Morrow & Made

Just Engaged: Your First 30 Days

You don't need to plan the whole wedding this month. You need a few clear decisions, in a calm order, so everything after is easier. This guide covers exactly that.

INSIDE

A four-week plan
The budget conversation
A first guest count
Your top priorities
Venue questions to ask everyone
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What a payment schedule looks like
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HOW TO USE IT

Work through one week at a time. Tick the boxes, write in the blanks, and skip anything that doesn't fit your wedding. None of this is a rule. It's an order that keeps the big choices ahead of the small ones.

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THE PLAN AT A GLANCE

Four calm weeks

One small set of decisions per week. If a week runs long, that's fine. The order matters more than the speed.

WEEK 1

Enjoy it

- [ ] Tell the people you want to tell, in the order you want
- [ ] Agree on what you'll say when someone asks "so, when's the wedding?"
- [ ] Pick one shared place for notes, screenshots and quotes
- [ ] Take a photo of the ring and the moment, then put your phones away for a night

WEEK 2

First decisions

- [ ] Choose the kind of wedding you want (page 3)
- [ ] Have the budget conversation (page 3)
- [ ] Ask whether anyone else plans to contribute, and how much
- [ ] Each list your top three priorities (page 4)

WEEK 3

Rough numbers

- [ ] Make a first guest count with an A and B list (page 4)
- [ ] Pick two or three date ranges that work (page 4)
- [ ] Agree how you'll handle plus-ones and children
- [ ] Make a short list of venues to look at

WEEK 4

Set up

- [ ] Contact 3 to 5 venues with the same questions (page 5)
- [ ] Decide who handles what between the two of you
- [ ] Set up one place for money, guests and dates (page 9)
- [ ] Book a weekly 20-minute planning check-in together

Good to know. Many couples start planning within the first month, and the average engagement is about 14 months (The Knot 2026 Real Weddings Study). You have time. This month is about direction, not details.

WEEK 2

First decisions

Rough answers are fine. You can change them later.

What kind of wedding?

Small and simple | Classic, mid-size | Big celebration | Destination or weekend | Not sure yet

Roughly when? _____ Roughly where? _____

The budget conversation

Money is where a lot of planning tension starts, so have this talk early and write the answers down. There are no right numbers here, only yours.

QUESTION	OUR ANSWER
What total are we comfortable spending?	
Is anyone else contributing? How much, and is it a fixed amount or a share?	
Does anyone contributing expect a say in decisions?	
What will we not borrow for? (our limit)	
How much can we save between now and the wedding?	
Which one or two things are worth spending more on?	
Where are we happy to keep it simple?	

Keep a cushion. Hold back a slice of the total for things nobody plans for, like a service charge on a quote, a last-minute rental or extra guests. Pick a share that feels right to you, and don't spend it early.

WEEK 3

A rough guest count

Your guest number drives the venue size and most per-person costs: food, drinks, chairs, rentals. A first draft now saves painful edits later.

LIST A: MUST INVITE	PEOPLE	LIST B: WOULD LOVE TO INVITE	PEOPLE
Partner 1 family		Extended family	
Partner 2 family		Friends	
Close friends		Work	
Other		Plus-ones	
Total A		**Total B**	

Our working number: Total A + the part of B we'd add = _____

- [ ] Agree how you'll handle plus-ones and children before anyone asks
- [ ] Decide who has the final say on each side's list

Your priorities

Each of you ranks your top three on your own, then compare. Where you overlap is where the money and energy go.

PARTNER 1

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

PARTNER 2

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Common picks: the venue or setting, food and drink, photos, music and dancing, the guest experience, the ceremony itself, attire, keeping costs down.

Target dates

Two or three date ranges that work for you and the people who must be there:

_____

Dates to avoid (holidays, family events, work peaks): _____

WEEK 4

Ask every venue the same questions

Comparing venues is easier when you ask each one the same things and write the answers side by side. Ask for anything important in writing.

QUESTION	VENUE 1	VENUE 2	VENUE 3
Available on our dates?			
Capacity (seated / standing)			
Price, and exactly what's included			
Service charge, tax and gratuity: added on top?			
Minimum spend or guest minimum?			
Must we use their caterer or vendors?			
Hours included, and the cost of overtime			
Deposit, payment schedule and due dates			
Cancellation and rescheduling terms			
Rain or backup plan, if outdoors			
How far ahead do they usually book?			

Write the true total, not the headline price. A quote of one number can grow once service charges, tax, minimums and overtime are added. Ask each venue for an all-in estimate for your guest count.

WEEK 4

Things not to rush into

- [ ] **Signing anything** before you've compared at least two options and read the cancellation terms
- [ ] **Paying a deposit** before the date, the price and what's included are in writing
- [ ] **Announcing a date** before the venue has confirmed it in writing
- [ ] **Inviting people out loud.** It's hard to un-invite, so wait for your guest count
- [ ] **Buying decor and extras** before the budget is settled
- [ ] **Choosing your wedding party** in the excitement of the first week

Which vendors come first

Most couples start with the things that set the date and the size, then move outward. Adjust the order to your own priorities.

1. **Venue.** It sets the date and the capacity.
2. **Catering,** if it isn't included with the venue.
3. **Photographer,** if photos are one of your top three.
4. **Officiant** or your ceremony plans.
5. **Planner or day-of coordinator,** if you want one.
6. **Music:** DJ or band.

Keep every payment visible

Each vendor usually has its own deposit, installments and final balance, and the final payments tend to land close to the wedding. From your very first deposit, write down three things for every payment: **the amount, the due date, and the date you paid it**. Keep the receipt. Both of you should be able to see the list.

BEFORE YOUR FIRST DEPOSIT

What a payment schedule looks like

Every vendor sets its own terms, and your contract decides what you owe and when. But most schedules have the same shape, and it helps to know it before you sign the first one.

WHAT 100 VENDORS' PUBLISHED TERMS SHOW

30%

median deposit when it's a percentage. 50% is the single most common ask.

$500

median deposit when it's a flat amount.

75 of 91

want the final balance 30 days or fewer before the wedding. 33 want it within two weeks.

67 of 100

say in writing that the deposit is non-refundable.

Source: Morrow & Made Wedding Vendor Deposit Report, 100 US vendors in 38 states, November 2026. morrowandmade.com/blog/wedding-vendor-deposit-report.html

The usual shape, in order

At booking	• Deposit to hold the date. Most vendors then ask for everything else later, in one payment.
In between	• Some vendors, often venues and photographers, split the rest into monthly installments.
2 to 4 weeks out	• Most final balances fall due here, often several in the same few weeks.
10 to 14 days out	• Caterers commonly ask for the final headcount, and the bill can change with it.
After the day	• Some photographers and videographers take the last payment before releasing the files.

Write each one down when you sign

VENDOR	TOTAL	DEPOSIT PAID (DATE)	NEXT PAYMENT AND DUE DATE	STILL OWED

Watch the "Still owed" column. Add it up across every vendor and note the month it lands. That total, money you've signed for but not yet paid, is what catches couples out in the final weeks. It is far easier to plan for when you can see it from the first deposit.

KEEP THIS ONE ON THE FRIDGE

The 12-month checklist

A typical order for a wedding about a year away. If your engagement is shorter or longer, stretch or squeeze the rows. Start where you are.

12+ months	• Budget, guest count and priorities (this guide) • Book the venue; confirm the date in writing • Start one shared place for money, guests and dates
10 to 12 months	• Book caterer if separate, photographer, officiant • Choose a planner or day-of coordinator, if you want one • Draft the full guest list with addresses
8 to 10 months	• Book music, florist and videographer, if wanted • Start shopping for attire • Set up a wedding website for guest details, if you want one
6 to 8 months	• Send save-the-dates • Book rentals, hair and makeup, transport • Reserve a hotel room block for guests
4 to 6 months	• Order invitations; plan the ceremony • Schedule tastings and attire fittings • Review every vendor's payment schedule
2 to 3 months	• Mail invitations; start tracking replies • Get your marriage license details for your area • Draft the day-of timeline with your vendors
1 month	• Final guest count to caterer and venue • Seating chart; confirm every vendor's arrival time • List each final balance, its due date and who pays it
Final week	• Pay or schedule remaining balances; prepare tips in labeled envelopes • Give a helper the day-of timeline and vendor contacts • Pack an emergency kit, then step back and enjoy it

WHERE TO KEEP IT ALL

Set up one place for your plan

After this month, the hard part is keeping the budget, guest list, vendors, payments and dates in step with each other. Whatever you use, make sure it does four things:

- [ ] Shows what you expect to spend, what you've booked and what you've actually paid, separately
- [ ] Gives every deposit and balance its own due date
- [ ] Keeps one guest list you can both edit
- [ ] Shows what's coming up next

FROM MORROW & MADE

Wedding Planning OS

Know what's booked, what's paid, and what needs attention. One connected workbook for Google Sheets or Excel.

- Record a vendor booking and see that commitment in your budget
- Give each deposit, installment and final balance its own row, and mark it paid
- Update guest replies; attendance totals and per-guest estimates change with them
- Open the Dashboard to see upcoming items and anything that needs attention

$34 one-time, plus applicable tax · instant download · morrowandmade.com

You enter and maintain the details yourself. The workbook doesn't connect to your bank, import RSVPs or send reminders. It's designed for laptops.

This guide is general planning guidance, not professional, financial or legal advice. Every wedding is different. Take what helps and skip what doesn't. Questions: hello@morrowandmade.com