

THE WEDDING MC HANDBOOK

HOW TO BECOME A GREAT WEDDING MC

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A free sample: the introduction, chapter 1, chapter 7 on microphones, and two of the scripts.

Before you start

If you're reading this, someone has asked you to MC their wedding. That's a genuine compliment. Couples think hard about who gets the microphone, and they picked you because they reckon you can do it. They're right.

It's also completely normal to feel a bit sick about it. Most people who get asked have never held a microphone in front of a hundred people, and the ones who have still get nervous. You want to do a good job. You want to be funny. Above all, you don't want to stuff it up in front of everyone the couple loves.

I've played hundreds of weddings and events as a professional musician, and I MC'd most of them. I've also spent a big chunk of my career designing microphones, which is why there's a whole chapter in here on how to hold one. Over those years I've watched the same handful of things make a reception run beautifully, and the same handful of mistakes make one drag. Almost none of it comes down to natural talent. It comes down to preparation, a few good habits and a plan for when things go sideways, and anyone can learn those.

How the book works

The book is in four parts.

Part one, The job, explains what an MC actually does, what you don't have to worry about, and why someone needs to be the person in charge on the night.

Part two, Before the day, covers the preparation: getting to know the couple, the running order, writing your script, wrangling the speakers, the microphone, and the week before.

Part three, On the day, covers the night itself: your first hour at the venue, how to carry yourself, how to be funny, how to keep time, what to do when things go wrong, and games, dances and traditions.

Part four, The scripts and templates, has word-for-word scripts for every part of the night, three filled-in sample run sheets, and fill-in templates you can copy.

The whole thing takes about two hours to read. Each chapter in the first three parts ends with a short list headed *Do this now*, with the jobs from that chapter and roughly when to do them, so you always know where you're up to. And at the start of the toolkit there's a page called *Find it fast*, for when something happens on the night and you need the answer in ten seconds.

Your first half hour

Before you read any further, do these four things. They take half an hour, and they make everything after them easier.

1. Reply to the couple properly. Tell them you're honoured, and ask when you can catch up over a drink. Chapter 3 has what to cover.

2. Ask who else is involved: a planner, the venue coordinator, and the DJ or band.
3. Start a note on your phone called “Names”, and add every name you’ll need to say as you hear it.
4. Count back from the wedding date and write the real dates next to each step of the countdown in chapter 17, or in the countdown template that comes with the download.

Where to start

If the wedding is six weeks away or more, read the book front to back over a couple of evenings, then follow the countdown.

If it’s two to six weeks away, read part one, then chapter 6, because the speakers need the most notice, then chapters 3, 4 and 5, and the rest after that.

If it’s less than two weeks away, read these first and come back for the rest:

- Chapter 1, so you know what the job is and isn’t
- Chapter 6, to get your speakers sorted
- Chapter 7, for the microphone
- Chapter 9, for your first hour at the venue
- Chapter 13, so nothing catches you out
- Chapter 15, and start adapting the scripts

A note on words

Weddings come in every shape, so I mostly say “the couple” rather than “the bride and groom”. Where I talk about traditional roles, like the best man or the maid of honour, swap in

whatever your couple uses: best person, man of honour, bridesmaids of any gender. The advice doesn't change.

I'm Australian, and the book reflects how weddings usually run here. Almost all of it works the same way in New Zealand, the UK and Ireland, and where there's a real difference I've pointed it out.

The templates

The full book comes with every template as an editable file you can fill in and print.

PART ONE

THE JOB

CHAPTER 1

What a wedding MC actually does

When someone asks you to MC their wedding, they're handing you the part of the day they have the least control over. They've spent months on the venue, the food, the outfits, the playlist and the seating plan, and on the night they'll be sitting at the bridal table with no way of steering any of it. You're the one who steers it for them.

The job sounds bigger than it is. A lot of the dread people feel when they say yes comes from not knowing where it starts and where it stops, so let's pin that down first.

The job in one paragraph

The MC is the host of the reception. You welcome the guests, tell them what's happening and when, introduce the people who walk in and the people who speak, and move the night from one part to the next so it runs roughly on time and nobody is left wondering what's going on. You're also the person the venue, the DJ or band and the photographer come to when they need a decision, so the couple can stay out of the logistics and enjoy themselves.

That's it. Everything else in this book is about doing those things well.

What the guests need from you

I find it useful to think about the job from the guests' side of the room. Over a five-hour reception, they need three things from you.

They need to know what's happening. People relax when they know when dinner is coming, when the speeches are on, where the toilets are and how they're getting home. A guest who doesn't know what's next ends up at the bar, outside, or asking the couple, and all three of those make your job harder later.

They need to feel welcome. Plenty of people in the room will only know one half of the couple, and some will barely know anyone. A good MC talks to the whole room as though everyone belongs there, because that's how the couple wants them to feel.

They need the night to keep moving. Receptions lose their energy in the gaps: the twenty minutes where nothing seems to be happening, the speech that runs fifteen minutes over, the long wait for the couple to come back from photos. Most of what makes a reception feel good is that it flows, and the flow is your job.

If you only remember one thing from this chapter, remember those three. When you're unsure what to do on the night, ask yourself which one is being let down, and fix that one.

What you're not

It helps just as much to know what isn't your job, because taking on too much is the most common way first-time MCs wear themselves out.

You're not the celebrant. In Australia the ceremony is run by an authorised marriage celebrant or minister. There are words the celebrant is legally required to say and vows the couple must make, so the ceremony and its wording belong to them. In the UK and Ireland it's a registrar, a minister or another authorised celebrant. Unless the couple asks you to do something before or after the ceremony, like welcoming guests or asking them to take their seats, the ceremony belongs to the celebrant. Sit back and enjoy it.

You're not the wedding planner. If the couple has a planner or coordinator, that person looks after the suppliers, the setup, the seating chart and the day as a whole. If they don't, the venue's function manager usually picks up a lot of it. You'll work closely with whoever it is, but the flowers, the buses and the seating plan aren't yours.

You're not the DJ. The DJ or band looks after the music and usually the sound system. Plenty of DJs are happy to make some announcements themselves, so it's worth agreeing early who says what. Chapter 4 covers this.

You're not the entertainment. This one surprises people. The couple didn't ask you to MC because they wanted a stand-up set between courses. A bit of humour helps heaps, and chapter 11 is all about it, but the speakers, the dance floor and the couple are the entertainment. Your job is to set them up and then get out of the way.

And you're not the star. The best compliment an MC can get is that the night felt easy. If guests go home talking about the couple, the speeches and the dance floor, you've done a great job, even if nobody mentions you at all.

Who you'll be working with

On the night you'll be one of a small team of people who all want the same thing. It's worth knowing who they are before you get there.

Person	What they do	What you need from them
The couple	It's their day.	Their wishes, a check-in before each part of the night, and a decision only when one is really needed.
Venue coordinator or function manager	Runs the room, the staff and the kitchen.	The food timing, which drives everything else.
Wedding planner, if there is one	Runs the day as a whole.	The latest run sheet, and who to go to when something changes.
DJ or band	Music, and usually the sound system.	Song cues, a working microphone and an agreed signal.
Photographer and videographer	Capture the day.	Nothing, except that they'll love a heads-up before each big moment.
Celebrant	Runs the ceremony.	When the couple will be free, if the ceremony is at the same venue.
Speakers	Give the speeches.	To be in the room when called, keep to time and hand the mic back to you.
Bridal party	Look after the couple.	Help rounding people up, and someone to find the couple when you need them.

When the job starts

The job starts the day you say yes. Most of the work happens in the six to eight weeks before the wedding, which is good

news, because preparation is the part you control completely. The night itself goes well for MCs who've done the groundwork and badly for MCs who haven't, and very little of it comes down to being a natural.

Part two walks through that preparation in the order you'll need it. Part three covers the night. Part four is the scripts, run sheets and templates.

Sometimes there's a bit more

Some couples ask their MC to take on a few extras. Common ones are:

- welcoming guests and doing housekeeping before the ceremony, when the ceremony and reception are at the same venue
- reading or playing a message from someone who couldn't make it
- running a game, or helping with a cultural tradition the families want included
- giving an Acknowledgement of Country at the start of the reception

All of these are fine, and there's guidance on each later in the book. The important thing is to agree them with the couple early, so nothing lands on you on the day without warning.

DO THIS NOW *This week*

- ☐ Ask the couple whether they'd like any extras from you, like a welcome before the ceremony, a message read out or an Acknowledgement of Country.
- ☐ Look down the table of people in this chapter, and note who you haven't met yet, so you can introduce yourself before the night.
- ☐ Write down the three things guests need from you, and keep them where you'll see them while you prepare: to know what's happening, to feel welcome, and for the night to keep moving.

CHAPTER 7

Microphones and sound

I've spent a large part of my working life designing microphones, so I'll admit this chapter is close to my heart. It's also the most practical chapter in the book. If the room can't hear you, nothing else you do matters: not your script, not your jokes, not your lovely introductions. Most of the sound problems I see at weddings come down to a handful of simple habits that anyone can learn in five minutes.

The microphone you'll probably get

At most weddings you'll be handed a wireless handheld microphone that's connected to the DJ's, band's or venue's sound system. Most of these are dynamic, cardioid microphones. You don't need the engineering, but those two words tell you two useful things.

Dynamic describes how it turns sound into a signal, and dynamic microphones are fairly insensitive, which is why they need to be close to your mouth. Used close, it picks up your voice well and much less of everything else in the room. Hold it down at your chest and you'll sound thin and quiet,

the sound person will turn you up to compensate, and that leads straight to feedback.

Cardioid means it hears what's in front of it and largely ignores what's behind it. The front is the end with the grille, the round mesh ball. So point the grille at your mouth, and keep the back of the microphone pointing towards the speakers.

You might also come across:

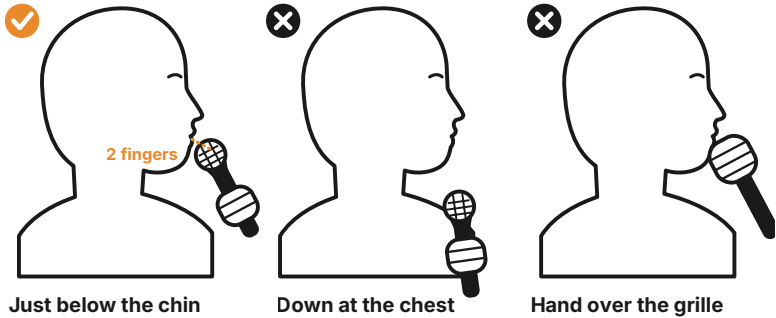
- a microphone on a stand or a lectern, which works the same way but stays put, so you have to stay close to it
- a lapel microphone, the small clip-on kind, which works from further away. Clip it to the centre of your chest, about a hand's width below your chin, and don't turn your head right away from it
- a headset microphone, which some professional MCs and celebrants use, and which is great at staying the same distance from your mouth

How to hold a handheld

Hold it around the middle of the handle, rather than right down the bottom, and never hold it by the grille. Bring it up so the grille sits just below your chin, about two fingers' width from your lips, angled slightly up towards your mouth, as though you're about to take a bite of an ice cream. That's close enough to pick you up clearly, and low enough that your breath and your p and b sounds don't pop into it.

Then keep it there. The most common mistake by a mile is moving your head and leaving the microphone behind. When you turn to look at the bridal table or the other side of the room, turn your hand with your head, so the microphone

stays the same distance from your mouth the whole time. Imagine your hand and your chin are tied together with a short piece of string.



Hold the microphone just below your chin, about two fingers from your lips. Holding it at your chest, or cupping the grille, are the two most common mistakes.

A few other habits make a big difference:

- **Don't hold the grille.** Cupping your hand around the head of the microphone changes the way it hears. Your voice goes muffled, and it's one of the fastest ways to cause feedback.
- **Don't tap it or blow into it** to check it's on. Just say "Evening, everyone" at a normal volume and you'll hear straight away.
- **Don't gesture with your microphone hand.** If you talk with your hands, use the other one.
- **Hold your notes in the other hand,** and don't let them cover the microphone.
- **If you need to cough or sneeze,** turn your head away and drop the microphone down.

Don't shout

When people get nervous, they get loud. With a microphone you don't need to. Speak at the volume you'd use to talk to someone across a dinner table, and let the sound system do the work. Shouting into a microphone sounds harsh and distorted, and the sound person will end up turning you down anyway.

What you do need is to speak clearly and a little slower than normal, especially in a big room with hard walls. Sound bounces around a room like that, and slowing down gives each word time to land before the next one arrives.

Feedback, and how to stop it

Feedback is that squeal or howl you've heard at every school assembly. It happens when sound from a speaker gets picked up by the microphone, comes back out of the speaker louder, gets picked up again, and keeps looping until it howls.

You can prevent almost all of it by remembering one thing: stay behind the speakers. The speakers are the big boxes on stands, usually at the front of the room or either side of the dance floor. As long as you're standing behind the line of the speakers and facing the room, the back of your microphone points towards them, and the microphone mostly ignores them.

Most feedback happens when someone wanders out onto the dance floor, in front of the speakers, to get closer to the couple or the guests. If you do need to move around, keep the microphone close to your mouth and pointed at you.

If it does start to squeal, don't panic, and don't cover the microphone with your hand, which usually makes it worse.

Step back behind the speakers and point the microphone down and away from them. The sound person will usually pull the volume back at the same moment.

Wireless microphones

Wireless microphones are wonderful when they work and miserable when they don't. Nearly all the problems come down to three things.

Batteries. Most wireless handhelds run on two AA batteries, and they'll go flat at the worst possible moment if nobody has changed them. Ask the DJ, band or venue whether the batteries are fresh and whether there are spares. If you want to be completely sure, bring a pack of good AA batteries yourself.

The switch. Most wireless microphones have an on, off or mute switch somewhere on the handle. Find it during your sound check and learn how it works, so you can mute yourself between announcements. More than one MC has given the whole room a live broadcast from the toilets because they didn't know where the switch was.

Range. Wireless microphones work well anywhere in a normal room, but they can drop out if you walk too far away, go outside or stand behind a wall. Stay in the room, and stay roughly in sight of the receiver, which is usually on the DJ's desk.

If there's a second microphone, ask for it to be set up on a stand for the speakers, so they can use that while you keep yours.

Your sound check

Before guests arrive, ask the DJ, band or venue for five minutes to check the microphone. It's one of the most useful five minutes of your whole day.

1. Find the spot where you'll stand for announcements and speeches: behind the speakers, with a clear view of the bridal table.
2. Say a few lines of your script at your normal speaking volume, and ask the DJ to set the level.
3. Ask someone to read a few lines from your spot while you listen from the back of the room, and check every word is clear.
4. Find the mute switch and test it.
5. Walk slowly towards the speakers until you hear the first hint of feedback, so you know where your limits are.
6. Play any video or audio messages through the system.
7. Check the batteries, and find out where the spare microphone and spare batteries are kept.

Outside

Outdoor speeches have their own problems. There are no walls to help the sound along, so you'll need the microphone close and the volume up. Wind across a microphone sounds like a roar, so if it's windy, ask whether there's a foam wind-shield for it, and stand with your back to the wind if you can. Keep the microphone in tight and slow down even more than you would inside.

Coaching your speakers

Everything in this chapter applies to your speakers as well, and they won't know any of it. Before each round of speeches, take each speaker aside for thirty seconds and show them. Put the microphone in their hand at the right height, show them where two fingers from their lips is, and remind them to turn their hand when they turn their head. Tell them that if they hear a squeal, they should step back behind the speakers and point the microphone away from them.

It feels like a small thing, but it's often the difference between a speech the whole room hears and a speech only the front tables hear. The speakers will thank you, and so will the couple when they watch the video.

DO THIS NOW *This week*

- ☐ Practise the hold with anything shaped like a microphone: grille just below your chin, two fingers from your lips, and turn your hand when you turn your head.
- ☐ Ask the DJ, band or venue what microphones they'll have, and whether there's a spare.
- ☐ Put a pack of AA batteries in your bag now, so you don't have to remember on the day.
- ☐ Ask for five minutes before the guests arrive for your sound check.

CHAPTER 15

The scripts

This chapter has word-for-word scripts for every part of a typical reception. Use them as a starting point, change the words until they sound like you, add the details you got from the couple, and cut anything that doesn't suit their night.

Words in [square brackets] are for you to fill in. Lines in italics are stage directions, not things to say out loud.

For the parts of the night where tone matters most, there are two versions. **Relaxed** suits most weddings. **Classic** suits a more formal wedding, or a room with lots of older guests. Mix and match.

Welcome and housekeeping

This is the most important two minutes of your night. Learn the first three sentences by heart.

Relaxed

Wait for the music to fade. Wait for the room to settle.

Evening, everyone, and welcome. For those who don't know me, I'm [your name], and I've known [Name] since [we were eleven and

equally bad at under-twelves soccer]. I'm your MC tonight, which means my job is to keep things moving, keep you fed and watered, and get you onto the dance floor as early as is respectable.

[Name] and [Name] are so happy you're here. Some of you have come a long way tonight, [from Perth, from London, from just around the corner], and it means a lot to them.

[Acknowledgement of Country, if the couple would like one. See below.]

A few quick bits of housekeeping before we bring them in.

The toilets are [location]. The bar is [location], and it's open. Smokers, you're [location].

If you've got a dietary requirement, let the staff know when your plate arrives and they'll look after you. And if you've got a food allergy and somehow forgot to put it on your RSVP, please tell them now, so the kitchen can look after you.

[The couple would love to see your photos tonight. The details for the shared album are on the card on your table.]

[Buses back to town leave at [time] from [location]. I'll remind you later, because by then you won't remember.]

In a minute we're going to bring in the bridal party and the newly weds, so make sure your glass is full and your hands are free for clapping.

Classic

Wait for the music to fade. Wait for the room to settle.

Good evening, everyone, and welcome. My name is [your name], and I'm honoured to be your MC tonight. [I've known [Name] for [twenty] years, and I'm thrilled to be part of today.]

On behalf of [Name] and [Name], thank you all for being here. Many of you have travelled a long way to share this day with them, and it means a great deal.

[Acknowledgement of Country, if the couple would like one.]

Before we begin, a few pieces of housekeeping.

The toilets are [location]. The bar is [location]. The smoking area is [location].

If you have a dietary requirement, please let the staff know as you're served.

[Transport: The buses will leave from [location] at [time], and I'll remind you of that later in the evening.]

In a moment, we'll welcome the bridal party and the newlyweds into the room, so please make sure your glasses are full.

The speeches

Opening the first round:

Evening again, everyone. It's time for the first round of speeches. If you're facing the wrong way, now's a great time to turn your chair around.

Introducing a parent:

Our first speaker has known [Name] longer than anyone in this room. [She taught her to ride a bike, to drive a car, and, as you're about to find out, how to tell a story.] Please welcome [Name]'s mum, [Name].

Introducing the best man:

Our next speaker has been [Name]'s best mate since [year 7]. He's promised me this speech is under five minutes, and some of you have money riding on that. Please welcome the best man, [Name].

Introducing the maid of honour:

Next up is someone who's been by [Name]'s side through [school, three share houses and one very questionable haircut]. Please welcome the maid of honour, [Name].

Introducing the couple:

And to close the speeches, please welcome our newlyweds, [Name] and [Name].

After each speech, keep it short:

Thank you, [Name].

Or, if the moment calls for it:

Thank you, [Name]. I don't know how [next speaker] is going to follow that.

Thank you, [Name]. I think table four needs a box of tissues.

Closing a round:

That's our first round of speeches. Mains will be out shortly, so enjoy dinner, and we'll hear from the rest of the speakers a bit later.

Want the rest?

This sample has the introduction, chapter 1, chapter 7 and two of the scripts. The full book has seventeen chapters, including getting to know the couple, the running order, writing your script, briefing the speakers, being funny and what to do when things go wrong.

It also has word-for-word scripts for every part of the night, three filled-in sample run sheets, and editable templates for your run sheet, the DJ or band's cue sheet, the speaker briefing and the questions for the couple.

Get it at weddingmchandbook.com