

WEDDING VENDORS: TIPPING CHEAT SHEET

With so many wedding expenses, gratuities can add up. Here are the wedding vendors you need to tip.

When you're already dipping deep into your (or your parents') savings for so many wedding expenses, shelling out gratuities on top of that can be hard to handle. Well, rest easy: unless a service charge is spelled out in your contract, you're never obligated to tip anyone.

However you can't ignore the fact that some vendors will expect a gratuity, which forces tipping to be considered on a case-by-case scenario. Some general rules: Don't tip business owners, only tip their employees (however, you can/should tip an owner when the service exceeds expectations); tip vendors who offer exceptional service; thank-you notes are always appreciated; and assign the responsibility to a trusted deputy such as your wedding planner, a parent, or the best man. For a breakdown of what's customary for each vendor, read on.

Wedding Planner

Wedding planners won't likely expect anything; however, if yours did a great job you can always offer a token of your appreciation. (Note: Non-monetary thank-yous like professional photos of the wedding for the planner's portfolio can go a long way too.) Approximately 50 percent of couples do tip their planners -- typically those with more opulent weddings.

Protocol: Optional

The Standard: Up to \$500, or a nice gift

When to Tip: The bride should hand off the envelope at the end of the reception, or, she should send a thank-you note with photos or a check after the honeymoon.

Wedding Hair Stylist and Makeup Artist

This is one area where a gratuity is definitely expected. Tip between 15 - 20 percent just as you would in a hair salon, and consider giving a little extra if there's a crisis, like one of your bridesmaids has a meltdown over her updo and it requires a redo at the last minute.

Protocol: Expected

The Standard: 15 - 25 percent, depending upon the quality of service

When to Tip: At the end of your service

Wedding Delivery and Set-up Staff

Slip a few dollars to anyone delivering important items to the site (wedding cake, flowers, or sound system). And if a lot of gear needs to be brought in and set up (tents, chairs, or port-a-potties), the workers deserve a tip too.

Protocol: Expected

The Standard: \$5 - \$10 per person

When to Tip: Drop off cash envelopes the day before the wedding to the catering manager so the person accepting deliveries can turn the tip.

Wedding Ceremony Officiant

If your officiant is affiliated with a church or synagogue, you're often expected to make a donation to that institution. If you're a member you'll probably want to give a larger amount than if you're not. However, if you're getting married there and they're charging you to use the space, feel free to give a smaller amount. If you're using a nondenominational officiant, no tip is required because they will charge you for their time.

Protocol: Expected (depending on officiant)

The Standard: Donate \$500+ to the church or synagogue, or, for a nondenominational officiant, an optional tip of \$50 - \$100

When to Tip: Most ceremony fees are required prior to the wedding. Otherwise, have the best man pass the cash envelope at the rehearsal dinner if the officiant is in attendance.

Wedding Ceremony Musicians

If you worked with a mini orchestra to come up with the perfect score for your service (and they pulled it off flawlessly), consider showing some monetary thanks for their talent. However, you probably don't have to tip the solo church organist who was required to play.

Protocol: Optional

The Standard: \$15 - \$20 per musician

When to Tip: At the end of the ceremony.

Wedding Photographer/Videographer

You're not expected to give your shutterbugs any dough beyond their normal fees. Yet if the wedding photographer or videographer doesn't own the studio, consider tipping each person (or give a certain amount with a thank-you note to disperse to staff).

Protocol: Unnecessary, unless the photographer is not the studio owner.

The Standard: \$50 - \$200 per vendor

When to Tip: At the end of the reception.

Wedding Reception Staff

This type of staff includes the on-site coordinator, maitre d', and banquet manager. A service charge (typically 2 percent) is almost always built in to the food and drink fee, so check your contract. If the gratuity is not included, tip as follows.

Protocol: Expected

The Standard: 15 - 20 percent of the food and drink fee (based on labor, not the cost), or \$200 - \$300 for the maitre d'.

When to Tip: If it's covered in the contract, the final bill is typically due before the reception. Otherwise, have the father of the bride or best man hand the envelope to the maitre d' at the end of the reception since you will need to know the final tab to calculate the percentage.

Wedding Reception Attendants

When it comes to bartenders, waitstaff, parking, bathroom, and coat-room attendants the rules of tipping are dictated by your contract. If the service fee is included, consider doling out extra only if the service was exceptional. If it's not included, ask ahead of time how many attendants will be working your wedding and calculate on a per person basis.

Protocol: Optional, based on contract

The Standard: \$20 - \$25 per bartender or waiter; \$1 per guest for coat room and parking attendants; \$1 per car

When to Tip: Although tips are traditionally passed out at the end of the event, you could alternately distribute them at the beginning of the evening, to encourage all the workers to give you great service.

Wedding Reception Band or DJ

Whether you hire 12-piece swing band or grooving to a DJ, tipping musicians is completely optional. (Depending on the quality of the job and how willing they were to follow your ideal playlist!) And don't forget about any sound technicians they bring with them.

Protocol: Optional, yet preferred

The Standard: \$20 - \$25 per musician; \$50 - \$150 for DJs

When to Tip: At the end of the reception, by the best man.

Wedding Transportation

Again, check your contract, as gratuity is usually included. If it isn't, plan to tip provided they show up on time and don't get lost!

Protocol: Expected

The Standard: 15 - 20 percent of the total bill

When to Tip: At the end of the night or after the last ride. If you used a separate company for the guest buses, designate a bus captain to hand the driver a tip, otherwise, this duty falls to the best man.