

A romantic close-up of a bride and groom. The groom, on the left, is wearing a dark tuxedo with a white shirt and a dark bow tie. The bride, on the right, is wearing a white wedding dress with lace detailing on the sleeves. She has her hair styled in an updo and is wearing a large, ornate earring. Both are smiling warmly at the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light green and white.

AN **EXCLUSIVE** E-BOOK

10

**SIMPLE TIPS
TO MAKING A
BETTER
WEDDING FILM**

BY ROB ADAMS

Forward

I was once there. I barely knew my equipment and I would get so nervous before a wedding day that I would be lucky to squeeze in two to three hours of sleep the night before. I would wake up amped but unsure of my abilities to effectively and cleanly capture a wedding day, let alone artistically. It took years of mapping a plan, formulating strategies, studying the work I admired and then reverse-engineering the concepts and photographic techniques to finally find a way to consistently produce quality, clean and beautiful footage for my wedding films. Then there was the editing process, which was an entirely different thing.

Ahead of my planned workshops for 2015, I decided to write this E-Book of 10 Simple Tips To Making a Better Wedding Film for videographers and cinematographers who just need a leg up and a few fresh ways to improve at any level. These ideas are hardly new, but they are effective. They are proven. I use them on every job to ensure that I can avoid as many obstacles as I can on a wedding day, and there are many. I have found great success using these tips as part of my fundamental approach.

Having a clear vision of what I want my final product to look like and a plan to execute the techniques that can accomplish that vision is of utmost importance. I hope that this short but informative book helps you to establish a few new, good habits to incorporate into your workflow.

Now, let's go out there and make those brides happy.

- Rob Adams

1

HAVE A PLAN

After 15 years in the business, I know how easy it can be to become complacent. At one point, when I wasn't inspired by the work I was creating, I began to approach each wedding with an under-active mindset. It's not that I didn't want to get great footage and beautiful shots. It was more like I expected those shots to come to me more than I wanted to work on anticipating when cool moments would happen and to be "in-position" and ready when they did.

I overcame this by starting to plan and envision the day in my head ahead of time. Interviewing your clients thoroughly before the wedding day can help you to get to know their personalities and get an overall sense of their energy and how the day may flow. Then, by formulating a strategy for how you will match your shooting style to that energy, you can more effectively position yourself for key happenings.

For example, knowing that a groom is planning to surprise his wife with a scavenger hunt to give her a wedding day gift will help you block-out in your mind just how you want it to unfold on-screen. This may require a bit of thought as to how many shots you will need and what angles are necessary for a clean edit. I always take the lead on stuff like this and work with the bride in walking her through the process as she hunts for the gift. I will stop and start her as I setup my next shot until she finds her gift. Another way to approach this would be to just let her find it in real-time, film the actual reaction the best you can and then re-enact her walking from location to location to get your shots afterwards.

The same goes for ceremonies. Always speak with the officiant to know exactly where people will be standing at what times to cleanly block your cameras in places where you will have an optimal angle. Always think about the wedding day ahead of time and communicate with your clients about what's going to happen. Then envision it. Don't just go into a wedding day cold and expect to always be in the right place at the right time. You may get lucky, but chances are the camerawork will end up being shaky or otherwise sub-par.

2

GIVE YOURSELF TIME

It is widely accepted, albeit unfortunate, in the world of wedding photography and videography that the photographer makes the time schedule for the day. This makes sense to an extent. The photographer has to plan specific times for the family photo session, the photo session of the bridal party and bride and groom, and make sure that there is enough time built into that schedule to allow for unforeseen circumstances like long shot lists and an overbearing wedding planner or venue coordinator. That doesn't mean you don't have the right to ask for your own time.

I make it a habit of contacting the photographer before the wedding to see if they wouldn't mind me taking 10 minutes at the end of their photo session to work solely with the bride and groom. If they are hesitant it's important to be polite but firm and explain how your clients are already expecting this time to be built-in (just make sure your client actually is expecting it) and that it is part of your services.

If the schedule for the day is tight, you may have to work side-by-side with a photographer to take turns getting optimal shots. This can be cumbersome but it is really an art form in and of itself. A good tactic is to meet with your bride and groom before they do their final scheduling with the photographer and ask them to relay to the photographer how important a little extra time with their cinematographer is to them.

Their direct wishes cannot be trumped.

3

HAVE A CONSISTENT CREW

Are you hiring your second/third shooters weeks before your weddings in the hopes that the best ones haven't been booked already? Perhaps they operate their own businesses and can't commit to an event months ahead of time. This is common, but one of the best things I've ever done for my business is build and train a stable of consistent crew members. In fact, my editors *are my shooters*. Even better. This way they know each wedding day intimately and can bring that knowledge into the edit with them.

More importantly, a consistent crew knows their roles and each person is familiar with the format of how you shoot and how your team interacts. You may end up spending more time training your personnel to be efficient shooters and editors in the beginning, but the long-term benefit is what to focus on.

Start by paying a tad more than you normally would for shooters and editors and then try and roll that extra cost into your packages. It may only end up being \$100 more. Then, find crew members that are loyal and will be invested in the work you create. Build an encouraging work environment that stimulates learning and growth. Attend conferences and workshops together to discover new techniques and strategies and be constructively critical of each others' work.

A consistent crew can pick-up on each other's weaknesses and fill in the gaps. There's little better than being able to rely on one another in any situation during a hectic wedding day. Identify where each person is strong and maximize that use-case. Be careful not to get too comfortable, though. Work outside of your comfort zone often to build your skill set on the job. Switch roles from bride and groom's side occasionally for a different perspective in the final edit.

4

ASSIGN ROLES TO CREW

Filming a wedding shouldn't be a free-for-all. That's a great way to end up in other's shots, gather repetitive material, and annoy other vendors. Part of your plan for the day should include assigning roles to each crewmember. Here's a short example of how I break-down the shooters' roles for the day:

Camera 1 (Primary) - Bride prep, bride transitioning to ceremony, ceremony establishers, rear processional camera, left-side angle for vows, left-side angle for ceremony exit, photo session glide cam, reception room details and wides, introductions rear camera, spotlight dance close-ups, main-action toasts, party dancing wide-shots and glider-shots, close-up shots for cake, dessert table details and people being served meals and desserts.

Camera 2 (Second) - Groom prep, groom transitioning to ceremony, ceremony guests and arrivals, front-aisle processional camera(s), right-side angle for vows, right-side angle for ceremony exit, photo session close-ups and mediums (monopod), head-on angle for introductions, medium-shot spotlight dances, bride and groom reaction for toasts, medium and close-up hand held for party dancing, medium-shot for cake, people getting served/serving themselves desserts.

Camera 3 (Supplemental) - Ceremony close-up on groom/extreme-wide camera ceremony, wide-shot ceremony exit, venue exteriors, cocktail hour faces/bar shots, wide-angle introductions and spotlight dances, reaction shots for toasts, wide-shot for cake, various dancing footage.

This is just a small example. These roles actually include much more like rigging lights and setting up audio at times, but the primary function of each role remains in tact. For non-traditional weddings we will modify these roles to fit the scenario but each shooter has a definitive objective and is tasked with getting quality footage of each category.

5

SHOOT INTENTIONALLY

I try to film by one fundamental rule: Don't film it if you aren't going to use it. Each time I start and stop the camera, I know what it is I'm going to be capturing. By shooting with intention you are forced to really look at your subject. It's an opportunity to analyze the light on your subjects and look at the composition of your shot. Does it wow you? Will it wow the viewer? Be critical of your shot as you look at the LCD/EVF (Electronic View Finder).

Ask yourself, "Does this shot look as good as it could?" If not, perhaps shift your POV (Point of View) a tad or add more foreground. Perhaps the light looks more interesting or dramatic from the opposite side. Are their faces well lit and are the skin-tones natural and vibrant? Compare your footage later on with others' you admire and study the differences. Understand that the shots you choose to film ultimately make a wedding film artistic and ask yourself, "Am I creating an artful experience for the viewer?"

Download my proven shot checklist here and aim to get the shots you really want. Think about the day ahead of time and consider the weather, the time of year, and the energy of the bride and groom. What kind of mood are you trying to create? Think of shots that would help you to relay that mood to viewer. If there isn't a lot of emotion in a wedding day, you can create it with your vision, interpretation of the wedding day, and some creative editing and sound design.

Action: Think of 3 or 4 shots or angles from each part of the day that you've never gotten, but would be cool to have, and try to get at least 1 or 2 of them on each new wedding.

6

COMMUNICATE

As a videographer, it can be easy to become a fly-on-the-wall and wind up watching and capturing the day as it unfolds. But if there's one thing I've learned it's that without proper and consistent communication throughout the day you will find yourself painted into a corner, often. Always communicate with the photographer, wedding planner, officiant and maître'd. These people can either make your job easier or Hell on Earth.

Ask your photographer where he/she will be during the key moments and try to match your lens and focal length with them to avoid crossing lines of sight with them and their assistants. Tell them where you will be and ask them not to step in front of your cameras. Knowing where the officiant will be standing for the homily can make the difference between having his audio and not getting it at all! It also helps to know whether the bridal party will be standing or sitting so you can plan your camera placement.

At the reception, talk with the maître 'd to find out *when* things will happen. Don't rely on bandleaders and DJs for this information, as they often aren't responsible for keeping things on schedule and tend to get wrapped up in their own tasks. However, talk with the DJ and make friends early to get a clean tap-in for sound from his/her PA system.

Stay in contact with these important notables throughout the day and things will go much smoother!

7

KEEP IT SIMPLE

With all of the flashy and high-tech cinema gear becoming more and more popular and affordable these days, it's easy to get wrapped up in tech-hype, become a gear-head and overlook the simple beautiful art of film-making. I see sliders, drones and 3-axis gimbals overused in many wedding films. While these tools are awesome and certainly have a place in visual storytelling, it's not their mere presence or use that makes a wedding film great. Some of the best films I have ever seen were shot with nothing more than a few monopods and tripods. They were all cleanly shot with steady, intentional frames and utilized solid composition. The use of well-timed cuts, great color-grading, and clean sound rounded out the experience and made the film amazing.

It comes down to story. It's the emotion of what's happening in front of the camera that is most important and it's how you capture that emotion cleanly that makes a compelling film. Don't overuse your tools for the sake of using them or staying relevant. None cares how cool you look on the wedding day. You might impress the groom with your cool gear but see how happy he is with you when his wife is crying about how disappointed she is with her wedding film. Or worse, when he feels like the work you created didn't match what he thought your cool gear would create. These tools are powerful only when used correctly and sparingly. When overused, they look out-of-place and can homogenize the art of filmmaking itself.

I make use of sliders and flyers when trying to create a mood or bring emphasis to a particular shot. A "dolly-in" using a slider can move the viewer into a scene while a "drone-fly out" can pull the viewer out of a scene and perhaps transition them into a new one. Most importantly, if you're going to use these tools, use them cleanly. If your slider stutters and your fly shots rock back and forth chances are they will be more distractive than additive to your film's production value.

8

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Truth: Pleasing your client with a good wedding film starts well before they even put down a deposit. One of the biggest mistakes I see amateur, and even some veteran cinematographers, make is over-promising and under-delivering. This is how you can end up in court with a bride. Manage expectations early on as to *what exactly will go into their film and how long the final film will be*. I'm very precise with how long I tell a client their film will be. If I say it's going to be twenty minutes, it had better be twenty minutes. It also has to be a compelling twenty minutes. If I give a bride eight minutes of good material fluffed up by twelve minutes of filler, she's going to feel let down.

Make sure that your price point fits your offerings and that you can deliver on your promises. By keeping your edits straight-forward and simple, and finding a method that yields consistent shooting and editing results, your clients will know exactly what to expect from their film. It doesn't mean you can't expand on your style to do new and different things. It's just more important to establish a solid workflow first and create a solid simple edit before getting too crazy with bells and whistles.

This type of fundamental edit will serve you well when you have a wedding that doesn't offer much in the way of creative opportunities or emotional content.

Also, be sure that you have your client sign off and specifically initial contract items like "objective style" and whether or not you allow revisions after the final edit is delivered. If so, how many times? Make sure they understand fully if you do not offer "coverage" of their day and do only a creative edit. Many times, brides are so hyped-up about planning their wedding day early on that they don't pay attention to the fine print. Make sure they initial those important items on the contract and understand what they will be getting once the flowers are wilted and having a baby becomes the next important life event.

9

NAIL THE CORE STORY

The first step to making a solid foundational edit is nailing the core story. Most weddings have a similar core story. Two people fell in love and are getting married. There will likely be a ceremony, perhaps more than one, and there will likely be toasts and some dances. That's your core story.

If you nail these parts cleanly you will have everything you need to build a solid edit. Of course, you will likely end up with more story when you factor in the bride and groom preps, photo session and party, but that's all beauty shots and supplemental story. What you really need to focus on is nailing a clean multi-camera ceremony, toasts and special dances. If you do that correctly, you will have an anchor for your film that can be used throughout like a backbone to the film.

I make use of each of these parts of the day throughout an entire twenty-minute film. It's the mortar between the bricks and makes the difference between having enough footage to make an edit clean and compelling, or always having to edit around sloppy camerawork and then scramble to find shots to cover up mistakes. Refer back to Tip #1 and have a plan.

This will help you nail the core-story and give yourself a head start on a good, solid edit. A popular method to utilize is use the bride and groom writing a love letter or card to each other the morning of the wedding to make the dialogue and story more personal. This can be considered core story also, if done correctly.

10

REACTIONS ARE EMOTION

After almost 20 years of making wedding videos, one thing I have always noticed is how emotional and happy brides are about seeing the faces of their loved ones in their final edit. It's more than just mom helping the bride into her dress. It's more about the aunts and uncles, cousins and work-friends, old college roommates and girlfriends from high school. We make it a point to assign a whole camera to nothing but reaction during the first dance, parents' dances, and toasts - sometimes even the ceremony.

These reactions shots are widely missed in many of the wedding films I see and critique and they are *so powerful!* They are even more powerful when shot as close-ups and not shots taken with a wide-angle lens from 20 feet away. If you don't have an entire camera unit to spare for reaction shots, just try to anticipate where the strongest reaction will be during certain moments. For example, during the father/daughter dance you can bet mom will be expressing some emotion. During the mother/son dance knowing where the groom's sisters are can yield you some amazing footage as well.

Take note of the people throughout the day who have expressed the most excitement and tears and then note where they are sitting for the toasts. Chances are they will give you *gold*. During the toasts, a great three-camera setup is to have one camera on the speaker, one on the bride and groom, and one roaming the room looking for 4-5 second reactions shots to cut in and add emotion in the edit. Reaction shots also serve as cutaways to get that long, boring speech down to a tolerable length.

11

USE LICENSED MUSIC

Yep, I added one extra tip. Why? Because I care about you. Really. I don't want to see you get sued. That is just bad for our industry and can leave brides with an uneasy feeling about our integrity as a whole.

Although this isn't really a tip for better filmmaking it will help your film to stay visible, marketable, and keep you in business to make more great wedding films. I cannot state this enough: *Use licensed music*. If you use music without permission you open yourself up to a potentially bankrupting lawsuit. Standard federal copyright infringement cases can lead to judgments upwards of \$150,000 per incident! That's terrifying.

At a price as low as \$9.99 per song you can affordably use fully licensed music from popular sources such as:

www.songfreedom.com

www.themusicbed.com

www.triplescoopmusic.com

Not to mention that the music choices are great! There are lots of selections to fit any mood or wedding type and it makes your video 100% legal.

Don't gamble with your business. As videographers, we've gotten off scott-free for years using someone else's art/music for our personal gain. Now that technology is making it easier for music publishing companies to identify, track down and sue smaller content-producers like us, we have to be vigilant about protecting our businesses. *Use licensed music. All the time.*

About The Author

Rob Adams is one of the America's most recognized wedding cinematographers and has earned worldwide acclaim for his story-telling style and beautiful, feature-length wedding films. Adams teaches at conferences around the globe and educates fellow videographers and cinematographers on his wedding technique and business practices.

Before starting his venture into the world of wedding video in 1997, Adams underwent formal training in video production, audio production and news-gathering and spent the beginning of his career working for national news outlets and producing packaged pieces for ABC and CBS. After spending 6 years honing his wedding craft while working for another company, Rob launched his successful company Rob Adams Films (then called Rob Adams Productions) in 2006. Just a few years later, Adams quickly rose to the top of the wedding video industry as one of it's most recognized names.

Adams continues to hold intimate workshops and has appeared in various trade magazines including Rangefinder, Capture Magazine, and Photo District News and has written for Shutter Magazine and numerous blogs. He hosts a weekly wedding video/film related podcast called "The We B-Rollin' Podcast" which can be found on iTunes and in the Google Play store.

To find out about Rob's latest workshop schedule, seminar dates and other news and freebies, visit <http://www.learnphotovideo.com>

Rob can also be reached at these outlets:

Website: www.robadamsfilms.com

Email: rob@robadamsfilms.com



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