

Step by Step writing your own vows (from “the knot”)

So you thought it'd be great to write your own wedding vows, but now a healthy dose of writer's block (not to mention fear of embarrassing yourself) has hit you squarely on the head. Don't know how to transform your heavy, life-altering, feelings into a string of coherent words? You're not alone -- but don't worry, your goal is within reach: Just take it one word at a time. Here's the homework you need to do (and the questions you should ask) to make your wedding vows perfect.

Prep Step A: Get clearance - Affordable Wedding Ministers approves and loves it when couples write their own vows.

Make sure your officiant will accept personalized vows.

Prep Step B: Make a plan

You need to tackle the logistics to make sure you and your fiancé are both on the same page: Are you each going to write your own, or will you write them together? Will you show them to each other before the ceremony?

Knot Note: If you're feeling shy, opt to write your vows together and even recite the exact same promises. If there's more you wish to say, privately, say it in the cards you exchange on the day of your wedding or on your honeymoon.

Prep Step C: Create your outline

An outline can help to establish a structure that you both stick to. For example, plan to first talk about how great your fiance is, then about how great you are as a couple, then about what you're vowing to each other.

Prep Step D: Find your voice

What overall tone do you want: Humorous and touching? Poetic and mushy? It's your call -- the most important thing is that your vows ring true and sound like they're from your heart.

Prep Step E: Cut it down

Finally, pick a length and stick to it by keeping the mantra pithy and to the point in mind -- anything longer than a minute or so, and no matter how

gorgeous your prose, the audience will start to squirm.

Ready to Write!

What exactly do you say? To help you think of sentiments to include, take turns answering this list of questions. When you're done, look through your answers for the phrases that best capture your intended message and incorporate them into the structure of your vows.

#1

What did you think when you first saw him/her? Start from the beginning -- you didn't want to go out and now you're grateful your friends dragged you out? How to use: When we met at _____, I knew _____.

#2

When did you realize you were in love? The more specific you are able to be, the more touching the story. Was it when he helped you bring your sick puppy to the vet? How to use: I knew I was in love when _____. Don't underestimate the power of humor. Throw in at least one more playful sentiment (When she recited Don Mattingly's RBI record...).

#3

What do you have now that you didn't have before you met? Focus on the heart and head, not material possessions. Has she taught you to appreciate beauty differently? Has he helped you learn to savor creating a home-cooked meal? How to use: Before I met you, I _____. Now I _____.

#4

How has your worldview changed? Life has likely gotten better since the two of you joined forces, so tell everyone about it. How to use: Because of you, I see the world _____. Having trouble? Think about the new things you've tried with your mate -- what have you experienced together that you never would have on your own?

#5

What do you miss most when you're apart? This will probably be something mundane but powerful -- what about his smile first thing in the morning, or the way she puts out your lucky mug for your morning coffee? How to use: You are such a part of me that when you're gone, I _____.

#6

Where do you see yourselves in 10 years? 20 years? 40 years? Go deeper than Happily married in a big house. What are your long-term hopes, dreams, and goals? How to use: I look forward to _____, laughing and _____ as we _____.

#7

Is there a line from a movie, song, or poem that says it all? It's okay to borrow, as long as it's not too much of a cliché (we're sorry, but You complete me is suffering from overuse). Instead modify something familiar to personalize. How to use: Subtly. I watch you _____, and I think to myself, what a wonderful world.

#8

Do parts of the traditional vows resonate with you? Maybe you're not so sure about the obey part, but can you really go wrong with love, cherish, and...? How to use: Try I promise to cherish and honor you _____, but add a time frame and funny reference for levity: ...all the days of my life, especially when curled up on the couch with takeout.

#9

Can you think of a funny or touching experience that put your partner in a new light? The way he played with your little cousin or helped your grandmother up the stairs showed you that under his macho exterior is a wittle, bitty bunny wabbit and you love him for it. How to use: When you _____, I saw you for the _____ person you are. And that made me want to _____.

#10

Is there a harrowing experience that strengthened your bond? This one rides tandem with #9. How to use: See #9.

#11

What goals and values do you both have? Stating your common bond may just expose your inner Wordsworth. These ties -- whether your shared faith or your mutual love of wine -- will also help demonstrate why you're a perfect pair.

How to use: We share _____, so together we can _____.

#12

What about him/her inspires you? What is it about your fiance that you'd like to improve in yourself? What do you most respect about your partner? How to use: Your _____ has shown me how to be _____.

#13

What promise can you make to codify your devotion? Here's an opportunity to personalize your vows -- many couples pledge their endless love, but how many promise to take the dog out in the morning, even in the snow? How to use: I promise to always _____.

#14

How will you change together? You know what your goals are -- think about the steps the two of you will need to take together to reach them. How to use: I look forward to _____ as we _____.

#15

What metaphor (or simile) would capture your love? Think of something that describes or defines your love: Is it strong like a castle? Peaceful like a mountain stream? How to use: Our love is like a _____ because it _____.

#16

Why are you entering the bond of marriage? Think about why marrying your fiance is so special. You may be surprised how the answer leads you to the perfect words. How to use: To me, marriage is _____. With you, it's _____.

#17

What will keep your marriage strong? Find the bedrock of your relationship. What makes your relationship tick? Is it your resilience? Your shared sense of humor? How to use: Even when _____, we will have _____.

#18

What are you most looking forward to about married life? The wedding is just the beginning. How to use: I look forward to _____ as we embark on _____.

#19

What do you expect out of married life? Defining your expectations will help you make and keep promises. Think about your dreams, and what you'll have to vow to do to make them come true. How to use: I know our marriage will _____ and I vow to _____.

#20

What words do you associate with love? Make a list of romantic terms so you can avoid overusing love -- too many repetitions dilute its power. How to use: My devotion/adoration/ passion is _____.