

Wedding Etiquette for Toasts and Speeches

What is the basic rule of toasting?

The best toasts are, in a word, brief. Toasts help to add to the celebratory mood of the affair. Think about it, the wedding is about the bride (and sometimes about the groom). This is not the time for the best man to try out his new stand-up routine. The longer the toast the less memorable it is for the couple and for the guests.

Who is the Master of Ceremonies for the toasts?

Many people think the bandleader or the disc jockey is in charge of the toasts. Wrong! It may be hard to believe, but the best man is in charge of toasting. That is right; this is the same person who was chosen to be the best man based solely on his ability to plan the bachelor party. While most best men will spend days, even weeks planning the demise of his buddy's single status, they usually start thinking about their toasts the night before the nuptials. This means you, the bridal couple; need to do some advanced planning.

Who toasts?

The bridal couple should decide who is likely to want to toast at the wedding. This varies widely based upon the formality of the affair and the feelings of the family. Nowadays, it is common for the best man to toast the bride, the maid/matron of honour to toast the groom, and the father of the bride to toast the couple. It is also common for the bride and groom to toast their parents and the guests. Additional toasts may depend on factors such as who is actually hosting the wedding. (For example, if the bride's step-father is paying for the wedding, chances are he will be the one to toast the couple.) Even if the groom's side is not financially supporting the couple, they should be offered the opportunity to bestow their well-wishes.

As you can see, the toasting can become rather complicated rather quickly. It is best to consider the toasts well in advance to address any issues that may arise. (This also allows time to consult an etiquette reference as necessary.)

What about the rehearsal dinner?

Often people are so engrossed in thinking about the toasting at the wedding that they overlook the opportunity for toasts at the rehearsal dinner. The rehearsal dinner provides the time for anyone involved in the wedding to share their thoughts with the bride and groom. In addition, toasts at the rehearsal dinner can be spontaneous and can be longer than wedding-day toasts.

When are the toasts?

For formal affairs, the toasts are generally given after the meal. If the wedding cake the couple is cutting will be the cake served for dessert, the toasts are done following the cutting of the cake. If the cake the couple is cutting is not the cake being served, the toasts may occur immediately following the meal. For less formal and afternoon weddings, toasting is generally conducted after the couple's first dance as husband and wife. Either way, you should consult with your caterer so that they can plan the timing of the dessert course.

What do the bride and groom do during the toasts?

As for the newlyweds, while your friends and family are toasting your good fortune, you get to sit still and smile. No toasting to yourselves! What? You want a sip of champagne? Well then, you should get up and return a toast. Returned toasts, if you can imagine, are even briefer than the original toast to ensure things keep moving along.

Ten Tips for Toasting at Weddings

1. **Be Prepared.** Do decide who is toasting, in which order and what you will say well in advance of the wedding.
2. **Be Sincere.** Do use your own words and speak from the heart. This will be easier for you to remember and mean more to the couple than a toast borrowed from a book.
3. **Be Brief.** Do keep the toast within a two to three minutes timeframe. (Hey, anyone can memorize a two-minute toast.)
4. **Be Tactful.** Do refrain from embarrassing the couple on their special day. The groom's broken heart from an old girlfriend, the bride's nose job, first marriages, what happened during the bachelor/bachelorette party, all should be left out of the toasts.
5. **Be Complimentary.** After all, the whole purpose of a toast is to say something nice about the people being honoured.
6. **Be Practiced.** Do practice the toast, in front of a mirror, without your notes. (Remember that if you are holding a glass in one hand and the microphone in the other, you would need a third arm to read from your notes!!)
7. **Be Clear-headed.** Nerves and memory are not aided by alcohol. Avoid the spirits until after you have successfully delivered your toast.
8. **Be Mannerly.** Do sip your champagne. Wedding toasts are not a chug-a-lug contest. Your glass should not need to be refilled after each toast. Also, clinking should be done with care. Unlike beer mugs, crystal is quite delicate.
9. **Be Connected.** Do look at the couple and the guests while speaking slowly and clearly.
10. **Be Charming.** Do remember to raise your glass during the toast and sip from your glass at the end of the toast.

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