

How to make your wedding dance memorable!

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The wedding ceremony went wonderfully, just as you planned, and at the reception you and your new husband are introduced to your friends and families for the first time as a couple. Everyone watches as your husband takes you in his arms and moves effortlessly around the dance floor with you. The joy you get from being with each other is obvious to everyone as the dance ends with a deep dip, and a kiss.

Will you include a special first dance at your wedding? Although the first dance is symbolic of the effort that a couple will put into working together for the rest of their lives, it often surprises me how many people choose to include dancing in their wedding day even though they don't dance at any other time in the year. If you plan to include a first dance with your new spouse - and not everyone does - it is worth putting some time and effort into learning to dance in advance of the wedding reception.

If you do decide to include a first dance, it is a good idea to start planning early. If you start taking lessons at least several months in advance, you will decrease your last-minute stress and increase your enjoyment of your first dance together. Dave and Emily, a Burlington, Vermont couple spent a year learning to dance, and when it came time for their first dance together even the hotel staff came out to watch them dance!

As your wedding day approaches it is a good idea to practice at least half an hour once or twice a week. As with any other physical skill it is better to practice for a short time, but often, rather than practicing for a longer time only once or twice. It will also increase your confidence if your wedding dance is not your debut of dancing in public. So, once you've learned enough to dance comfortably, go out social dancing!

As you start practicing for your dance try to pick a song with an easy-to-hear beat that is less than three minutes long. You will be too focused on your new spouse to listen for intricate tempo changes, and for new dancers, three minutes is a very long time to be the only couple on the dance floor! If you know what song you will be dancing to before your lessons begin, your instructor will be able to teach you the best way to dance to that particular song.

While learning to dance, practicing individual step patterns will give the couple the building blocks of a wonderful first dance. Then, once you are comfortable dancing the pieces separately, you can put the pieces together into a routine that will incorporate all you have learned. Of course couples should also practice forgetting the routine, just in case! If a specific routine is planned, it's important that the bride not anticipate that routine in case the groom has to change plans due to a sudden obstacle, like a child wandering onto the dance floor. Regardless of any obstacle, it will look better if the bride does what the groom leads rather than trying to force him back into some pre-determined choreography.

The groom should remember that his arms are the picture frame that shows off his wife. Maintaining a solid hold and good connection will allow her to show her dance ability. The

groom should lead the bride firmly, but gently. It's also important for the groom to listen for and keep time with the music, so if the groom can't hear the beat in the song consider either picking a new song, or getting help from the dance teacher.

It might also be a good idea for the bride to consider dancing requirements when selecting or fitting a wedding dress. Will the bride be able to dance in the skirt and train? Will the couple be able to raise their arms to do turns and spins? Knowing the answers to these questions in advance will avoid last minute surprises on the dance floor!

To ensure that you can dance comfortably, practice dancing in your wedding or reception shoes. If the wedding shoes are not comfortable for dancing, plan to have a different pair of shoes available for your first dance. Be aware, though, that eliminating the bride's heels may put the hem of her dress closer to the floor. In addition to dancing in your wedding shoes, practice dancing with the bride in a skirt as similar to her wedding dress as possible, because not only might the full skirt interfere with her dancing, but the groom might get disoriented by having all that fabric against his legs!

While preparing for their first dance, you will deal with various professionals, perhaps including a dance instructor. Although an inexpensive way to prepare for your first dance might be to purchase instructional videos, these provide no feedback about your progress. Going to group lessons gives a couple access to professionals and "forces" you to practice at least every week. Private lessons and wedding dance workshops tend to be more expensive, but many people consider the personal contact and feedback to be worth the extra money.

Most people choose to include a photographer or videographer in their wedding plans. If you include these professionals, you may want to tell them that you know how to dance to ensure that you'll get dazzling photographs and video! If possible, dance through the routine with them watching so that they will know when to take pictures. If there are two videographers, have one film the audience. Ensure that whoever is filming the couple doesn't stay zoomed in on your faces and lose what the rest of your bodies are doing!

Like the rest of your life together, each of you will have input into what the final product of your first dance looks like. You both want to look and dance your best, but presumably neither of you has danced like this before. Be kind, gentle and understanding of each other as you learn to dance together. Remember that dancing, like marriage, is a team effort!

Kevin Laddison teaches dance classes, private lessons and wedding workshops in Burlington and St. Albans, VT. For more information about dancing, Kevin can be contacted at www.FirstStepDance.com, at 802-598-6757, or via email at Kevin@firststepdance.com.