

## How to choose a civil celebrant for your ceremony



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## Congratulations on your decision to get married!

Choosing a **civil ceremony** really opens up your options on:

- **Where** to get married – your home, park, forest, beach, chapel, other wedding venue
- **What** to have in your **ceremony**
- **Who** to involve in your ceremony (bridal party, other participants, guests)
- The **style** of your ceremony – relaxed, formal, informal, alternative, themed...
- Who will be your **celebrant**

## Why your choice of celebrant is important

Because you have just **one chance** to have the marriage ceremony of your dreams, choosing the right celebrant for you is very important. You don't want to have a clash of personalities halfway through planning your ceremony or someone who is very formal if you are planning a relaxed and informal wedding; someone who makes inappropriate jokes through the ceremony, or doesn't ensure that your guests can hear the ceremony.

**No two celebrants are the same** or offer the same service, so you cannot compare on price alone. While you may be able to purchase goods online cheaply, you still end up with the same product if you buy a brand item; the same is not true for obtaining the services of a celebrant or anyone else who provides a service – each brand is unique in this case.

You will **spend many hours with your celebrant**, completing paperwork, discussing your ceremony, emailing and phone calls, giving feedback on your ceremony, rehearsing your ceremony and then during your ceremony. You may want to ensure that you have a good rapport with your celebrant, that he or she understands and listens to you and that you feel reassured in their presence. Even if you are coming from interstate or overseas, you need to ensure that your celebrant is comfortable using email, Skype and social media to keep in touch with you.

## Facts about celebrants

### *MYTH BUSTER –*

*Most celebrants do not expect an invitation to your reception as they will often only know you, the couple and your bridal party and parents. They are give you a hug or shake your hand after the ceremony, then leave you to get on with your celebration.*



*Every celebrant is a unique individual with different skills, abilities and qualities they bring to the job. Celebrants all have something in common – they genuinely want the very best for you and your ceremony and are dedicated individuals who will strive to do their very best every time.*

## So, how do you go about finding the right celebrant for you?

*Here are some tips and questions to help you make the right choice.*

### **TIP 1: Think about the type of celebrant and ceremony you want before you start looking.**

Do you want someone who is very **formal** and takes charge, **or** someone who accommodates your ideas and thoughts and **goes with the flow**, a co-creator, someone professional and **experienced**, someone young or old, male or female, **relaxed** or controlled, someone alternative, someone happy and bubbly, someone **creative**...?

**Is humour important** in your ceremony, do you want something short and sweet but still elegant, or are you having an extremely formal ceremony?

Are you having a **themed wedding** and require your celebrant to dress for the part, or a handfasting or an adventure wedding (skydiving or ocean diving or a wedding on the top of a mountain)? This may influence your choice of celebrant as they may need to be fit or open to wearing fancy dress.

Are you from different **cultural backgrounds** and need your celebrant to integrate different traditions into your ceremony?

Would you like a **registry-office** style wedding **or** something **personally written** for you?

Are you getting married **outdoors** or inside? If outdoors, your celebrant will need to have a **PA system** so check if they do or if they will hire one for your wedding.

Do you want to **write your vows**, or do you want the celebrant to do that? **How much** input and **say do you want** on what goes into your ceremony?

Would you like your celebrant to speak another language, or be affiliated with a **spiritual** belief you hold?

*Once you have thought about these questions, you are ready to start calling celebrants.*

## TIP 2: Decide if you are flexible with your date or it is fixed.

Find out early in the conversation **if the celebrant is available** on your day – this saves you time. If they aren't available, you can move on to the next on your list.

If you haven't yet booked a venue or a time and day, or sent out invitations, and you've found a great celebrant, you may decide to change the day if they are not available on the day you planned.



## TIP 3: Talk to a few celebrants before making a decision.

Chat to a few celebrants on the telephone to get a feel for their style. Taking a little time now gives you a good chance of a successful ceremony on your wedding day.

What does the celebrant's voice sound like on the telephone? Does the celebrant seem friendly, approachable, professional, relaxed on the phone?

Do they seem interested in what you want?

Ask the celebrant to tell you a little bit about themselves – look for someone who will tell you about the qualities and abilities they bring to your ceremony, their experience and what they offer.

Having some questions you ask each celebrant makes it easier to decide if they are the best celebrant for you.

## TIP 4: Have some questions ready to ask the celebrant.

- Do you have ceremonies I choose from or do you write an individual ceremony for each couple?
- Do you have my date free?
- Do you have a PA system?  
*(if they say they don't need it, don't believe them, unless you are getting married in a chapel with great acoustics, a PA system will always enhance the quality of your ceremony for the guests – one of the most common things I hear from guests at other weddings is that they couldn't hear a thing – making it very boring for them)*
- Will you design a ceremony to suit me and include my ideas and needs?
- Are you a full-time celebrant or do you have another job?  
*(This may impact on their ability to be flexible with meetings, rehearsals and contact with you about your wedding ceremony or do a weekday ceremony for you.)*
- How many meetings do we have and where are they held?  
*(If the celebrant meets with you at your place, or at a convenient spot halfway, this may save you time if you are time-poor. This may or may not be important to you. It is just something to consider.)*
- What is included in your fee?
- How long have you been a celebrant for and how many weddings have you done?  
*(A new celebrant may have experience in public speaking, writing, acting or other relevant experience, even though they have not done many weddings, so bear this in mind when asking this question.)*
- Are there any extra charges I should be aware of?  
*(Some celebrants quote a fee initially but then add extra charges for rehearsals, parking, travel, additional items they can supply for you such as ceremony props.)*
- Is the certified marriage certificate fee included in your fee, or do I need to pay this separately to Births Deaths and Marriages?  
*(The Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages charges a fee for sending you a certified copy of your marriage certificate, which you need if you are changing your name. Another common complaint I hear is that the celebrant didn't mention that I needed this certificate.)*
- Is there anything else I need to know about civil ceremonies, the place I am holding my ceremony (is a permit required?) or the time of day and year that I have planned?  
*(This can show how experienced and professional your celebrant is, (e.g., I live near Tamborine Mountain and at some venue locations, the sun sets behind the mountain earlier than others so an earlier ceremony, say at 2pm is better than a 3pm one.)*

## TIP 5: Find out some more about the celebrant.

Using a celebrant someone **recommended** can help you with your choice if you are seeking a similar style of ceremony or are similar in your tastes and styles to the person who is recommending the celebrant. But they may not be the right one for you.

Read some **testimonials** on the celebrant's website or ask them to email some to you. How many ceremonies has the celebrant performed?

Ask if the celebrant provides an **obligation-free meeting** to talk about their services and what you want for your ceremony – a chance to get to know them better and see if they suit you.

## TIP 6: Arrange an obligation-free meeting.

*At this meeting, you can ask the celebrant some more in-depth questions and also see if your personalities are compatible.*

If you have children or someone that you want to involve especially in your ceremony, or have some thoughts on what you would like to include in your ceremony, you may like to **ask the celebrant what ideas they have** for doing this. This can show if they are creative and flexible in what they do. Flexibility and creativity are useful if they need to make last minute adjustments on the day, for example, where one of the people participating in your ceremony is late.

What are the celebrant's **terms and conditions** for booking and carrying out the ceremony? Do they explain these clearly and openly? Will they charge you extra if you need to reschedule your ceremony, or if you are late to your ceremony?

Will the celebrant show you a copy of your ceremony beforehand so that you **can make any changes**? Will the celebrant allow you to make any changes?



## TIP 7: Travel considerations.

If you are holding your ceremony at a distance from where you live, you may like to weigh up whether to choose a celebrant close to where you live and pay a little extra for them to travel to your venue, or choose a celebrant close to the venue but then use your own time and incur your own travel expenses in meeting with your celebrant near the venue.

Celebrants are not restricted from performing ceremonies in other locations and you may decide that paying a **travel fee** is a small price to pay for peace of mind in having a celebrant that you trust, can work with and who is professional and creative.



## TIP 8: Book a celebrant early.

Celebrants are often booked 12 to 18 months in **advance**. Avoid disappointment - **book early**.

You cannot get married until you have given **one month's clear notice** of your intention to marry. In very limited circumstances, such as illness or work commitments, you can have the amount of notice reduced but you need to provide strong evidence to do this. There is no guarantee the time will be shortened. You will also need to pay an extra fee to have this considered.



## When to choose the cheapest celebrant available

If you really don't care about:

- The words of the ceremony
- How those words are spoken
- What the celebrant wears on the day
- If the celebrant suits who you are as a couple
- What vows you say
- Having a ceremony designed and created just for you
- Having your ideas and needs included
- If the celebrant is experienced or not
- If your guests can hear the ceremony
- If significant people are acknowledged in your ceremony
- If you have a well organised rehearsal and ceremony
- Getting tips and advice on planning your ceremony to run smoothly
- The celebrant standing right in the middle of both of you and being in every photograph (*most experienced celebrants stand to one side out of the way and just stand near you when it's time to say your vows*)
- Feeling supported throughout the process of planning your ceremony and on your day
- Having a celebrant that puts everyone at ease, including guests and especially the Groom while he is waiting for his Bride to arrive
- Important information you should know after your wedding day, e.g. How to change your name

then and only then the cheapest celebrant may be your best choice.

## Code of Practice and Complaints Process

Civil Marriage Celebrants in Australia have a Code of Practice and need to tell you about this before or when you book them, and also about the Complaints process available if you are not happy with the service you receive.

At the least, Celebrants are required to give you a choice of ceremonies, ensure everyone can hear your ceremony and provide a high standard of service. If they do not do this, you can help future couples by providing feedback to the Celebrant so that they improve their service. If you are happy with their service, providing good feedback is also appreciated 😊.

You can read more about the Code and what it says on the Attorney-General's website:

### **Code of Practice:**

<http://www.ag.gov.au/FamiliesAndMarriage/Marriage/Pages/GettingmarriedinAustralia.aspx>

### **How to make a complaint:**

<http://www.ag.gov.au/FamiliesAndMarriage/Marriage/Pages/Complaintagainstamarriagecelebrant.aspx>

## All the very best for your wedding

I hope this information was helpful. If you have any questions or would like to provide feedback about this article, you are very welcome to contact me:

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## About the author:

Marlee Bruinsma became a celebrant in 2005 and has conducted over 500 wedding ceremonies (over 1000 ceremonies altogether, including naming ceremonies, commitment ceremonies, house blessings, renewal of vows, celebration of life and rites of passage ceremonies). She is a full-time celebrant, located in south east Queensland and travels far and wide conducting ceremonies, including interstate and to north and western Queensland. Her ceremonies are individually written for those celebrating special occasions. One of her most challenging ceremonies (and most enjoyable) combined Monty Python quotes for the Groom and spiritual elements for the Bride (afterwards a psychotherapist who was a guest at the ceremony came and congratulated her on being able to synthesise these elements and create a ceremony that was meaningful, happy and professional). Marlee loves what she does and it shows in her loving creation of ceremonies for all the wonderful people she meets in her line of work. She has had the honour of naming first, second and third children in many families, marrying their parents, and conducting several ceremonies for the same families. Her clients often comment on her calming presence at ceremonies, which relaxes them and helps the whole ceremony to go smoothly and enjoyably for everyone. She loves handfastings and performing in public.

*Here are some other articles she has written:*

“Ceremony – make yours eco-friendly”

<http://www.bridetobe.com.au/Article/Planning/Your-wedding-day/Wedding-ceremony/Ceremony-Make-yours-eco-friendly>

“Naming ceremonies as healing rituals”

<http://www.naturalparenting.com.au/flex/naming-ceremonies-as-healing-rituals/98335/1>