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Ten Tips for Writing Your Perfect Wedding Vows

By Rev. M. Maureen Killoran, Unitarian Universalist minister

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1. Start with a nice clean piece of paper (lavender is good, but any kind will work). Down the left side of the page, write the numbers 1–10. Now - without stopping to think about it, fill in this page! Write down the first 10 things that come to mind in response to this sentence: "I love (my partner's name) because . . ." Set this piece of paper aside.

2. Now - how about YOU? What do YOU bring to this union? What promises will you make? Take another sheet of paper, and write `em down - don't worry about spelling, grammar, or anything else at this point. Just write down 4–5 things you want to promise this very special person with whom you want to spend your life.

- Do you promise to be there in bad times as well as good?
 - Do you promise to be faithful with your body as well as with your mind and heart?
 - Do you promise to support your partner even when he/she isn't perfect?
 - Do you promise to share all your resources? Some?
 - What about if he/she gets sick? What about if you have a serious fight?
- You get the idea . . . what are you promising in this union?

3. Think about the language you will use to claim your partner and name your relationship. When you introduce your beloved, what words will you use? Husband? Wife? Spouse? Partner for Life? What energy does each of these have for you? If you don't like one for some reason, throw it out. . . but before you start writing your vows, decide . . . what language will you use? This is a decision you need to make together . . . so start early, and give this as much time as it takes.

4. OK, after you've done steps 1–3, and you've got at least two pages of writing and one decision made - set it all aside. Do something else, preferably with your partner, and preferably fun. Like Christmas trees, weddings get too much "stuff" hung on them, Make yours beautiful, by stepping aside from the stress for a day or two. Go out and remember WHY you love . . . go and play.

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5. Done that? Now it's time to make a BIG DECISION. Are each of you going to write your own vow, or do the two of you want to say the same thing? You don't have to, you know - some of the most beautiful ceremonies I've celebrated had each partner saying something different . . . But here's a trick: If you're each creating your own unique vow, why not insert a sentence at the end symbolizing the fact that you come together as unique individuals, and, without surrendering your individuality, you are creating a beautiful, shared union. Here's an example of words each partner might use to complete his or her unique vow:

John, I accept you as my husband.

I Tracy, embrace you, Susan, as my partner for life.

6. It's time to go back to the papers you wrote in Steps 1 and 2. If you're working together, you'll have fun sharing those pages, and seeing where you overlap . . . Use colored pencils or highlighters to lift up

what you have in common - and make those promises and statements of love just leap off the page.

7. Now, whether you're working alone or as a couple, it's time to prioritize. Which is fancy language for saying, OK, if I have to cut two of these promises off the list, which ones will they be? Nibble at your lists, removing the things that are just a little less juicy, until you're left with three or four things you love . . . and about the same number of things you promise.

8. Copy these over onto a brand new, clean page. (It's amazing what a difference a clean sheet of paper can make - trust me on this!)

9. One more question . . . this is a wedding, a celebration of your union, presumably for life. Will your vows indicate a time frame? Some couples use phrase like: "Through all our years, and in all that life may bring us . . . " "For the rest of my days"

"As long as we both shall live"

"lifetime partner."

"partner forevermore."

Whatever works for you, a wedding or service of union vow should contain a phrase that indicates the duration of your commitment. (If you've come this far, I hope you've decided to promise your commitment for life.)

10. Read your vow out loud to a trusted someone other than your partner. Does it sound like you? How does it feel to say these words aloud? Have you said anything you'd be embarrassed to say in public? Are there any tongue-tanglers in there? (It's amazing how seemingly simple phrases turn complex when it's time to speak!) Make whatever minor changes you need, and then Stop. Feel good about what you've done - for you have created one of the greatest gifts you will ever make.

Blessings on you and on your union ~

Rev. Dr. M. Maureen Killoran, MA, DMin

Life Coach & Spiritual Guide

Maureen Killoran is a life coach and Unitarian Universalist minister who has performed over 300

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wedding ceremonies. After 20 years in the parish, she is now a life coach in private practice in Western North Carolina — where she is delighted to be performing weddings & services of union. Learn more at www.spiritquest.ws

Personalize Your Wedding Vows

By George Meszaros

You can personalize your wedding ceremony with your own wedding vows. The freedom of creating your own vows comes at a price; you have to work at it. Although writing your own personalized wedding vows can be a difficult and rewarding, there are many things you can do to make the process easier.

First of all, you should make sure that you and your groom are in agreement on having personalized vows. Then, you have to discuss it with your wedding officiant. Most officiants should have no objections to the idea. The wording should be in line with the style of the ceremony, and it is going to be different for a traditional ceremony than a modern ceremony. If you elected to have a religious ceremony, you may be required to include certain phrases. You and your groom may write the same vows or work on different vows on your own.

Remember from your term paper writing days? Brainstorming may be the best approach to start? Write down the words and thoughts you must have in your vows. If you encounter writer's block, you may read several traditional vows to look for ideas. You can start by swapping out some of the words with words you feel more comfortable with. Write down what kind of commitment marriage means to you. Try to put your thoughts into words. Don't worry about grammar and spelling at this point. The goal is to try to be creative. Some of the questions you could ask yourself in the process are: What are my expectations of my partner? What are the qualities that are important to me? What it means to be committed to one another? What does marriage mean to me?

After you have a first draft, you should consult your wedding officiant. Your friends and your family may be able to help you fine tune it too. Then, be prepared to rewrite. Some of the best writers are famous for writing and rewriting their best work dozens of times. Rewriting is not a sign of failure; it is a sign of perfection.

Remember that your wedding ceremony is also a performance, so you must practice your vows with your groom. Once you hear it, you may have a different opinion on the words you have used. Practicing provides you with an opportunity to make final adjustments.

Once you've worked out a final version, practice reading it on your own, and try to memorize it.

George Meszaros



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