

# Wedding Invitations

FAQ for selecting and designing memorable wedding invitations



## ***Practical advice on wedding invitations and wedding stationery:***

- **Advantages of shopping locally rather than online**
- **Avoid common mistakes for DIY wedding invitations**
- **When and how to use Save-the-Date announcements**
- **Wedding Papers timeline to avoid last minute headaches**
- **Letterpress, engraving, thermography explained**
- **Budget and cost-saving ideas that don't compromise invitation quality**
- **The truth about green and "eco-friendly" wedding invitations**
- **And, much more . . .**

# 1

## Why shop with an experienced stationer?

There are many advantages to seeking help from an experienced stationer to help design your wedding invitation. Selecting your wedding invitation is as much a tactile experience as it is a visual experience and there is no substitute for seeing and feeling a wide variety of paper samples before proceeding to the design phase. An experienced stationer in your neighborhood normally represents a variety of paper and printing companies and is best able to steer you in the “right” direction based on your interests and budget. The [StationersGuild.org](http://StationersGuild.org) has over 200 qualified storefront stationers listed on their website and you should be able to find one in your neighborhood.



While paper selection is important, your local stationer can help you understand the different printing options and color combinations to complement your wedding theme. Most importantly, a stationer can help you navigate the troubling shoals of wedding etiquette to properly word your invitation. There is a common misconception that storefront stationers are more expensive than online alternatives. Storefront stationers are no more or less expensive than online resellers: The price of your wedding invitation is a function of the quality of the paper, the printing process and the design features (ribbons, envelope linings) you desire. Your local stationer is in a far better position to provide wise counsel on cost-saving strategies to help bring in your invitation on budget and on time.

Unlike online invitations, you have a committed resource to help you design a well-crafted and elegant wedding invitation that will stand the test of time. Leaning on the shoulder of your local stationer will save you time, frustration and probably a great deal of money.

## 2

### What are the disadvantages of shopping online?

While expediency sometimes gets in the way of common sense, buying fine stationery and custom invitations online is downright silly. Gosh, would you risk \$500 or more for an online wedding invitation when the odds of getting what you want are stacked against you from the get-go?

- First, internet image resolutions are of poor quality and often purposely distorted to avoid reproduction. With a limited internet color range, different monitor resolutions and poor quality image reproduction, it is almost impossible to determine the outcome of your printed invitation.
- Second, paper texture and the weight of the paper stock are vital components in selecting your invitation. Why not visit a qualified stationer and feel hundreds of paper samples rather than the one or two that might be sent to you by an online store?
- Third, colors change dramatically depending on the printing process you use. Wouldn't it be nice to see true color reproduction on different paper stock rather than leave it to chance with your online dealer?
- Fourth, most quality paper companies and designers recognize that crafting a custom wedding invitation is more than filling-in an online template. In fact, many of the leading fine paper companies do not sell custom invitations online. They want the buyer to feel their papers, discuss printing options and receive expert advice from an experienced stationer before making a major financial commitment. In short, they want the buyer to have a positive outcome based on "real" samples and expert advice rather than the "luck-of-the-draw" with an online store.

If you want expert advice, consult a qualified stationer in your neighborhood. Many of the leading stationers can be found on the [Guild website](#). Don't be seduced by the online hype. Some things are best done in person and creating a custom wedding invitation is certainly one of them.

## 3

### Do I need a Save-the-Date Announcement?

Save-the-date announcements are highly recommended when the wedding takes place in a location where advance planning is essential; otherwise, your guests will not have enough time to book hotels and transportation. Examples: a wedding on Nantucket, in the West Indies or in Europe. Also, you should consider using a save-the-date announcement if your wedding event is

scheduled near a major holiday or around a popular vacation period. That being said, we are now finding that well over 60% of our bridal couples send out save-the-date notes to insure that their guests reserve the wedding weekend. Found below is an example of a destination wedding save-the-date announcement from Mr. Boddington's Studio:



Sending out a save-the-date announcement well before the formal wedding invitation also gives you the opportunity to include travel and accommodation information that your guests may find useful. In general, a save-the-date announcement tends to be more casual and informational.

## **4** Any special considerations for destination weddings?

A save-the-date announcement is useful for destination weddings. Early airline and hotel reservations are essential to insure that family and guests have plenty of time to make the necessary travel arrangements. It is far better to include accommodation information with your save-the-date than clutter a wedding invitation.

Many wedding couples use this opportunity to include additional “background” information and destination resources to help their guests plan accordingly. This is a great opportunity to create excitement for the event and build momentum. A well-crafted save-the-date announcement coupled with an information packet is both helpful to your guests and generally will give you a better fix on the number of guests you can expect.



## 5

### When should I start looking for my wedding invitations?

Ideally, begin at least six months before the wedding date to give you sufficient time to design the invitation, place your order and receive the invitations. There are many design options available and two or more visits with your stationer may be required before reaching a decision. After making your choice, the printing of invitations can take between one week and twelve weeks depending on the invitation you have selected. Plan to spend several days to address your invitations and at least two weeks if you engage a calligrapher.



## 6

### What is the difference between engraving, letterpress, thermography and lithography?

Engraving is an older, more traditional form of printing. Perhaps your mother (and grandmother) had their wedding invitations engraved. Engraved ink colors tend to look richer and are raised on the paper surface. Letterpress is the inverse of engraving and inks are pressed into soft paper, normally cotton. This old-

fashioned form of printing is undergoing quite a renaissance and letterpress colors appear soft and subtle. Thermography is a relatively new printing process whereby inks are baked onto the surface of the paper to simulate the raised look of engraving. Colors tend to be somewhat transparent (not opaque) and shinier, but printing with thermograph inks is less expensive. Lithography or flat-printing is similar to the type of print that you would see using an ink-jet or laser printer.

Both engraving and letterpress printing are more expensive than thermography or lithography. Prices can vary significantly based on the papers and design features of the printer and are generally 30% to 50% higher than comparable designs printed in thermography. Nevertheless, the crispness and richness of the printed outcome is significant. In fact, ink colors change significantly depending on the printing process used so it is wise to consult a storefront stationer with company-supplied color palettes before committing to a printing process. In the case of engraving, letterpress and thermography each color is applied individually and, as such, costs increase for each press run if you use more than one color.

## **7** Should I use a calligrapher to address my wedding invitations?



Brides or family members with “good” hand-writing skills can usually address wedding invitations. If you are seeking to match the font style of the invitation or seeking a more stylized and professional look then we recommend engaging a calligrapher. Many storefront stationers provide machine-calligraphy to address your invitations and reply card sets. While less artistic than hand calligraphy, it is considerably less expensive. Hand calligraphy normally requires a two to three week turnaround. Machine calligraphy generally requires a lead time of a week.

We recommend using a font style that is similar to, if not identical to, the font style and color used in the invitation.

Nevertheless, many well-established companies use proprietary font styles and it is impossible to reproduce the style exactly when using machine calligraphy. Alternatively, one could blind emboss the return address on the back of the envelope (very traditional and quite elegant) thereby avoiding font comparisons.

# 8

## What is the wedding date timeline?



Planning a wedding requires considerable organizational skills to insure that friends and family located across a wide geography show up on time to the planned wedding events and, most importantly, enjoy themselves! Found below is a wedding date (WD) timeline to assist bridal couples create their own customized paper trail:

**WD -6++ Months for Save-the-Date Announcements:** Given people's hectic schedules, we encourage couples to give their guests a "Heads-Up" announcement anywhere from four months to a year before the wedding. This is particularly important for destination weddings and weddings that may conflict with holiday and vacation schedules.

**WD -15 Weeks for Wedding Invitations:** As a rule-of-thumb, formal wedding invitations and the reply card set should be received by your guest eight weeks before the wedding. Wedding invitations generally take between two to six weeks to print. Budget a week or two to address and mail your invitations.

**WD -7 Weeks for Rehearsal dinner, showers, bridesmaid parties and post-wedding brunch:** Invitations to these events should be mailed within two weeks after the wedding invitation has been sent.

**WD -4 Weeks for Wedding Programs:** Wedding programs are probably one of the more complex, error-prone and time-intensive events for a wedding. Coordination with your Church or Synagogue is essential before assembling your program. Allow four weeks and several proofs to receive your final wedding program.

**WD -2 Weeks for Reception Papers:** Seating and Table Cards and Menu cards should be prepared at least two weeks before the Reception. Don't wait until the last minute, particularly if you are working with a calligrapher.

Personal stationery for the bride and groom should be ordered around the time that wedding invitations are ordered because as soon as the invites go out, you will begin to receive gifts. Keeping on top of your "Thank You" notes will help relieve stress and embarrassment.

## 9

## What papers do I need to for the wedding reception?

Aside from the wedding ceremony itself, the reception is probably the most logistically complicated event. Guests invited to the ceremony are generally invited to the reception. A separate reception enclosure may be required if the reception is held at a different venue. With out-of-town guests, it is helpful to include **direction cards** to both the wedding and reception with the wedding invitation.

**Seating cards** should be prepared at least a week before the reception, particularly if you intend to use a calligrapher. Your stationer will help with the proper etiquette. The seating card will direct your guest and spouse or friend to a specific table. We encourage bridal couples to be creative by using the names of flowers, birds, schools, restaurants or even rock musicians rather than a number or letter. **Place Cards** are used when you wish to seat your guests next to a particular person. While this is generally not required for all tables, we certainly recommend it for the key tables.

Providing your guests a **Menu Card** is a very gracious thing to do. If you are planning to do so, we recommend doing so at least three to four weeks before the reception to avoid stress. You may want to consider having the menu written by a calligrapher, scanned and reproduced on high-quality paper stock. Another nice touch for the reception is to have



**cocktail napkins** and guests towels with the monogram or names of the couple. Again, these too should be ordered three to four weeks before the wedding. As a rule-of-thumb we suggest 5 cocktail napkins per guest and 2 guest towels.

In short, your reception invitation, direction card and seating card are designed to elegantly help your guests get to the right place at the right time and to do so in style.

## 10

### What is the proper way to go about printing a wedding program?

**Wedding programs** are generally distributed at most wedding ceremonies. While your Church or Synagogue usually has a defined template for the program, many couples and their families prefer to personalize their wedding and invite close friends and relatives to participate in the actual ceremony. While most Churches and Synagogues encourage this participation, they generally have defined service protocols and requirements on the preparation of wedding programs by third parties. If you intend to engage a stationer to help prepare your wedding program, it is absolutely essential that you first obtain permission from the person who will conduct the ceremony and determine any specific program requirements of your House of Worship.

There are literally hundreds of options to personalize your wedding program. Programs are generally organized in chronological order with the name and role of the speaker shown next to the scheduled reading. Members of the bridal party such as bridesmaids, groomsmen and ushers are generally listed in alphabetical order on the last page or separate page of the program. A tribute to deceased members of the bridal couple's family may often be found in wedding programs.

Your stationer can help you organize and package this information in a coherent manner. We recommend that several sets of eyes proof the information, since there is considerable detail in a well-prepared program. The initial draft of the program should be submitted to the printer no later than 4 weeks before the wedding. Respond quickly when you receive your initial proof.

## 11

### What about the other party events that generally surround the wedding?



While the Wedding Reception is generally the “big party” of the wedding weekend, there are many other occasions to honor the bridal couple in the weeks leading up to the wedding. Invitations to these events should be mailed no later than four weeks before the event.

The **rehearsal dinner** tends to be the most important party preceding the actual wedding. Generally hosted by the parents of the groom, these parties can range from rather large formal

dinners to more casual affairs. Trends across the country vary, but most rehearsal dinners are casual in nature and designed more of a mixer to introduce friends and families across both sides of the aisle. The invitation should match the spirit of the occasion and should be sent no later than two weeks after the wedding invitation is mailed.

Parties preceding the wedding may include **bridal showers, bachelor and bachelorette events, bridesmaid parties** and teas and parties during the weekend to keep your guests engaged. For the most part, these invitations tend to be fun and whimsical and designed to match the spirit of the occasion. The **morning-after brunch** has become an important fixture at most weddings. Generally hosted by the bride's parents or their friends, this is a great occasion to say goodbyes. These invitations should be mailed shortly after the invites so guests can plan their departures accordingly. Monogrammed napkins celebrating the wedding are a useful touch for this event..

## 12 What about wedding stationery? Can I use monogrammed stationery?

Few things are less understood than the proper etiquette and use of wedding stationery. Couples generally seek personalized stationery to thank people for their wedding gifts and to write personal notes of gratitude to family members, the bridal party, the clergy and other people who helped organize the event. For personal correspondence prior to the wedding, the bride-to-be



should use correspondence only with her maiden name. Under no circumstances, should correspondence with your married name or married monogram be used prior to the actual wedding.

Serious stationers grow pale when they see monogrammed wedding invitations. Aside from being improper and in poor taste, the fact is that you are not married and wedding invitations and personal correspondence should not be sent under your married names. While many decry this custom as old-fashioned and feel that a monogram is “cute” on a wedding invitation, it unfortunately demonstrates a lack of respect toward your guests and, indeed, the sanctity of the marriage ceremony. Duo-grams – first name initials only – are gaining acceptance.

While some wedding pundits suggest that the couple has up to three months after the wedding to send out their “Thank You” notes, we feel that this is far too

long. Thank You notes written on personal correspondence should be sent out as soon as practical after receiving the gift – a consideration for the giver to know that their gift was received. While joint correspondence cards (ex. Jane and John Doe) are perfectly acceptable after the wedding, we encourage bridal couples to have their own individual correspondence cards. After all only one person generally writes the note. Furthermore, you can use your correspondence cards for many activities after the wedding event.

## 13 Any suggestions on designing and printing my own wedding invitations?

With money tight, many bridal couples are seeking ways to economize on their weddings. Very often they opt to create their own wedding invitations. While this may seem a wise decision, it often ends in frustration or a wedding invitation that doesn't quite rise to the importance of the occasion.

It is most disappointing to see the anguish that ensues when couples realize that their “inexpensive” DIY wedding invitation has turned into a logistical nightmare. Before deciding to craft and print your own invitations to save money, we **strongly recommend** that you consult a **stationer in your neighborhood**. They generally have several lines of attractively priced wedding invitations and can provide expert advice on styling and etiquette. You will not be sorry you have done so. Also, many of these stores carry card stock that may be used for your wedding invitation in the event you decide to fly solo.



### DIY Wedding Invitation Tips

1. **Always start with the paper.** Many people start with the design only to realize too late that they can't find the "right" paper stock. Papers come in a variety of sizes and weights. Some stores carry pocket folders to hold your invitation, directions and accomodation cards, reply card sets and other wedding stationery.
2. **Use the heaviest paper weight possible.** Weight matters. Nevertheless, paper stock above #96 (ninety-six pounds) will generally not go through an ink jet or laser printer.
3. **Seek matching envelopes.** We recommend including a reply card set with your invitation and, as such, it is wise to insure that there are

- matching paper stock and envelopes in the stock you select for your invitation.
4. **Avoid being too cutesy!** There is a tendency to incorporate all kinds of design elements into a DIY wedding invitation. Remember, it is a wedding invitation, not an arts-and-crafts project. The key is moderation and a clean design.
  5. **Maximum of two font styles.** More than two font styles is confusing and detracts from the elegance of the invitation. Try to restrict the number of font styles to two.
  6. **A Question of Etiquette.** There are few things more disturbing than the lack of proper etiquette in the wording of your invitation. While customs change, proper etiquette is never out of fashion. A few **big** don'ts:
    - Do not put the URL of your wedding website on the invitation
    - Please, no gift registry information on the invitation
    - Resist using a combined monogram of the married couple no matter how cute (after all, you aren't married)
  7. **Color.** There are many ways to incorporate color into your invitation. Envelope linings, borders and font colors to name a few. Like font styles, too much color tends to cheapen the look of the invitation. If in doubt, go with black.
  8. **Motifs.** The judicious use of motifs can often create a sense of "place" "time" or "energy." For instance, a sea shell motif for a beach wedding; or an acorn for a fall wedding. You might want to use theme motifs on different elements of your wedding papers ensemble. For instance, a palm tree on the wedding invitation and a sea shell on the reply card set. Use your imagination, but don't go overboard. Too many motifs can be as distracting as colors and font styles.
  9. **Postage.** Before you mail your invitation and reply card set make sure you take it to the Post Office and have them weigh it to insure that you have the correct postage. Don't forget to stamp the reply envelope.  
***Nothing is more embarrassing or costly than having them returned.***

If you are committed to doing it yourself, following these tips won't lead you too far astray. Again, there is more than meets the eye in crafting a wedding invitation and you are well advised to consult **a stationer in your neighborhood for expert advice.**

## **14** Why spend the money on a nice invitation, how about a Facebook invitation?

Some have long given up hope that the etiquette, civility and interpersonal relationships will ever be the same after a generation has been brought up

believing that **Jersey Shore** and the **Kardashians** is as good as it gets in expressing yourself.

Fortunately, most realize that "good taste" is still relevant. I recently came across a delightful article describing someone's shock at receiving her first **Facebook wedding invitation**. With great sensitivity and delicacy, JMW, who writes [A Place to Dwell](#) blog, documents her reaction to receiving her first Facebook wedding invitation. Despite every conceivable rationalization to justify this strange behavior which includes a request to his guests "to bring a dish for the potluck reception" she finally concludes with: "I'm going to say it: *you just don't do that!*"

Is a "Let's Party" invitation equivalent to a "Wedding Invitation?" If it is, what does this say about the long-term prospects for your relationship? Wedding invitations can be expensive, but statistically the "cost" of wedding papers is less than 5% of the wedding budget. Many people, including the bride and groom and their close family, will save the invitation, but few are likely to remember the extra pasta dish. A well-conceived and executed wedding invitation sets the tone for your wedding.

## **15** How many wedding invitations should I order?

Most wedding invitations are printed in lots of 25. When finalizing your guest list count one invitation or announcement for each couple and/or family with children under the age of 18. It is recommended that you send separate invitations to adults over the age of 18 or guests of friends or relatives that are not married or living together. To that total, one should add anywhere from 10 to 15 for keepsakes and perhaps another 10 or so for last-minute guests. We generally recommend printing at least 25 more invitations than you require. While this may appear to be self-serving, reprinting an additional 25 invitations could cost approximately 50% of the cost of your initial order for 100 invitations. Look upon this safety-margin as insurance.

## **16** How do I decide on a wedding invitation style: Traditional or *contemporary*?

There are no fixed rules on determining the "style" of the wedding. Weddings are an important milestone in people's lives and should be treated as a special occasion that holds many sacred and ancestral traditions. We honor our family and our guests by honoring those traditions. Nevertheless, weddings can be traditional, informal or contemporary and still respect those traditions. Unfortunately, many wedding couples feel that they "have to make a statement"

and use the occasion to espouse some cause or topical passion. While there is no reason not to incorporate elements of your passion into the wedding event, one should not lose sight of the fact that your guests and family are there to celebrate a union of two people in love.

For instance, “green weddings” are currently quite popular on the bridal scene. It is a cause that most willingly embrace; however, there are those who may hold different views. Unfortunately, the marketing of “green wedding invitations” has become quite popular and there are many unscrupulous people marketing “green invitations” in which the only thing “green” is the color of the invitation. Share your passion with others, but don’t use the occasion of your wedding to get on the soap-box.



## 17

### What about “green” wedding invitations?

As stationers, we are sensitive to environmental concerns and monitor evolving trends in the industry. Many of the leading boutique design firms have clear environmental guidelines on the materials used in producing fine stationery and custom invitations. This is particularly true for many firms that design letterpress wedding invitations. Many insist on using only papers produced from organically grown cotton and most have shifted from using oil-based inks to vegetable inks.

Having attended several conferences on the environment, I must sadly conclude this is a complex subject and that there are many shades of "green" when it comes to intelligent debate. What disturbs me the most is the vast number of unsubstantiated claims made by merchandisers anxious to get on the "green" bandwagon. Scot Case of TerraChoice Environmental Marketing described **Six Sins of Greenwash** at a business conference well over a year ago.

As consumers, we want to be seduced by the notion that we are "doing the right thing for the environment" by using recycled paper for wedding invitations. Don't you feel cheated when you find out that only 30% comes from recycled paper? Did you stop to consider that paper made from cotton and recycled cotton rag from textile mills has been a "green" choice for over 200 years? Granted, the carbon footprint left behind by the production of paper and the use of pesticides and herbicides are serious concerns, but one needs to step back from the green "hype" or "Greenwash" and make decisions on what you see in front of you.



As Scot Case of TerraChoice says, "all decisions you make inevitably leave a carbon footprint, the real challenge is to make the ones that are less harmful to the environment." It is far wiser to seek expert advice from a qualified stationer than be seduced by the hype from online retailers. Choosing a green wedding invitation may not be as difficult as you thought.

**18**

## How do I put place the invitation in the envelope?

Enclosures like the reply card set are placed on top of the invitation with the largest on the bottom and the smallest on top. If you are using double envelopes, put the invitation, with enclosures, into the inner envelope with the printing facing the flap. Write the names of the guests on the front of the inner envelope using only the surname of the guest, or guests. The inner envelope is unsealed and inserted into the outer envelope so the guest's name is the first thing seen as the outer envelope is opened. For single envelopes, put the invitation, with enclosures, into the envelope with printing facing the flap.

**19**

## Do I need to use a double envelope?

No. But it is recommended. Unfortunately, the Post Office is a bit heavy-handed or machine-handed and that extra layer of protection is useful to protect the beauty of your invitation and enclosures.

## 20

### How do I economize on buying wedding invitations?

There are over 20 million web pages promoting “bargain” “free” “discounted” or “cheap” wedding invitations. For the most part, they are print companies churning out low-quality invitations that, quite frankly, do not rise to the importance of the occasion. There are also many home dealers who think they can produce elegant invitations with PhotoShop and an ink-jet printer. Perhaps, a handful can. Most informed consumers realize that you can’t purchase the equivalent of a Rolls Royce invitation for the price of a VW. If you believe that to be true, I might be able to sell you the Brooklyn Bridge for \$100. Caveat emptor or “Let the Buyer Beware.”

Most people who get married desire an invitation that reflects the importance of the occasion and stamps their personality on the event. Regardless of what your budget is for the event, it is **absolutely critical to feel and see a wide variety of invitation samples before making any purchasing decision**. Once you are happy with the paper, there are many techniques that can be used to keep costs within budget. These decisions involve trade-offs and **only** an experienced stationer can help you navigate the intricate shoals of designing wedding invitations.

For instance, you would love to have an engraved invitation, but it is 30% more than an invitation printing in thermographic inks. Perhaps, a bold envelope lining might give your invitation more “pop” and save money at the same time. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of similar trade-off opportunities that no template-based website can ever expect to master. If you truly want to understand your options, consult an experienced stationer. The first question that should pop out of your mind is “How long have you been helping people design their wedding invitations?” If it is less than 5 years, seek someone else within the store or another stationer. You will be glad you did.

## 21

### What do I need to know about etiquette?

Plenty! Sorry, there are plenty of resources out there, but the **Crane Wedding Blue Book** continues to be the standard for good wedding invitation “wording” etiquette. “Doing your own thing” or “expressing who you are” at a wedding ceremony is corny, disrespectful and decidedly more “reality TV” than relevant. Your wedding is important an “passage,” so give it the importance it deserves. As they say in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians: “let us put aside our childish things.”

## About the Stationers Guild:

- Hi, I am Sheila May, the owner of Thérèse Saint Clair and the author of this guide. As a founding member of the Stationers Guild, I am passionate about fine paper and love the few moments (and often hours) that I spend with our clients crafting their wedding invitation. The Stationers Guild is a loose confederation of independently-owned stationery stores located across the United States and Canada. We are experienced stationers who love the craftsmanship and creativity that goes into making wedding stationery.
- Stationery is a people business. Our objective is to help you design a wedding invitation that stamps your personality on the event and rises to the importance of the occasion.
- If you are in the New York area, please call 203-661-2927 or email [info@theresesaintclair.com](mailto:info@theresesaintclair.com) to schedule your appointment. For other areas visit [www.stationersguild.org](http://www.stationersguild.org) to find a qualified dealer in your neighborhood.



We would like to thank the following companies for allowing us to include samples of their lovely wedding papers in this brochure: Smock Paper (Cover and page 8), Crane & Co. (page 2), Mr. Boddington (page 4), Vera Wang (page 5), Elum (pages 6 and 15) and William Arthur (pages 10 and 14). The remaining images are from iStock Photos.

