

Seating Arrangements

Pre-planning seating arrangements for the ceremony and the reception helps alleviate confusion and awkwardness. Below are helpful suggestions on arranging seating for your upcoming event:

Ceremony:

Except for the first few rows (depending on your guest list) these seats are designated for the immediate family of the bride and groom. Facing the ceremony, the bride's side is on the left and the groom's side is the right. Traditionally, mothers are seated on the aisle, but often brides choose their father for the aisle seat who will be giving them away. It can be a bit complicated if parents are divorced. If they are great friends, the parents can sit together. If they are re-married their spouses can sit behind them or next to them, depending on their personal preference.

When a parent is deceased, it is a delicate situation. A chair can be draped with white linen and a photograph or flowers placed on it in their memory.

Elderly grandparents and guests and handicapped guests should be given consideration in the seating preparation.

Ushers can escort the family members who have reserved seating. I prefer to designate the reserved seats with a place card. That way other guests are more likely to fill in around the designated seating.

Besides the reserved seating, couples do not have an even amount per side of guests attending. Seats should be filled without priority to the groom's/bride's side.

Reception:

Organized seating is often associated with a formal event. However, when seating isn't organized, tables can become cramped (with guests' adding chairs) and other tables are left with empty seats.

Most parties organize a head table. Seats are organized on one side, giving the guests an opportunity to see and visit with the wedding couple. The head table is seated either with family or the wedding party:

Head Table seating with Family (left to right):

Mother of the Bride, Father of the Bride, Bride, Groom, Father of the Groom and Mother of the Groom. Interestingly, in England, the "top table" also includes the maid/matron of honor at the far left and the bestman at the far right.

Head Table seating with Wedding party (left to right): Bridesmaids, Maid/Matron of Honor, Bride, Groom, Bestman, Groomsmen.

Seating is a complicated affair and sometimes our couples elect for a "sweetheart table". It is a side-by-side table for just the bride and groom. The remaining wedding party and family are seated close to the sweetheart table.

For guests' seating, there are three ways to organize the placement:

1) Open seating: Open seating means that guests' may sit wherever they choose. Depending on the arrangement of the head table, I recommend having a few tables reserved for immediate family. If the parents are not seated at the head table and the seating is left open they may end up at a table far away from their children. Also, there may be special guests in attendance that the couple would want seated close to them.

2) Table numbers and layouts: We provide our couples a seating plan and table stands/numbers. An easel or table can display the seating arrangement and table numbers. Guests' names are listed separately under a table number or by last names in alphabetical order with a corresponding table number. In this format guests are assigned a seating location without a place card and more table space is left for centerpieces and table settings.

3) Place cards with diagrams: This option takes the most time, but can also provide more style and design to the event. Place cards can accompany a favor and set at each guests' place setting. Couples can place the guests' name in a decorated frame. A fall bride, placed the guests' place cards with their table number, in wooden boxes filled with brick-red sand (she had corresponding colored table cloths). Table numbers and layouts are helpful to assist guests' in finding their place card/table

As you create your seating arrangements remember a few simple guidelines: Try to mix both sides of the family together to give them an opportunity to get to know each other. Children under eight years of age should sit with their parents. Sit singles among couples and family and be sensitive to family/friend relationships.