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PROMISES, *promises*

RELAX AND TAKE PLEASURE IN WRITING YOUR
PERSONAL WEDDING VOWS. HERE'S HOW.

writer NATASHA GARBER ~ *photo* AKIL BENNETT PHOTOGRAPHER

With so much focus on the festivities, it can be easy to overlook the most important part of your wedding—namely, your wedding. Your big day is a big day precisely because of the importance of the promises you and your beloved make to one another, in front of those you love most. Don't relegate your ceremony to afterthought status. Take time, in these months and weeks before your special day, to enjoy




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expressing your love with personal vows that speak from your heart to his. You're likely to utter these words only once in your life—so make them mean everything you mean to say.

**1. TALK ABOUT IT TOGETHER
BEFORE YOU BEGIN.**

Personal vows are just that—highly personal. Which means your vows will come out of your unique experience and be expressed in your unique voice. That said, if you have decided together to pen personal vows to each other, you should figure out if you'd like to approach it as a team project, or each solo. Whatever you decide, it's a good idea to both write vows of roughly equal length, so one partner isn't making a lengthy, erudite speech while the other is distilling things down to the



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nitty gritty. Basic rule of thumb: Each partner's vows should be about two to three minutes long.

2. DON'T EDIT FROM THE OUTSET.

In the words of Minister Lynn Turner of Houston's Weddings Performed, "Write from your heart, write from your experiences, look at your future together." To get to the heart of that "heart," it can help to let your mind wander a little. Try some stream-of-consciousness writing, starting with a list of your beloved's qualities or a distinct memory of your time together, for example: "strong, inquisitive, deadpan funny, brilliant, compassionate, headstrong, gentle," or, "Yosemite beneath the stars, we watched the moon make a rainbow in the mist, and you actually clapped

your hands." Once your imagination is in motion, don't rein it in; there will be time to pare down your words later, after your emotions are on the page.

3. MAKE PROMISES.

They don't call them vows for nothing, so make sure to express your commitment with concrete promises, big and small. And don't be afraid to mix a little funny into the formal—your ceremony is serious, but it doesn't have to be grave. It's OK to say, "I promise to support and uplift you no matter what challenges we face," and, "I promise to kiss you every night before bed," and also, "I promise never to complain about the fact that you match your socks by thickness instead of color." Sweet, humorous glimpses into your private life and the little, special things

you know and love about one another make your ceremony memorable not just for you, but for your guests as well. Just don't go overboard with the jokes—this is an exchange of vows, not an opportunity for you to test out your new standup routine.

4. PLEDGE YOUR LOVE.

While they're certainly essential elements of most weddings, the rings, the kiss, the readings by guests, "are really all window dressing," Minister Turner notes. "What's absolutely required is a declaration of intent. As the officiant, I need to ask, 'Do you take this man to be your husband? Do you take this woman to be your wife?'" As bride and groom, though, your answers need not be standard "I do's." Here's where you'll make your personal statement of

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commitment, for example: “I, Melanie, take you, Dylan, as you are, for who you are, today and for all days to come,” or “I, Rosa, take you, Jonathan, to share the adventure of life with me from this day forward,” or “I, Jasmine, take you, Robert, to be my husband and best friend, my partner in crime, my gentleman and my confidante, in this moment and for all time.” If you are both spiritual or religious, you may choose to acknowledge the divine in one another, or make reference to God as witness to your pledge. Just don’t try to write the entire ceremony, soup to nuts. “When couples do that, it really takes the spontaneity out of what we do as officiants. We end up having to read everything word for word, and it becomes a canned ceremony,” Turner adds.

5. TYPE OUT YOUR VOWS AND SAVE.

While you might prefer classic pen and paper for taking the notes that will become your vows, once you have a solid draft completed, you’ll want to type them out and save the document to your computer. This will allow for easy edits, and for changes you may want to make as you think about your vows in the days leading up to your wedding. The intensity of the final approach to your big day may bring up new thoughts and feelings you want to express to your groom—allow yourself to work these into your vows. And don’t worry about learning your words from the heart by heart. “I tell my couples, don’t stress about memorizing vows. You’re in very good company with world leaders, presidents, even the pope. We all have cheat sheets!”

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