



Planning Your Ceremony

A practical guide from Judi Hewitt

Everything you need to think about, prepare and look forward to

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Making the Most of Your Questionnaire

Once you have confirmed your booking with me, one of the first things I will send you is a detailed questionnaire. This is the foundation of everything I create for you, so the more you put into it, the better your ceremony will be.

There are no right or wrong answers, and no such thing as too much detail. Write freely, write personally, and do not worry about spelling or structure, I am reading it as a person who genuinely wants to understand you.

A few tips for filling it in

- Set aside some time
- If you are completing it as a couple, try writing your answers separately first, then compare. The differences are often just as revealing as the similarities.
- If you are completing as a family for a loved one, answering together is a good idea.
- If a memory makes you laugh or cry, include it. Those are the moments that make a ceremony feel real.
- Think about the people who will be present, how do you want them to feel, and know?
- If a question does not apply to you, skip it. If something feels missing, add it at the end. There are no strict rules.

“The questionnaire is not a form to complete, it is a conversation starter. Everything I write begins there.”

For funeral and memorial families

I know that sitting down to answer questions about someone you have lost can feel difficult, and I want you to know there is absolutely no rush. Fill in what you can, when you feel able. If it is easier to talk than to write, we can do that instead. I will work with whatever you are able to give me, and I will always handle it with the greatest of care.

Weddings & Vow Renewals

Your timeline at a glance

Getting the timing right makes the whole process feel easy rather than rushed. Here is a guide

1. **12+ months before:** Get in touch and confirm your booking. Popular dates fill up quickly.
2. **9–12 months before:** Have your initial planning conversation and start thinking about the shape of your ceremony: venue, tone, any rituals you love the idea of.
3. **6 months before:** Complete your questionnaire and have your main planning meeting with me.
4. **3 months before:** Read through your draft ceremony script carefully. Sit with it. Read it aloud. Note anything that does not feel right.
5. **4–6 weeks before:** Finalise readings, music choices, and any contributors who have a role on the day. Brief them so they feel confident.
6. **1–2 weeks before:** Approve your final script. Share the running order with your venue and any other key suppliers.
7. **The day before:** I will be in touch to confirm everything. Your job is simply to be ready to enjoy it.
8. **On the day:** I will be there early to ensure your day runs smoothly and all you need to do is be present and have the most wonderful, memorable ceremony.

Writing your vows

If you are writing your own vows, here is some practical guidance to help you.

- Aim for around one to two minutes when spoken aloud.
- Write in the way you actually speak, not the way you think vows are supposed to sound.
- Start with a specific memory or moment rather than a general statement, it immediately feels more personal.
- Make at least one promise that is genuinely yours, something that reflects how you actually love each other.
- Read them aloud to yourself several times before the day. You will be surprised how different words sound when spoken rather than read.
- Send them to me when you are happy with them and I can help you shape them if needed and will advise on how to pace them on the day, in my Diamond Ceremony with your guidance I can write them for you.

“The most moving vows are not the most poetic ones. They are the ones that sound most like the person saying them.”

Choosing your readings

A ceremony with well-chosen readings can be so memorable. When you are choosing, ask yourself: does this actually sound like us? Would we have chosen this, or does it just feel like the done thing?

- Classic poems work beautifully when they genuinely resonate, but only then.
- Passages from a favourite book, film or song can be just as fitting as traditional ceremony readings.
- Something written by a friend or family member is often the most moving thing in the room.
- I have a wide selection of suggestions across all styles and tones, just ask.
- We can also discuss some ideas for me to write a personal poem or reading for you in my bespoke offering.

Thinking about music

Music does more emotional work in a ceremony than almost anything else. Think about three moments: arrival, any significant middle moment (such as a signing or ritual), and the exit.

- Arrival music sets the entire atmosphere, so give it some thought. How do you want guests to feel as they wait and as you walk in?
- Exit music is your first moment as a married couple, it should feel like a celebration or true to who you are.
- Live music always adds something special if it is within your budget.
- Do not feel pressured by tradition, the right music is the music that means something to you.
- Check with your venue about sound system requirements, particularly for outdoor ceremonies.

Naming Ceremonies

A naming ceremony can be for a new baby, a growing child, an adult stepping into a new identity, or someone honouring the name they have always carried. Whatever the reason, the practical preparation is similar: the more personal detail you can bring me, the more meaningful the ceremony will be.

Your timeline

1. **2–6 months before:** Get in touch and confirm your booking. Share your date and venue as soon as you have them.
2. **6–8 weeks before:** Complete your questionnaire. For a child's ceremony, tell me everything — the pregnancy, the birth, the name and why you chose it, the siblings, the grandparents, the funny stories.
3. **3–4 weeks before:** Review your ceremony script and request any changes.
4. **1–2 weeks before:** Confirm the running order with anyone who has a role on the day and make sure they feel prepared.
5. **On the day:** Relax and enjoy it. This is a celebration.

Guide parents and special roles

If you are choosing guide parents (or any equivalent role), think carefully about what you want to ask of them. A promise made in a ceremony carries real weight — it should feel meaningful rather than ceremonial.

- Talk to your guide parents or special guests well in advance about what their role will involve.
- If they are making promises or delivering a reading, send them the words at least two weeks before.
- Think about whether there are other people you want to involve — older siblings, grandparents, close friends — and how.
- For adult naming ceremonies, consider who in your life has supported your journey and how you might acknowledge them.

Practical considerations

- If babies or young children are involved, build in flexibility. We can always adapt on the day and I am very experienced at reading a room with little ones in it.
- Think about where guests will sit or stand, and whether younger children need a quiet space nearby.
- Have everything you need for any rituals organised in advance — candles, sand, a vessel, whatever you have chosen.
- Consider having a small memento or keepsake for the day — a printed order of ceremony, a framed print of the words, or a photograph taken during the ceremony itself.

Funerals

I know this is not an easy time. What follows is gentle, practical guidance to help you think through some of the decisions you will need to make. Please take it at whatever pace feels right and remember that I am here to guide you through all of it.

Working with your funeral director

If you have already chosen a funeral director, please share my details with them, or let me know who they are and I will get in touch directly. I am experienced in working alongside funeral homes and will handle all coordination with them on your behalf so you have one less thing to manage.

Already have a funeral home booked or in mind?

Please contact me as soon as you feel ready. I will reach out to them directly and take as much off your plate as I can.

Your timeline

I understand that time is often short when arranging a funeral — sometimes just a few days. Please do not let this worry you. Contact me as soon as you feel able and I will work quickly and carefully around whatever timescale you have.

1. **As soon as you are ready:** Get in touch. Even a brief phone call or message is enough to start.
2. **At our meeting:** We will talk about your loved one, who they were, how they lived, and what you want the ceremony to feel like. There is no right or wrong way to do this.
3. **Sharing memories:** jot down some thoughts, or to involve other family members in telling me about your loved one.
4. **Reviewing the script:** I will share a draft with you as soon as I have written it. Please read it aloud if you can, it sounds different spoken than it does on the page.
5. **Final confirmation:** We will agree the final script, music, readings and running order ahead of the ceremony.

Gathering memories and tributes

The life story I tell in a funeral ceremony is only as rich as the material I am given. Here are some ways to gather what I need from the people who knew your loved one best.

- Ask family members to write down their favourite memory, a word that captures the person, or something they want people to know about them. Look through photographs together, they often spark stories that might not otherwise surface. Think about the everyday details as well as the significant moments: hobbies, favourite foods, habits, sayings, things that made them laugh or they were passionate about. If someone wants to speak or read at the ceremony, please confirm this as early as possible and let me know so I can build the ceremony around their contribution.

“You do not need to have everything sorted before you call me. Just reach out whenever you are ready, and we will take it from there, one step at a time. Or if your Funeral Arranger has contacted me, I will contact you.”

Memorials & Celebrations of Life

A memorial or celebration of life gives you the gift of time, time to plan, and to come together when you are ready rather than when circumstance demands.

Planning ahead

Because there is no fixed timescale, it is worth thinking carefully about when and where feels right before you begin planning in detail. Some families hold a memorial within a few weeks; others wait months or even a year. Both are entirely valid.

- Think about whether there is a date that carries meaning: a birthday, an anniversary, a favourite season.
- Consider who you want to be there and what travel or logistics might require.
- Think about the size and tone you want: a small, quiet gathering or something larger and more celebratory.
- Decide on a venue that reflects the person: their favourite venue, a garden they loved, a village hall, a meaningful outdoor space.

Making it personal

Because you have more time to plan, a memorial or celebration of life can often be even more personalised than a funeral. Here are some ideas to consider.

- A memory table or display of photographs, objects and mementos that capture who they were.
- An open invitation for guests to share a memory, a story or a favourite photograph in advance.
- A memory book or jar where guests can write and leave their words on the day.
- A playlist of music that meant something to them, played as guests arrive or during a reflective moment.
- A symbolic ritual: a release, a candle lighting, a planting or something that gives everyone a shared moment of participation.
- A display or projection of photographs set to music, running as a tribute in the background.

“The more personal detail you can bring me, the more the ceremony will feel like a true reflection of the person you are honouring. Nothing is too small or too ordinary to include.”

Practical Guidance for Any Ceremony

Involving others on the day

Whoever you are asking to take part: a reader, a musician, someone sharing a memory, please brief them properly in advance. Here is a simple checklist.

- Share the exact words they will be saying or reading at least two weeks before the ceremony.
- Let them know roughly when in the ceremony they will be called upon.
- Encourage them to practise reading aloud, it is very different from reading silently.
- Reassure them that nerves are normal and that I will cue them clearly and calmly on the day.
- If anyone is sharing a personal memory or tribute, suggest they keep it to two to three minutes, shorter is almost always more powerful.

Choosing symbolic rituals

If you are thinking about including a ritual, here is a brief guide to the most popular options depending on the type of ceremony and what they involve practically.

Hand-fasting

You will need ribbon or cord in colours meaningful to you or I can source them for you, usually two or three lengths of around a metre. I will guide the binding during the ceremony.

Unity candle

You will need three candles, two smaller ones and one larger unity candle. Check with your venue about open flames, particularly indoors. We can do something similar with battery candles.

Sand ceremony

You will need two small containers of different coloured sand and one larger vessel to pour into. The vessel becomes a permanent keepsake. You can purchase kits.

Stone, flower or wish ceremony

Guests each receive a small stone, petal or piece of paper as they arrive. They place it into a vessel during the ceremony. You will need to source the items and vessel in advance and have someone distribute them as guests arrive.

Tree or flower planting

Arrange for a small potted plant, sapling or bulbs, a container of soil and a trowel. This works beautifully for outdoor ceremonies and naming ceremonies in particular.

On the day — a checklist

Whatever ceremony you are having, these practical points will help everything run smoothly.

- Share the ceremony running order with your venue coordinator in advance, particularly music cues and any sound or lighting requirements. I will arrange this.
- Make sure someone is responsible for welcoming guests and directing them as they arrive.
- Have a single point of contact on the day who can liaise with the venue if needed so you do not have to.
- If you have an order of service or printed programme, make sure enough copies are printed and someone is ready to hand them out or placed on seats.
- For outdoor ceremonies, we will always have a contingency plan for wet weather. We will discuss this with your venue.
- Think about accessibility, where your elderly or less mobile guests will sit, whether there are steps or uneven ground, and whether anyone needs particular support.
- Make sure any props or ritual items are in place before guests arrive.
- And finally trust me to hold the ceremony for you. That is exactly what I am there to do.



Whatever you need, I am here.


No question is too small, and no idea is too unusual.

Please do get in touch at any point in the planning process, that is what I am here for.

Get in touch

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