

# White wedding



**If you're going to a wedding this summer, you'll want to take pictures to be proud of, so you need pro wedding photographer John Grayston's advice**

**I**'ve heard tales of pro photographers banning people from taking pictures at weddings, but I don't think that's right at all. Of course the main part of many of my pictures is the connection with the client, so if they're being distracted that might be a bit of a worry. But as long as you keep an eye on what the pro is doing and don't take the key people out to one side while he's trying to bring them together in a group shot, it shouldn't be a problem.

As a guest you'll know the main people in the wedding party far better than the official photographer. So once he's finished doing the formal portraits and groups, that's the ideal time to take some of them to one side and do your own group shots and portraits.

With events like the throwing of the confetti or the cutting of the cake, I'll set everything up and then invite some of the guests over to get their cameras ready and find the right angle around me. That way we can all get the shot together. The pro photographer might have a certain viewpoint, so try and get a different perspective. That way the bride and groom will get a nice mixture of shots taken from different angles.

With young kids the trick is to be quick and grab their attention. If they have to think about it for too long, you've lost them. A good way to engage them is to show them their picture on back of the camera, but if they're not into it don't force the issue. Instead, leave it for 20 minutes, then try again.

I use the Nikon 50mm f/1.4D lens for the majority of my photos, which on my Fujifilm



ALL IMAGES BY JOHN GRAYSTON

FinePix S5 Pro is equivalent to a 75mm. The sort of perspective a 50mm gives is perfect for portraits. I shoot quite wide open so I lose all the distractions in the background, and of course a nice fast f/1.4 lens is brilliant for this. When you lose the background your subject appears sharper and appears to have absolute clarity. The downside of shooting at f/1.4 means that any inaccuracy on the focusing is very noticeable. There's no room for error, so a setting of f/2.8-4 is usually what I try to aim for.



**TOP** The cake cutting can be bit of a scrum and it pays to keep an eye on what's going on and grab a good position as the shot is being set up. Then just wait until the happy couple look towards you.

**ABOVE** During the formal part of the wedding shoot, you should be able to grab some nice pictures as the pro works but without getting in his way.

**LEFT** There's always a bit of time for scene-setting shots like this. Crank up your digital camera's ISO setting to 400 or higher to cope with the low light.

**RIGHT** A telezoom, responsive autofocus and a quick shutter finger can produce lovely portraits. Remember to keep focus on the eyes.



“ I shoot quite wide open so I lose all the distractions in the background ”

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Fleeting moments are a challenge to catch.

**ABOVE** Get posed shots like this while the pro's working with the happy couple.

For group shots I'll often use the Sigma 18-50mm f/2.8. Occasionally, if I need to shoot in a confined space such as the wedding car, I'll use my 10.5mm fisheye because it gives me that space. You've got to watch out for distortion around the edges of the frame, but anything in the middle of the frame will look fine. The fisheye is also great for wide-angle views of all the guests at the reception or in the church.

With outdoor shoots the lighting is crucial. I look for something that isn't too contrasty

and somewhere that's sheltered from direct sunlight such as under a tree or by a wall. It's direct sunlight that gives very contrasty images where you lose important shadow detail under the eyes, for example. If there's no immediate cover, I'll either place a translucent reflector between the sun and the subject, or use fill-in flash to reduce the contrast and bring out the shadow detail.

I take multiples of the same shot and slightly change the exposure compensation on each one, so I'll typically have a highlight, an under and a correctly exposed one. I also shoot both Raw and JPEG simultaneously so that I can dip into the Raw file if I need to retrieve any data that I've lost in the JPEG. I always leave the white-balance on Auto and nine times out of 10 the result is spot on. On the odd occasion when there's a slight mismatch, I'll simply go to the Raw file and set it manually.

Indoors I prefer to use natural light rather than flash. The key is to get near a big window. Move furniture around, do whatever you need to do to get your subject near, say, a big lounge window that's facing the sun.

If I need a faster shutter speed I'll just kick up the ISO to 800 and above rather than use a tripod. You do get digital noise, but of course you used to get 'noise' with high speed film that went up to a high ISO. I always try to keep it as low as I can, but it's more important to avoid camera shake.

## Technique

### It's party time

It's the main event of the evening, but it can be tricky because the light levels are lower. On the plus side, the pro's usually finished working so you are free to snap away. On-board flash can look very harsh, so try whacking up the ISO instead. If there's a band playing or DJ you'll be able to capture the background lights burning in. Yes, you'll get some noise, but the results will be far more atmospheric. For example, this was shot at ISO 3200. The other option is to combine a burst of flash with a slow shutter speed. This will capture the ambient lighting while recording any movement as a slight blur.



“Family groups are important, but we know it’s the candid shots that really make the album”



The only time I’ll use a tripod is in the church when the bride and groom are down the aisle exchanging vows and rings. That’s the point when I’ll have my 80-200mm on a tripod with a remote release. I prefer not to use flash in the church because it distracts everyone and kills the atmosphere. My advice to guests would be to curb the flash and just dial up the ISO.

After the signing of the register my next task is to record the family groups and the bride and groom on their own. That can take quite a time, especially when you get handed – like I do – one and a half sheets of A4! As a guest however, you’re totally free to grab those brilliant reportage-type pictures of what’s happening all around. You know, shots of the page boys and flower girls running around in the gardens of the reception or church or the ushers talking to their friends.

Yes, the family groups are important, but we know that the candid shots are the ones that really make the album. They’re the ones, which are purchased after the wedding as enlargements that’ll hang on people’s walls.

The speeches provide another great opportunity for candid shots. The obvious one is to shoot pictures of the chap who’s doing the speech, but there are some wonderful shots to be had of people’s reactions, for example, the bride and groom listening to the best man.

The best way to shoot candid images is to use a longer lens and then just stand back and

observe. That way people are just not aware that those shots are being taken, so they’re acting naturally. My 80-200mm gives me the ideal distance to do the fly-on-the-wall-type thing.

Finally, weddings these days cost a fortune – I think the average is around £17,000 – so do try and grab pictures of the car, cake, flowers, menus and any other interesting details. People photography is, of course, crucial, but these elements are the icing on the cake as far as the finished album goes. **PM**



**TOP** Such shots might be set up by the pro, but you could organise it yourself – there’s usually time.

**ABOVE** Detail shots are always worth taking, if you get the chance.

## Kit bag

### Lenses galore

A selection of lenses can really come in useful at a wedding, when there are opportunities for all sorts of different shots, from formal portraits through candid shots to group shots.

For the majority of the day, my Nikon 50mm f/1.4D is firmly attached to my Fujifilm S5 Pro, but my kit bag also contains an Sigma 18-50mm f/2.8 for group shots, a 10.5mm fisheye for confined spaces and an 80-200mm for candid shots.





You might only be shooting pictures for fun rather than profit, but that's no reason for not trying to be creative with your compositions.

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