



UNIT-3

The Wedding Consultation

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Identify the Concept of Wedding Preparation
- ✓ Describe the Required Details you Need for Wedding Preparation
- ✓ Analyze the Offers you Present to your Clients

Unit 3

The Wedding Consultation

First Meeting with the Client and Establishing Wedding Vision

Preparation

Before your first meeting with a new client you will have to be fully prepared.

You cannot just breeze in and expect to come out with a clear understanding of your clients' needs. In this Unit, we will discuss what you should do to prepare for your first meeting.

Where to Hold the Meeting

If you have a home office, you could hold your first meeting there. But only do this if it looks like a professional office. Alternatively, you could suggest that you'll make a visit to their home. This is often a better option as your client will be more relaxed in their natural surroundings and will possibly open up more about their wants and needs. Also, make sure you identify who will be attending your initial meeting. Ideally, it will just be you and the couple that are getting married. However, sometimes the couples' parents will want to be present, and this can confuse things. Always make sure you are taking in what the bride and groom want. Make sure they are happy with the plans that you make as a group.

Self Presentation

When you attend your first meeting with a client it is important that you make the right impression. Arrive looking like a professional. Make sure you look smart, tidy and organized. Take care of your appearance. If you look the part, your clients will have more confidence in you. If you look like you've just got out of bed, they'll perceive you as someone who struggles to plan their own life effectively, and someone who's not capable of organising someone else's wedding.

Style

You must maintain a professional, yet friendly manner during your first meeting. Let your clients know that you take your business very seriously, but at the same time make sure that you come across as approachable and understanding.

What to Take To the Meeting

You'll need to take to your first meeting:

- A pad and pen to take notes with
- A copy of the 'who, what, where, when and how' questions listed later in this module
- A copy of the 'planning the ceremony' questions listed later in this module

- Some suggestions for locations, venues and suppliers etc
- Leaflets and brochures from your suggested suppliers etc Budget estimations
- A calculator

And if you take a mobile phone with you, remember to switch it off. You'll look truly unprofessional if halfway through a meeting a friend calls to see if you fancy going out for a drink in the evening. Keep your work life and home/social life separate.

Be Clear about What You will Ask

Before setting out for your first meeting with a client, make sure you know what you want to ask. In the next section, 'at the meeting', we cover the questions that you'll need to ask.

At The Meeting

Getting To Know Your Client

As a wedding planner, it is your duty to make sure that your client's needs and concerns are taken care of during the wedding planning process. In order to do this, you must effectively communicate with your client. This means asking a lot of questions and clarifying ideas. Effective communication decreases the instance of unnecessary errors and mistakes. Here are some methods to improve communication between you and your clients.

Listening Skills

The art of good conversation lies in getting the other person to talk about themselves. This especially applies in wedding planning. You get people to talk about what they want from you by asking questions. And in asking questions, you gain valuable information. You can use that information to understand the client, and to help them understand how to fulfil their wedding needs.

So here are the two most important things you can say to a client.

1. One is to say nothing
2. The other is to ask questions

High Quality Questions

Questioning the client serves to gain their attention, to understand their situation, and to learn about them. It also reveals what their needs are. You should adopt a funnel approach in your questioning. Start with general questions, such as what time and date they'd like the wedding on, and then move gradually

closer to the more complicated areas like who they'd like to invite and what food they'd like at the reception.

Summarise

When the client has spoken, perhaps in a random way for several minutes, it is helpful to summarise what they have said. You can say:

- 'So you want a reception with a live band?'
- 'What you're saying is, you only want close friends and relatives present?'

This summary can put into a nutshell what the client is trying to say.

Getting the Details You Need

In order to serve your client you must discover all the important details. In the beginning, your client may have a vague idea of what they want. But that is why they have come to you. They need help to make their wedding plans become a reality. Therefore, you must keep in mind the following guidelines when meeting with a client to plan an event.



WHO?

In order to plan the wedding, you initially need to find out:

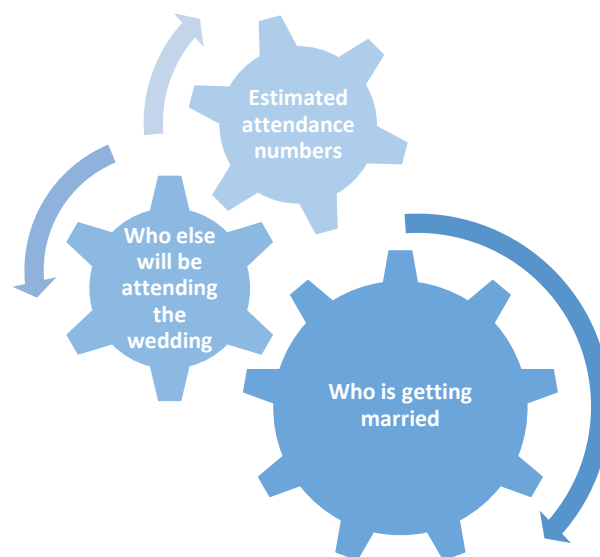


Fig. 3.1

WHAT?

Your next task will be to find what your client's plans are for the wedding. Do they want you to arrange everything down to the hen/stag party, or do they want you to solely concentrate on the wedding ceremony. It is your job to be able to successfully handle whatever you are presented.

WHEN?

Your next task is to find out when your client wants to hold the event. This is very important in order to develop a timeline of services.

Sample questions you should ask your client include:

- What month do you want the wedding to take place in?
- Is there a certain day the wedding needs to be held on? Would you prefer a weekday or a weekend date?
- Do you want the wedding to take place in the morning or afternoon?
- Is it a one-day event or will it take place over a series of days?
- You must ask your client these questions in order to pick a suitable date. In many instances, a date may have to be changed. But whatever the case, this information will be needed in order to pick a suitable venue for the ceremony and reception.

WHERE?

Your next task will be to ask your client where they plan on holding the wedding. Consider the following:

- Will your client wish to get married locally or away from their home?
- Will they want to host it at a church, hotel ballroom, or country club?
- Do they plan on getting married abroad?

It is important to choose a location that will accommodate the correct amount of people, as well as a location that can properly handle hosting the event.

HOW?

The last question you need to ask your client in order to plan their wedding is 'How?' The question of 'How?' is an open-ended question that can help you fill in any blanks. Here is a list of some possible 'How' questions.

- How long will the event last?
- How much do you plan on spending on your budget?
- How do you plan on accommodating your attendants? Will there be food, snacks, or beverages?

- How do you plan on notifying your guests about the event?

These are just some examples of possible 'How' questions you may ask your clients.

CHECKLIST (Who, What, Where, When, How)

Who	
What	
Where	
When	
How	

Planning the Ceremony

Once the couple has hired you to plan their wedding, you may offer:

-  Partial planning of a wedding
-  Complete planning and co-ordination of the wedding
-  Co-ordination on the day of the service only

You have been selected to provide them with the most comprehensive service possible. You must be prepared to meet their wishes, desires and needs with absolute competence. Wedding planning revolves around one singular event: the ceremony. There is a great deal of pre-planning and post-planning related to arranging the vendors, the dresses, the tuxes, the site and the reception. Yet all of these components are directly related to the central focus that is the actual ceremony.

What to Offer Your Clients

Prior to your first meeting with the couple, you will have already prepared a large number of resources to facilitate the planning sessions. A comprehensive wedding package would contain the following services:

- Ongoing communication with the bride and groom
- Budget planning
- Schedules, timelines and checklists
- Selection and booking of venues for wedding and reception
- Selecting and booking of the officiant
- Planning theme and style of the wedding
- Co-ordinating design, ordering and mailing of invitations
- Co-ordinating selection of wedding attire and accessories
- Co-ordinating or providing vendors (florist, caterer, photographer, musician, beautician, hair stylists)
- Co-ordinating transport
- Negotiating and reviewing all contracts
- Assistance with marriage licence
- Itinerary planning
- Ceremony planning
- Rehearsal oversight
- Direction of processional and attendant duties
- Planning the reception
- Wedding day gift co-ordination
- On-hand co-ordination on the day of the wedding
- Relieving the bride and groom of stress

If that list appears impressive, that is only a portion of what a wedding planner does. Weddings are a symphony of organized chaos with the wedding planner in the role of conductor. Whether you offer partial or full wedding planning services, you should be familiar with all aspects of planning a wedding.

Determining the Vision / Venue

A wedding vision is an imaginative conception of the event that encompasses all five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. As a consultant, the goal of discussing vision with your clients is to determine their ideal day and then move to the pragmatics of making that vision a reality. This section presents the tools that will aid you and your clients in establishing a focused vision that will be accompanied by theme, destination, and site selection.

Vision Determination

When you have an initial consultation with a couple, before you can start on your checklist of things to do, before you can book a venue or hire a photographer, you have to find out a little bit about the couple's vision. In order to meet their expectations, it is your responsibility to figure out what makes them tick and how that can be expressed in their wedding. This should be handled through a series of open-ended questions asked during a client interview. You can also ask the primary point of contact, generally the bride, to bring pictures and samples of ideas that she likes. These materials do not have to be wedding specific; they can include almost anything, for example, the shape of a plate, a swatch of fabric, or a photo that brings back a favourite childhood memory.

It is important that you meet with the couple, or at least the primary point of contact, in person. While many of the wedding particulars can be handled by e-mail or telephone, a face-to-face meeting will help you understand the styles and personalities of the individuals, which will typically be translated during their wedding. For example, you can expect different visions from brides who dress in a tailored fashion versus those who wear cutting-edge, fashion-forward clothing versus those who discuss the wicking ability of the latest outdoor hiking gear. Be careful not to over generalize based on appearance; rather, use this information in conjunction with other data provided.

The bottom line is to gather a breadth of information that you can draw upon when executing a vision. Most importantly, as a consultant you have to remember you are not planning your own wedding; you are planning your clients' wedding. So when they tell you, for example, that they got engaged at a popular historic theme park and want a cotton candy machine at the reception, you need to make that happen. When you are trying to uncover your clients' vision, you must actively listen while looking directly at them. Really listen. Don't get overly caught up in taking notes or talking about your experience. Don't say, "Oh well, when I did that wedding . . . and when I did that wedding." You are there to learn about this couple and their desired wedding day.

Wedding Themes

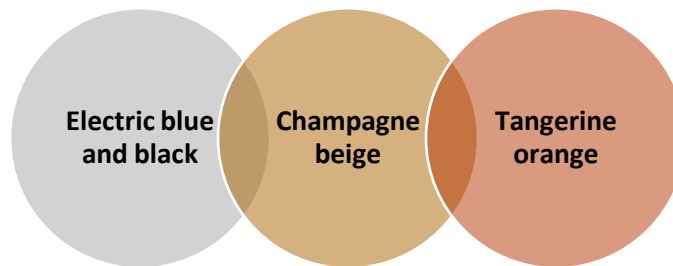
In the process of learning about a couple's vision, thematic ideas are likely to emerge. Wedding themes can vary from subtle to dramatic and generally feed into destination and site selection as well as influencing other elements such as floral décor and favours. A common starting place is a favourite colour. A colour scheme can be the impetus for the entire framework of a wedding.

Colour Composition

Your client is a huge Julia Roberts' fan and absolutely loves the movie, *Steel Magnolias*, so much so that she wants her theme to be based on the colours Roberts' character had for her wedding: blush and bashful (i.e., light pink and dark pink). You compliment your client for having this creative idea and explain that a choice of colours will aid in the overall design of the wedding. Using blush and bashful as an example, determine the following elements:

Month of year: Jan Feb Mar Apr May June Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec	
Ceremony time of day: Morning Afternoon Evening	
Reception location: Hotel Historic Estate Museum Garden Country Club Resort	
How the colours can be incorporated into clothing:	
Two ideas for favours:	
One other effect:	

Complete the same activity using the following colours:



A second thematic category pertains to seasons and holidays. Seasons often coincide with colours, with pastels working best in the spring, bright colours coordinating with summer, muted tones favoured in the fall, and festive shades and darks working well in the winter. Considering the calendar year, some popular holidays that coincide with wedding themes include New Year's Eve, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Easter, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labour Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Holiday weekends are popular because they generally allow guests to have more travel time; however, because of their popularity, prices tend to be higher during these periods. A specific aspect of a season or holiday period can be used to dictate the thematic elements; for instance, a harvest wedding can include a hay wagon, mums, pumpkin centrepieces, a cider-based signature drink, and favours such as baskets of pumpkin bread or candied apples.

For those with an appreciation of the past, a wedding theme based on a specific historic period may be appealing. Renaissance and Victorian periods as well as eras such as the Roaring 1920s and the Big Band 1930s and 1940s lend themselves to specific musical genres as well as clothing styles. A related theme involves drawing on a specific culture or subculture. This may be based on the experiences or heritage of the bride and/or groom or on a particular interest or borrowed culture. For example, a couple may wish to have an Ascot themed wedding, based not on a British heritage but on their love of horses. Another couple, equally passionate about horses, may opt for a more casual Country Western theme. A subculture theme can even be based on a career; for instance, military weddings have specific associated

customs and protocol embedded within the ceremony. Couples with an interest in outdoor activities may decide to have a beach, mountain, garden, or park theme. Gazebos, atriums, resorts, and estates lend themselves to outdoor themes. A related thematic area is comprised of earth and celestial elements, which can be tied into conservationist weddings as well as those using stars, planets, the moon, or angelic features.

A final, broad, theme pertains to popular culture, with couples frequently drawing on books, theatre, and film to inspire their weddings. Plot lines, time periods, characters, and music associated with stories such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *Camelot*, *Cinderella*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Star Wars*, and *The Great Gatsby* fuel the imagination. When choosing a theme, it is important to consider the knowledge base of the guests. If the couple wishes to incorporate Scottish elements into the wedding based on the bride's heritage, it will be helpful to explain the significance of the unique features in the wedding programme so that the cultural experience will not be lost on guests who are not of Scottish descent. In addition, the comfort level of the guests must be kept in mind. A couple with a Country Western theme might like to offer their guests the option of a horseback ride between the wedding and the reception, but they need to offer transportation alternatives for those who might not want to participate in this activity.

Destinations and Sites

Wedding destinations and sites can be chosen based on the theme of the wedding. For instance, a *Great Gatsby*-themed wedding could be held at the Great Gatsby Estate located on the Island of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, or at the Rosecliff Mansion in Newport, Rhode Island, which was the setting for the film. Similarly, an Italian Renaissance-themed wedding could take place at the James Leary Flood Mansion in San Francisco, California, as the architects who designed this building employed this classical style.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier, destination weddings allow many couples to live out their dream themes; for example, Walt Disney World has custom packages that can even include *Cinderella's* carriage.

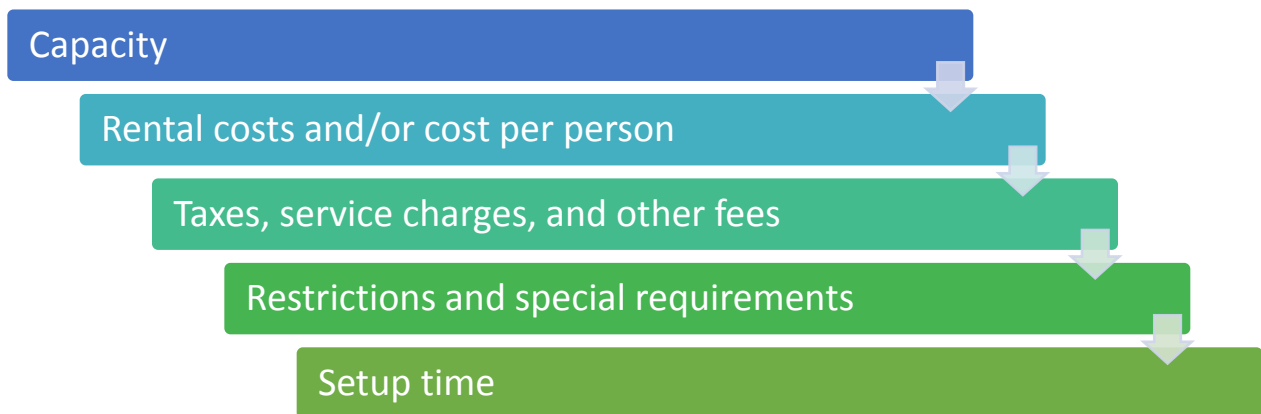
In many cases, it is not feasible for couples to choose a destination and site based on the wedding theme. Accordingly, the site can be transformed to reflect the theme and/or destination. For example, many couples who desire to have a beach theme do not live near an ocean or lake. However, the theme can still be established through stationery selections, favours, music, and other specific elements. Similarly, many couples get engaged while travelling and may want to incorporate elements of those memories in their weddings. For example, a bride and groom who became engaged in Paris at the Eiffel Tower are not likely to return to Paris for their ceremony, but they can readily include Parisian elements to impart a French flavour to their day.

While the destination is the broader geographical area such as a city, the site is the specific physical venue as well as the placement within that venue. For example, most major hotels have multiple-function spaces where a wedding and reception can take place, with options such as a courtyard,

ballroom, or conservatory being quite common. Each of these spaces has a different feel, thus allowing for a wide range of themes.

Many wedding ceremonies take place at a house of worship, and then the couple and their guests often move to a separate location for the reception. Alternatively, many sites can accommodate both the ceremony and the reception. Some common reception venues include aquariums, atriums, ballrooms, country clubs, gardens, historic estates, hotels, inns, museums, park facilities, plantations, and resorts. Many of your clients will not have a clear vision of their day and may rely on you to help construct a theme and then indicate the appropriate destination and site to carry out the theme. When this occurs, you have to gently lead your clients by the hand. Taking classes in design and floral décor as well as keeping up with the latest wedding trends will help you hone your creative skills and enable you to assist each couple in determining a unique style.

When selecting a wedding venue, you should pay particular attention to the following issues:



First, capacity will dictate whether a given facility is feasible and practical. Many historic homes, garden sanctuaries, and smaller museum sites have capacities limited to 150 or fewer persons; therefore, for large weddings, clients are better served with major hotels that can often handle as many as 3,000 guests. By the same token, a grand ballroom reserved for a 50-person reception would feel cavernous, so a couple planning an intimate wedding should select an equally personal setting.

Second, rental fees will differ significantly from property to property. For some hotels, there are no rental fees and pricing is based per person for food and beverage. In other cases, venues can charge £5,000 or more simply to reserve the space, which buys your clients nothing but the privilege of using the space for a certain number of hours.

When calculating costs, it is important to remember the third consideration: taxes, service charges, and other fees. For example, if a hotel using a per-person structure gives a reception estimate of £100 per person for 150 guests, the immediate assumption might be to budget £15,000. However, this estimate can be misleading if it is exclusive of tax and service charge. If the tax is 7 percent and the service charge is 18 percent, that adds an additional 25 percent to the bill, and the reception actually costs £18,750, which may be out of the couple's budget range. When you are showing your clients three different

proposals from three different venues, you are going to want to compare apples to apples. If one venue is including everything and one is not, the one that is incomplete will look less expensive, so you have to peel away the layers and make sure that the information provided is consistent and complete. Be mindful of other fees such as those pertaining to cake cutting, beverage corkage, and overtime.

A fourth consideration when selecting a venue is restrictions and special requirements. Some facilities, such as historic chapels in academic settings, private country clubs, and famous cathedrals, are only available to those who belong to the associated communities. While nominal membership fees may be paid to gain access to some such venues, in other cases it is cost prohibitive or impossible to secure usage privileges. Some venues are only available if the bride, groom, or an immediate family member has an established relationship created through ongoing and noteworthy financial contributions.

Special requirements also refer to what can and cannot occur at the given facility. Many historic buildings have policies that are in place to maintain the integrity of the building and its artifacts. Some common wedding elements that may be prohibited because of their ability to stain or cause damage include red or blush wines, other red liquids such as tomato and cranberry juice, chocolate fountains, candles, and flower petals. Other restrictions often apply to the types of rentals that can be used. For instance, some rental chairs may scratch flooring and will therefore be prohibited. Venues with strict guidelines will generally provide a list of accepted vendors with whom they have cultivated a trusting relationship. For venues such as hotels that have their own catering services, you may be required to purchase their food, beverage, and even the wedding cake as part of the contract. It is important that you become very familiar with the policies and regulations of wedding sites in your area so that you can assist your clients in making informed decisions.

A final consideration is the amount of setup time available. Essentially, you need to know when the vendors can move in to prepare for the guests to arrive. This issue can be particularly problematic at popular venues that book back-to-back receptions, which may mean that one ends at 5:00 P.M. and the next starts at 6:00 P.M. As a consultant, this makes the turnaround time very, very tight. Have a candid conversation with the venue manager to determine if the staff can accomplish the following in a one-hour turn: get the previous guests out, take the gifts away, vacuum the carpet, turn the room, reconfigure the tables, replace all the linens, and clean the bathrooms. Simultaneously, you will need to time the setup of the escort card table, floral décor, food, cake, musicians, lighting, and other reception elements.

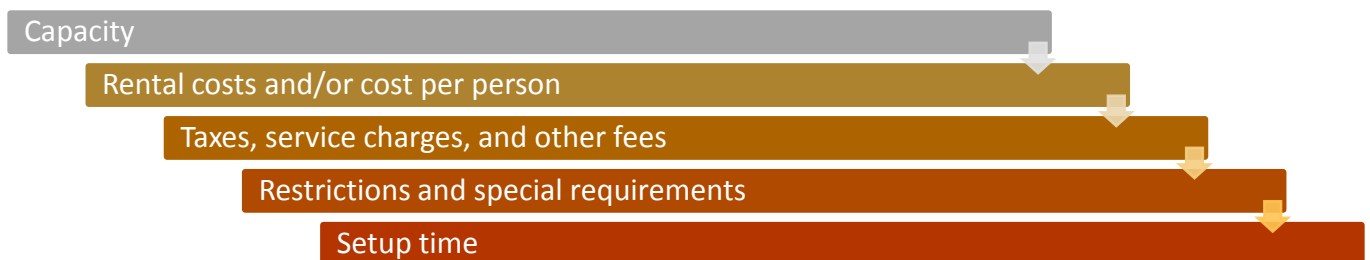
The bottom line is that a short turnaround does not allow for the emergencies, problems, and challenges that invariably arise. Generally speaking, you should look for a setup time of no less than four hours; if it has to be less, make sure that you have plenty of assistants on hand. With large weddings, it is best to advise your clients to select a venue that only handles one event per day so the stress of setup and breakdown is minimized. With setup and breakdown, you also need to be aware if the venue works with unions, as this, too, will influence time orientation. Most unions work within the exact specifics of their contracts and can actually leave if activities do not take place as scheduled.

One way to get an answer to all of the key questions pertaining to a venue is to send out a request for proposal (RFP) to the two or three venues under consideration. The RFP details the specific requirements of your client's wedding and asks potential vendors to bid based on the guidelines provided. You will send out the exact same RFP to all of the venues where you ask them to address the same issues. This way, your clients can readily compare information when making a venue decision. Decisions are not based solely on budget competitiveness; in addition, your clients should be assessing the completeness, organization, creativity, and feasibility of the proposal. As a wedding consultant, you should not blindly send out RFPs and hope for the best. Instead, you should start with a trusted list of venues and allow your clients to select the one that is the best fit.

Consultant Checklist and Reminders for Theme, Destination, and Site Selection

- Make sure the theme resonates with the couple.
- Stick to one primary theme and stay consistent in the application of the theme.
- Don't overdo a theme, as it can take away from the meaning of the day.
- Keep the guests' knowledge base and comfort level in mind.
- Keep the budget in mind, as the implementation of some themes can be cost prohibitive.
- Choose destinations and sites on the basis of the wedding theme; alternatively, transform a venue to reflect the theme.

When helping your clients compare venues, be very familiar with the:



Further Reading:

- ✓ *How to Plan Your Own Wedding and Save Thousands: Without Going Crazy*
By Tracy Leigh
- ✓ *E-plan Your Wedding: How to Save Time and Money with Today's Best Online*
By Crystal Melendez, Jason Melendez
- ✓ *A Priceless Wedding: Crafting a Meaningful, Memorable, and Affordable*
By Sara Cotner