition, and teach you how to apply them to any given wedding day.





# 1

## The Wide-Angle View of Wedding Photography

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Understanding what wedding photographers do
- ▶ Discovering the skills necessary for navigating a wedding

**W**edding photography has become increasingly popular in the last decade, and it's no surprise given that the advances in digital technology have made capturing a wedding and sharing the photos easier than ever. The explosion of social media allows a couple to share the details of their special day with anyone they choose, anywhere in the world. The growth and change in the wedding industry are exciting things to be a part of.

Although wedding photos have become more accessible to the public than they were when just the couple's relatives and close friends might get to flip through a wedding album, capturing the images of a couple is still as personal as it was the first time a wedding was photographed. As a wedding photographer, you have the opportunity to be a part of each unique wedding and build relationships with many different couples. You get to witness the celebration of love and the joining of two lives while the couple is surrounded by family and friends. I can't imagine a better job!

In this chapter, I talk about what it takes to be a wedding photographer: from the ways you'll be involved before and after the wedding day and the types of pictures you need to be comfortable taking to having an artistic vision and honing your storytelling abilities. I also go over the responsibilities you take on for each wedding and the specific skills you should have, with and without your camera.



## *Grasping the Scope of the Wedding Photographer's Job*

At first glance, being a wedding photographer may seem pretty easy. You buy a camera and show up for a wedding, take some pictures, and give them to the happy couple, right? Well . . . not exactly.

When I was asked to shoot my first wedding, I thought, “I’ve done families and portraits, so how hard can a wedding be?” Much harder than I anticipated, it turned out. Halfway through the wedding, I found myself wondering what I’d gotten myself into, and when the wedding was over I was completely overwhelmed by the editing process. Your job includes a lot of work that takes place before and after the wedding and requires a handle on photographing a variety of subjects. To spare you the mid-wedding freak-out and to help you get prepared, the following sections tackle the specifics of the wedding photographer’s job.

### *Getting involved before the wedding day*

Much of the work of a wedding photographer starts long before the wedding day. It begins with the initial client inquiry, which can be months to years in advance. Always have an up-to-date calendar of your bookings so you can let prospective clients know your availability immediately. After you let a client know that you’re available to photograph the wedding, you can take a few steps to prepare for the big day, as you find out in the following sections.

#### *Setting up a consultation*

Having a consultation is a great way to get some face time with your clients. After I receive an inquiry from a prospective couple, I ask if we can meet up for lunch or coffee to go over the packages I offer. If your clients live in a different state, setting up a web meeting (on something like Skype or Face Time) also works well. Either way, the consultation offers you the opportunity to get to know your clients and show that you’re genuinely interested in them, and it gives them the chance to ask you questions directly, without having to go back and forth through e-mail. It also allows you to fully explain each photography package you offer, the approximate turnaround time for giving them their photos, prints, and albums, and your pricing. (See Chapter 15 for details on establishing packages and prices.) Getting to know your prospective clients in a consultation can also help the couples you meet with feel more comfortable with you, which can lead to better pictures on the day of the wedding.



Because you’re trying to sell yourself as the photographer, be sure to bring examples of your previous work. Show clients your work in formats that they’re likely to want themselves, such as a tablet or laptop with a slideshow as well as a wedding album or prints.



During the consultation, you'll also want to go over the wedding contract (which is covered more fully in Chapter 15) and, after the contract is signed, collect the deposit to hold the wedding date. In addition, you should make sure to get the following information:

- ✓ Time of the wedding
- ✓ Location of the ceremony, reception, and where the bride is getting ready
- ✓ Whether or not the couple is doing a First Look (a private moment when the bride and the groom see each other before the ceremony; see Chapter 9)
- ✓ Full contact information for the couple
- ✓ Contact information for the wedding coordinator, if applicable

Let the couple know at this time that you need a list of people for the family pictures along with a schedule of the wedding day (which I cover in more detail in Chapter 8). And if you're going to photograph the couple's engagement pictures (see the next section), start communication about the time and place that works for both parties.

### *Shooting the engagement pictures*

Engagement photos are like a trial run before the wedding day. Doing an engagement session gives you the opportunity to learn more about the couple and get a feel for how comfortable (or uncomfortable) they are in front of the camera (see Figure 1-1 for an example of an engagement photo). Similarly, the engagement session allows the couple to learn how you set up and pose portraits in a more relaxed environment. They also get the opportunity to communicate what kind of pictures they do and don't like.



24mm, 1/100 sec., f/4.5, 125

**Figure 1-1:** Shooting an engagement session helps to break the ice with your couple.

You can schedule the engagement session any time between the consultation date and the wedding day, depending on your clients' availability. Some couples like to use their engagement pictures as a "Save the Date" card or may want to include a photo with the invitations, so make sure to take that into consideration as you schedule the session. Engagement pictures usually take two to three hours, so schedule your session accordingly.

### *Finalizing the schedule*

In the months leading up to the wedding, follow up with the couple to remind them that you need a list of who to include in family portraits and a schedule of the wedding day. Ask to be notified of any changes as soon as possible. I recommend requiring a final schedule at least two weeks prior to the wedding, just to make sure that you and the couple are on the same page. For more on creating a wedding schedule, check out Chapter 8.

### *Scoping out the wedding location and visualizing the big day*



Always try to be familiar with the setting of the wedding beforehand, including the ceremony location, reception area, and extra locations for portraits, such as a nearby park. If you don't know what the venue looks like, try to visit around the time of day the wedding will take place so you can evaluate the lighting and find good locations to shoot the portraits. After you've scoped out the location of the wedding, use the knowledge you've gained to plan out and visualize how you can use certain elements in the area to arrange your photos. Doing your homework ahead of time helps you feel more comfortable on the wedding day, and you won't have to scramble to find spots with decent lighting.

For example, if you know that the couple's portraits are taking place around 2:00 p.m. when the sunlight is harsh, and you noticed a lovely gazebo that offers some shade, you can plan ahead to take some of the couple's portraits at the gazebo. Or if you observed a gorgeous spiral staircase, you can visualize how to pose the bride on the stairs for her bridal portraits. Being armed with a plan helps to ease the stress of the wedding day.

Figure 1-2 is a great example of possibilities that open up if you plan ahead. In this image you will see a couple posed on a piano. The bride and I communicated in the months leading up to the wedding and picked out several spots to take pictures after the wedding. They ended up being some of the most fun shots of the day!



If the wedding isn't taking place in your area, most venues have pictures up on their website. Consider browsing through the photos and showing up early on the actual wedding day to scout for picturesque spots.



17mm, 1/800 sec., f/5.0, 125

**Figure 1-2:** Planning and visualizing ahead of time can lead to great photo opportunities.

## *Telling stories through pictures*

When the wedding day arrives, your primary job is to be the storyteller. You get to narrate the couple's love story with each photo that you take, capturing each little moment to make it last forever. Most couples, when looking back on their wedding, recall very little of the details of the day and say that it was all such a blur. That's why your job is so important! Your photos help keep their story consistently tied to the present and immortalize the things that otherwise may have been missed or forgotten.



Because your clients rely on you to document their story, you have to be able to communicate a narrative well. The elements of a photographic narrative are the same as a book or movie, and identifying these key components will be helpful to you as you photograph the wedding:

- ✓ **The characters:** The star roles are, of course, given to the bride and groom. But don't forget the people in the supporting roles as well: the family, friends, officiant, guests, and so on. Be sure to capture the interactions between the bride and groom and the rest of the cast and include detailed photos that describe the relationship between them.
- ✓ **The plot:** In this case, the plot of the story is how the wedding day unfolds. The climax of the wedding story arc is at the ceremony when the couple says "I do" and officially starts a new life together.

So consider the points before the ceremony that build up the story's tension (like the bride putting on her dress and the groom anxiously waiting to see his bride) and catch those moments as they happen. The highest point of the story arc is the moment when the bride and groom are announced as Mr. and Mrs., and afterward the story moves toward the resolution. Look for those congratulatory hugs, toast, laughs, and smiles that depict the closing of the story.

- ✔ **The setting:** Wedding narratives tend to feature a couple of different settings, like the bride's house or hotel room where she gets ready, the ceremony location, and reception site. Make sure to grab a few photos that encompass the entire area at each location as well as a few detail shots of things that make the venues unique. You can also include some exterior shots of the venue that help to create a mood for your pictures. Photographing the sunset or snow falling outside of the church is always a nice addition to the overall story.
- ✔ **The theme:** Each wedding has two themes. The first is the overarching idea of love and the joining of two lives as one. The second is the theme that the couple has chosen for the event, such as a nautical theme, or a rustic-chic theme set in a barn. It can even be as simple as the color palette the couple chose. These ideas are usually a reflection of the bride and groom's personalities, so be sure to document these details that add to the overall story as well as focus on the theme of love.
- ✔ **The tone:** As you narrate the wedding, be aware of the tone, or mood, of what is taking place, and make sure your photos reflect the right emotion. For example, if you take a candid of the groom making his bride laugh, you probably don't want to edit your photo to be in black and white with stark contrasts and shadows, which would give the photo a more somber look. Instead, you want to give the picture a clean and bright look that reflects the happiness of the couple.

Flip to Chapter 7 for full details on shooting scenes to tell a wedding story, and check out the must-have moments to photograph in Chapter 9.

## *Taking a variety of photos*

Not only do you need to be able to communicate a narrative well, but you must also know how to photograph a variety of subjects. The wedding photographer is a Jack (or Jane) of all trades. Here are the types of photography you should be familiar with:

- ✔ **Portrait photography:** A wedding photographer should know how to pose and frame individuals in a way that catches their expressions and presents them in a flattering light (see Figure 1-3). Chapter 8 contains a list of portraits to shoot at a wedding.
- ✔ **Candid photography:** Most of the pictures you'll take at a wedding are candid, where the subjects are not looking at the camera (check out