

Questions to Ask When Ordering Your Wedding Invitations



Letterpress, thermography, engraved, matte, jacquard, glassine... ordering invites will mean learning a few new vocabulary words. You'll also need to learn about all the components that you might want to include in your invitation, as well as what other printed materials could be part of your wedding scenario. With so many details to consider, you'll depend on a creative wedding invitation professional to clue you in on the jargon, and guide you in choosing invites that reflect your wedding style. After all, nothing sets the tone for an event like an impeccably designed wedding invitation.

Bring this list of must-ask questions to the stationery boutique or graphic designer you're considering to ensure that no detail is left unaddressed (no pun intended).

Getting To Know Your Invitation Professional

1. How long have you been in business?
2. What is your design background? *NOTE: This may or may not involve formal training. Remember, "good taste" isn't necessarily something that can be taught!*
3. What types of printing processes do you offer and which do you specialize in? Which do you recommend for my budget and style?
4. Is your printing done in-house or do you outsource the printing? *NOTE: Printing is usually less expensive if it's outsourced. However, a possible benefit of in-house printing is a quicker turnaround time, which could come in especially handy if any reprinting (say, due to an error) is required.*
5. Do you offer custom invitations as well as templated styles? Is there a fee if I want to order a sample of either an existing invitation style or a custom design? If so, how much?
6. If I choose a custom wedding invitation, what are my options for color, paper type, ink and fonts? What is the word limit for the text?
7. Can I also order my table numbers, place cards, escort cards, ceremony programs, menus, etc. from you?
8. Do you offer a package or a discounted price if I order all of the invitation components at the same time? (For a complete list of what might be included, see the next page.)
9. If I want to include a picture or graphic on my save-the-date card or invitation, can you accommodate that? If so, does the image need to be saved in a specific format? Do you have photo retouching available, and if so, what is the price range? Can your photo specialist also convert color images to black & white or sepia? Is there an additional cost?
10. Are there any new styles, trends and color combinations I might consider? Which are the most popular? What kinds of handmade or artisanal paper do you offer? *NOTE: The answers to these questions will give you a sense of how creative and up-to-the-minute your invitation professional is.*
11. Can my invitations be printed on recycled paper and/or with soy-based ink?
12. Based on the paper I select and the number of pieces involved, what would it cost to mail my wedding invitation? *NOTE: If you use a non-standard sized envelope, postage may be more expensive.*
13. Once I place my order, how long will it take to have the completed invitations delivered? Do you have rush-order available and what are the extra fees? *If you are ordering from an online company, ask: What are the shipping methods available to me, and their respective costs?*
14. If the invitation involves multiple pieces, can you assemble them? If so, is there an additional fee? How will the assembly affect my delivery date?
15. Do you offer an invitation addressing service? If so, what is the charge for this? What lettering style options are available? Will the lettering push back my delivery date?
16. When is payment due?

Getting Down To Business

17. I will have an opportunity to sign off on my invitation proof before you send my order to print, right?
18. Once I've signed off on the proof, I expect the printed invitations to match the approved sample. If they don't (i.e. an error was made after I signed off on the proof) will my invitations be corrected and reprinted at no additional cost? How much additional time will it take to redo my order if there is a problem with it?
19. What is your refund policy if for some reason I need to cancel my order?
20. When can I expect to receive my contract from you?
21. Can you provide me with the contact information of 3-4 recent brides who I can call or email for references?

Possible Printed Invitation Components

(Don't panic...most of the extra elements are OPTIONAL!!)

- ◇ Save-the-Date cards
- ◇ Wedding Announcement
- ◇ Wedding Invitation Components:
 - Outer Envelope
 - Optional Inner Envelope
 - Invitation
 - Reception Card, if held at a different location than the ceremony
 - Directions/Map
 - Response Card & SASE
- ◇ Thank-You Cards
- ◇ Shower Thank-You Cards
- ◇ Other Invites:
 - Engagement Party
 - Shower
 - Bachelor/Bachelorette Parties
 - Rehearsal Dinner
 - After Party
- ◇ Wedding Program
- ◇ Pew Cards
- ◇ Place Cards
- ◇ Table Cards
- ◇ Menus
- ◇ Napkins, matchbooks or labels for favors

Useful Tips:

- Ordering your invitations over the phone increases the possibility of mistakes, so order in person if possible. If you order your invitations from an online company, make sure your contract states that they will correct mistakes they make for free.
- Insist on getting a proof. Have at least two other people review all your proofs before you sign off on them—it's amazing what a fresh pair of eyes will see!
- If ordering online, remember that color resolution can vary drastically between computers. The best way to guarantee the exact color you want is to ask that a sample be snail mailed to you.
- Order 20-30 extra save-the-dates and/or invitations with envelopes in case you have to add to the guest list or you make a mistake when assembling or addressing the envelopes.
- Save-the-date cards should be sent out 6-9 months prior to your wedding.
- Invitations should be sent out 6-9 weeks prior to your wedding.
- Consider working with one stationer or graphic designer for all of your printed materials. She'll guide you in making sure all of the components convey a consistent design concept. Not that they have to be identical, but as Joyce Scardina Becker observes in *Countdown to Your Perfect Wedding*, "It's like making a fashion statement: All of the accessories in your wardrobe should coordinate and fit together nicely."
- To Evite or not to Evite? For the main event, even we progressives at Here Comes The Guide come down on the side of tradition and say go with real paper and snail mail—even if your budget determines that you have to DIY. However, if your overall wedding style is relaxed and casual, then we think Evites are fine for the supporting events, such as your Bachelorette Party. We like Evite's built-in RSVP system and creative style options.

Invitations Glossary

A glossary of common printing terms.

Printing Terms

Letterpress: Letterpress printing dates back to the 14th century, and involves inking the raised surface of metal type or custom-engraved plates and then applying the inked surface against paper with a press. When used with the right paper (thick, softer paper results in a deeper impression), fonts and colors, letterpress creates an elegant product with a stamped, tactile quality. This process offers lots of options, but can cost more than other methods. Also, photographs and metallic inks generally don't work well with letterpress.

Embossing: Using a metal die, letters and images are pressed into the paper from behind, creating a raised "relief" surface, imparting added dimension to the invitation design. Usually used for large initials or borders. Ink or foil may be applied to the front of the paper so that the raised letters and images are colored.

Blind embossing: No ink or foil is applied, so the embossed (raised) image is the same color as the paper.

Thermography: This popular printing method uses heat to fuse ink and resinous powder, producing raised lettering. Though it looks almost exactly like engraved printing, thermography is much less expensive. This process will not reproduce detail as sharply as engraving will. The powder is added after the ink is applied, generally with an offset press, so the use of paper or metal offset plates affects quality here, too.

Engraving: Engraving is generally the most formal and expensive printing option. The image is etched into a metal plate, and the ink held in the etched grooves is applied to the paper with a press. The resulting raised image is comprised entirely of ink sitting on the surface of the paper. The ink applied is opaque, making it possible to print a lighter colored ink on a darker colored paper with this method. Engraving is not the best printing choice if you have a photo or illustration that requires a screen.

Offset printing: Most printing these days is offset, which means the original image is transferred from a plate to a drum before it is transferred to the paper. This process produces print that sits flat on the surface. There are many levels of quality with this method: If your printer uses paper printing plates, the job will cost less but the result may be fuzzy, inconsistent lettering. Metal plates yield much sharper, crisper type.

Digital printing: In this method the computer is linked to the printing press and the image is applied to paper or another material directly from a digital file rather than using film and/or plates. Digital is best for short-run, quick jobs. This can also be a good option if you want to use full color.

Foil stamping: Foil is applied to the front side of the paper, stamped on with a metal die. Foils can be metallic or colored, shiny or dull. They are usually very opaque, and this is a great way to print white on a dark colored paper.

Calligraphy: This is the perfected art of writing by hand. Often associated with fancy, curlicue script, calligraphy is comprised of several genres and styles.

Paper Terms

Matte: A paper coating that's flat and non-reflective (no gloss).

Jacquard: Screen-printed paper that creates an illusion of layering; for example, paper that looks like it's overlaid with a swatch of lace.

Parchment paper: This paper is somewhat translucent and often a bit mottled to mimic the appearance of ancient, historical documents made out of animal skins. It's excellent for calligraphy.

Linen finish: Paper with a surface that actually mimics linen fabric. If you look closely, you see lines of texture going both horizontally and vertically on the surface.

Rice paper: Not actually made of rice, this paper is extremely thin and elegant.

Glassine: A very thin, waxy paper. Thinner than vellum (see below), its surface is slick and shiny, whereas vellum is more translucent. Glassine is best suited for envelope use, while vellum is sturdy enough to be printed on directly for invitation use.

Vellum paper: A heavier, finely textured translucent paper made from wood fiber. Similar to parchment, it was originally made from the skin of a calf, lamb or baby goat and used for writing and painting during the pre-printing age.