



So you want your mate Jim to film your own wedding? With his brand new Sony Handycam?

There are some useful tips to bear in mind if you want a friend to film your own wedding, or indeed you ARE that friend!

Every film should tell a story. The narrative is straightforward enough. The bride and groom are getting married. But what about all the detail? What about all the guests? What WON'T the bride see on the day that she would love to see afterwards?

Wherever things happen, you need “establishing” shots. These are shots that establish where you are. It may seem trivial, but all films set up a scene by giving you an indication as to where you are. So – when you are filming the bride getting ready, get footage of the hotel/house she is getting ready in. These should be nice big wide shots... Most cameras have a zoom, and most tripods can pan fluidly from left to right, but do you know what... **DON'T USE THEM!** 90% of all scenes in most films do not pan or zoom during the shot. Sometimes it works, but only for the occasional shot. The biggest issue with amateur films is when the zoom button gets overused during a shot, and wobbly pans ruin the feel. Even if you don't have a tripod, you can use something static and steady nearby – a rock, a fence, anything – to get a steady shot of a location.

There are exceptions, of course! Panning (side to side) and tilting (up and down) do work when you are following action... like the bride coming down the stairs, or people entering a room – so get used to what looks good, and practice before the big day.

Detail is something that often gets missed. Glasses of champagne, bouquets of flowers, the bridal shoes, detail on the dress – the list is endless. Look around and see anything that says “wedding day” and film it... Even a congratulatory wedding card can often evoke the right sentiments.

So, you've done the bride... now it's off to film the groom's lunch. This tends to be a much briefer shoot – as soon as the groomsmen/ushers sit down for lunch, then they don't really want to be filmed eating. The same applies to mealtime weddings... no one really looks that attractive whilst munching down chicken. It's best to focus on other things, or move on to the next location.

The bride and groom will have spent much time deciding on who to invite to the wedding, so it's sensible to get as many as you can on film. There are two best times to get these shots. The first is when they arrive at the church. If you station yourself outside the entrance, you are bound to get most of the people who are coming to the wedding. Vary your shot though... don't just let 100's of people walk past the camera. That will make for a very dull shot to watch back. Change your framing... some wide, some close-up. Move around. Be adventurous and get different angles of people arriving. It will all help for a more fluid and interesting film later.

But **WHATEVER** you do, don't miss the bride arriving. It's a key moment in the day. Follow her up to the church, and get the veil being put over her head. Miss that moment, and your new handycam will be smashed to bits under the bride's heels. Well, perhaps not, but don't miss it.

Are you filming the church service? Do you have permission and a licence? It may all sound very bureaucratic – but vicars can be very particular about where you can film from, if at all. Choirs can be particular about fees needing to be paid if they are a professional outfit. Its best to check all this beforehand.

If you can, get into a good position so you don't have to move around at all. You don't want to be the focus of attention in the church, so make sure that you can put your tripod somewhere discrete. If you have two cameras, you can put one on a magic arm at the front, which could film the service remotely.

Towards the end of the service, get ready to get the newly married couple walking down the aisle. You don't want to be in the position of one videographer, who missed it, and asked the bride and groom to walk down the aisle a second time. I'm not sure if he ever worked again...

After the bride and groom have left the church, you can grab a few last shots of everyone milling outside the church, and head off to the reception. The reception may be in the same place that the bride and groom got ready – so if you have been clever, you can use the same establishing shots from the morning in the edit to set up the reception.

We always like filming the formal photos. Some people wonder why, since the photographer is getting his photos anyway. There are two reasons. Firstly, it is a great place to learn who is important at the wedding. If they are important enough to be in the family shots, then they should be in the film as well. Furthermore, a photograph only takes a moment in time. Video/Film takes 25 pictures every second. There can be quite a lot of humour, and good natured-ness at this time, and this spills out into a great atmosphere, which looks great on film.

Speeches? Well... its difficult to get all the right shots with just one camera, so just concentrate on being near the speaker, or if there is a PA system, be near any speaker!

Try and vary the shot a little, so that you get the bride's and groom's reactions when someone else is speaking. If you are very "on the ball", you might hear someone being mentioned in the speech, and know where they are. You could whip round and grap a quick shot of them before returning to the speaker. You might have a situation in the edit where you have a visual image of this "whip around", and the speaker is still speaking, but you can always stretch the image of the cutaway by slowing down the cutaway shot to fill the gap left by chopping out the whip pans.

If there is any dancing... just get lots of different shots. Too many videos have a single shot of a camera wandering around the dancefloor. But if you intend to edit this film, (and if you want it watched, then you SHOULD edit it!), its best to compile all the best shots of the day into a couple of tracks that you can lay down in the edit, and end up with 10 minutes of fun viewing.

We always like to get the couple leaving... So make sure you know when that is happening. In fact, it is great to have a schedule to hand so you can check when the next item on the agenda IS happening.

In summary, if you want to make/film a great wedding video – concentrate on that. If you spend too much time chatting to guests, and quaffing the champagne, as much is your right, you may well miss some important moments – like cutting the cake.

If, after reading all of this, you feel you need more advice, then please do feel free to call. If you are nervous about whether your designated cameraman is up to the job, you might be surprised at how much it might cost to get someone else to do it... someone who has been doing it for years, and knows all the above as second nature. Thanks anyway, Jim.