



How to Choose a Wedding Photographer

Of all the vendors you might choose for your wedding, the Photographer can be the most challenging to pick. This article is going to help you take a closer look at *how* you choose a photographer. And it may surprise you, but the best photographer for your wedding just may not be AAFP. Shocking, eh? Read on to find out more about "**3+1 Method**"...

So how do you go about choosing a photographer? What things should you be looking for? In any decent sized city, there may be dozens of quality established studios. How do you narrow down the choices? Well, I suggest using what I call the '**3+1 Method**'. There are three criteria that your prospective studio *has* to meet, and then you choose based on the one final criterion. Let's look at them.

Pictures, Packages, Price + Personality (3+1)

In most instances you can use the first three items (Pictures, Packages and Price) to narrow your selection down to a small handful of studios that you like. Once you've done that, then you make the final decision based on Personality. Let's break down each item and see what I mean by them. When I tell you to choose based on the first three items, you should do so in the order listed. If you get to one of the three criteria and your prospective studio isn't meeting that criteria, stop there and move on to the next studio.

Pictures:

When you look at another photographer's pictures you are looking at the entire reason you're thinking of hiring them. So regardless of what else you like or don't like about them, you have to be comfortable 'seeing' your event in that photographer's style of shooting. If you see your event in your mind as being very elegant and formal, then the photographer's work should show that he or she can capture that accurately. On the other hand if you're planning a **major party**, then the work should capture that too.

In photographic circles for years there has been a large split between traditional, posed formal photography and candid, in-the-moment styles of artwork. Well, the truth is there is no 'right' way to image a wedding, other than: What does the bride want? The majority of brides that we talk to tell us that they want about a 30/70 balance between posed formals after the ceremony and candid during the prep and reception. If you fall into that group, then make sure your

photographer can easily switch between both styles, many can but there are others who cannot. Within the limits of their style these photographers are excellent, but they just don't venture outside of that style. There's nothing wrong with a studio picking either style and sticking to it, so long as the studio's style matches your needs.

Finding out the kinds of images you want is not hard. Look at other wedding images! Many of your friends may have recently married. Check out the work their photographer did. Flip through magazines. Check out online listings like theknot.com or weddingchannel.com. And when you approach a studio don't hesitate to bring in sample images. Now don't expect your photographer to slavishly copy those images, but they can certainly get some inspiration from them and tell you if they can do the same kind of work.

Keep in mind: If you can't envision your own event in that studio's style of work, move on to the next studio on the list.

Now, let's look at packages.

Packages:

Albums, fine art prints, thank you cards, slideshows, lions, tigers, and bears! Most studios are capable of offering you a dizzying array of products, so how do you choose? Well, to begin with you are going to want a studio whose offerings are flexible. The base packages should be able to be customized and/or tailored to your needs. Some studios have offerings that others don't, so shop around on this criteria. Some of the 'basic' items that most packages should come with...

Album: There are many album manufacturers out there and tons of different options for the album. Make sure the studio has samples on hand to show you. Many times the manufacturer will give the studio sample albums that are intended to show off that manufacturer's work, but are not representative of the studio's photographic style. This is perfectly acceptable and the photographer should be clear on this point. The studio should offer album upgrades in the following areas:

- Covering
- Number of pages
- Liner (the material that lines the inside of the cover)
- Stamped text on the front/spine
- Page style

Proofs: The studio will have to have some method of proofing your images. This can be anything from a CD-based slideshow to web proofing to actual hardcover books that are yours to keep. If you are a big scrapbooker you may want to look into a studio that proofs with 5x7 or 4x6 prints. Just make sure you are going to get to keep those prints or can order your own set.

Web Proofing: This may or may not be separate from the above proofing, but if you have a lot of guests coming in from out of town then web proofing should be a must for you so that those folks can see your images.

Wall Art: Wall art refers to large print images for you and your beau's new homeplace. For most homes you will want 11x14 or larger depending on what kind of wallspace is available. Make sure you come out of the event with at least one awesome portrait of you both to keep. This is a

signature event in your life and you want to make sure you have recordings of it. While we're talking about wall art, check out the prices of the studio's reprints.

There are many other offerings that may or may not be included: Keepsake cards, thank you cards, slideshows, etc. Check with your studio and make sure that you can get what you want!

Price:

Ah, the big question: How much should I pay? Now you might have thought that price would be the first qualifier, but trust me, it isn't. It's important, but in a wedding market as large as Dallas-Fort Worth you *will* find many studios within your budget. So how much should you pay? I can't give a hard answer to that; you will have to decide that on your own. However, I can give you some perspective to help with the decision.

One year after your wedding you will have two (maybe three) things left over from the event. You will have the ring on your finger and your wedding album, and possibly a freeze-dried piece of cake in the freezer. The dress will be packed away in the attic. The flowers will have long gone. The food will be nothing but fond memories, and the music will be distant echoes. Years from now when you want to remember this wonderful event, you will be reaching for the album or looking at photos on the wall.

Am I telling you the photography budget should be the bulk of your monies? No, of course not; you still have a major event to put on and dresses to buy and all sorts of other very important things. I'm just saying that how ever much you think you may want to spend, make sure you have enough to get a good solid album and the best studio you can afford.

While we're talking budget, let me tell you a story and give a warning. A few years back we had a young man inquire about hiring us. He and his lady were throwing a very small event, they had some budget restrictions (trust me, I've personally been there myself!) and we were simply priced out of what they could manage. I understood completely, wished him the best and referred him to some other photographers that I knew were closer to his budget.

Well, fast forward several months and I ran into him again. Apparently he was still in the doghouse over wedding images. He had decided that instead of hiring a professional studio he would simply put out disposable cameras on all the tables and have those developed. The guests could take wonderful 'real-world' images of the event, right? Wrong. What he didn't realize was that most guests gave the cameras to their kids and let the kiddies play with them. Apparently there is a good reason there aren't a lot of five-year-old wedding photographers! Out of \$400 worth of cameras and developing they got three good, useable images. Ouch.

The disposable cameras are a good idea *in addition* to hiring a professional studio, but they are no substitute for an established studio with a trained staff. Just FYI.

Let's recap a little... To begin with you should have started with a large list of studios that have your date available and could be photographing your wedding. You initially used **Photography** as criteria for eliminating some of those studios. Then you started looking at **Packages** and eliminated even more, and finally you reduced the list further based on **Price**. At this point hopefully you will have a list of maybe a half a dozen or so studios that are all in contention. The final studios should be relatively equal on all fronts, there may be some differences in Package offerings, but overall they can be considered interchangeable.

Now, you *could* put names on a wall and throw a dart to determine who you will book, but there's a better way. Look at the **Personality** of the photographer himself or herself.

Personality:

Your photographer is fairly unique because this is one of the only vendors you will hire where the product they deliver is... well... you. Let's assume for the sake of argument that you and your florist don't get along. Their flowers will still smell just as sweet and look just as beautiful regardless. But if you're angry at your photographer and he is trying to take a picture of you, well that's going to show in the final image. No way around it. For the person behind the camera to produce a world-class image of the person in front of the camera, there *has* to be at least a little bit of a click between them. If that's not there, it will just be a snapshot and, heck, anybody can do that.

This final criterion is purely gut-feel. Talk with all of the photographers on your list. If the studio uses multiple photographers, make sure you are talking with the one who will be imaging your event. Chat with them; listen to their thoughts on photography and art. How do they react to pressure, things like that? Then ask yourself: *Is this a person I can relax around enough to spend most of my wedding day with?* If the answer is no, then you should not be booking them.

Eventually the list will eliminate itself and you will be left with a single studio. Go book that studio. Do not balk. Get them signed and your date secured. Then relax and dream of the beautiful images that artist will be providing you!

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<http://www.allisonartsphotography.com/Home/PhotoBlog/tabid/77/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/19/HowToChooseaPhotographer>