

The Perfectly Suited Groom

Your bridal gown will turn heads as you walk down the aisle on your wedding day, but the groom, waiting patiently for you at the altar, deserves his share of the attention, too. The groom's attire will be dictated by the ceremony's time of day, since that dictates the wedding's degree of formality. Proper attire falls into four categories, each with their own distinctive traditions and styles: very formal, formal, semiformal and informal.

Putting on the Ritz

Both very formal and formal men's attire are governed by long held traditions. Morning weddings are considered very formal, calling for long-jacketed "morning suits" with gray waistcoats and pinstriped trousers, top hats, gloves and spats. The distinctive morning coat tapers from the waistline button to one broad tail with a vent in back. The groom and groomsmen may also sport walking sticks.

Very formal evening weddings require that the men of the hour dress in what's known as white tie and tails: black swallowtail coats and trousers, and white vests, shirts and bow ties. Black top hats and white gloves are optional. The traditional swallowtail coat is cut short in front and extends to two tails in the back.

A formal afternoon wedding calls for classic black tie and tuxedos for the groom and his men. White dinner jackets are worn at a formal evening ceremony with black pants trimmed in grosgrain or satin ribbon and a black bow tie, vest and cummerbund.

Proper footwear choices are opera shoes or formal lace-ups, always in black. In both very formal and formal weddings, while the men are dressed identically, the groom is allowed to distinguish himself from his groomsmen by a distinctly different boutonniere.

A More Casual Elegance

With semiformal and informal men's attire, tradition loosens and almost anything goes. While the groom and groomsman may still wear tuxedo or dinner jackets (double breasted or single-breasted), a dash of coordinated color in their ties, vests, cummerbunds and suspenders can be added to complement the wedding colors. Most men's formalwear shops offer a colorful variety of jackets and vests in brocades, iridescent and other textures and patterns. The groom may even distinguish himself from the groomsmen by wearing a different colored jacket altogether.

Semiformal fashion allows the groom and groomsmen a bit more contemporary flair. While an everyday man's suit is fine for an informal wedding, the groom and groomsmen should try to dress in the same color. Navy or dark gray suits or navy jackets with white pants are considered traditional informal wear, with white bucks or saddle shoes. The color of the men's ties should complement the bridesmaid's gowns.

The Bow-Tie Challenge

Unless you plan a morning wedding, which calls for ascots or elegant four-in-hand ties, the groom and groomsmen will likely wear bow ties. The bow tie is commonly rented or sold in a prettied version, so that a man need only adjust the strap length around his neck and fasten it with a clasp that is hidden behind the bow. However, buying a "real," or untied bow tie, and taking the trouble to learn how to tie it is a gesture that will not go unnoticed. The hand-tied bow tie will be slightly imperfect, revealing the touch of a human hand, and the result will be a kind of authenticity and elegance not possible with the stiff, perfectly symmetrical pre-tied version. However, it's really just a simple slipped square knot tied the same way shoes are tied. The salesperson at most formalwear shops will gladly give a tutorial, and with a little practice the groom and groomsmen will become experts. If you decide to go this route, the groom or at least one of the groomsmen should learn the procedure inside and out, ensuring that all ties are properly knotted prior to the ceremony.

Shopping Tips

When the men visit their formalwear shop they should have a firm idea of the women's wedding attire, and bring color swatches from the bridesmaid's gowns. Pictures from the pages of wedding and men's magazines of the preferred formalwear styles will aid in the decision-making process.

The groom and groomsmen should reserve their rentals at least three months in advance of the wedding. Final measurements should be taken about three weeks before the ceremony, however be sure to come back a few days before the wedding for last-minute alterations.

Tradition says that groomsmen pick up the cost of renting their own formalwear, but the discreet groom might offer to cover the accessories such as custom cuff links and shirt studs.

Finally, someone should be designated to return all formalwear to the store on time in order to avoid late fees, which can get quite expensive adding up the per day, per outfit costs.

The Perfect Fit

Whatever the style and degree of formality you choose for your wedding, there are a few key points to keep in mind regarding fit when ordering formalwear for groom and groomsmen. Shirts, whether with pleated front panels or traditional smooth-fronted ones, should fit snugly around the neck. The bottom hem of the pants should touch the top of the shoes. Jackets should fit snugly, but comfortably with some room at the waist. Sleeves should end at the wrist bone with the same number of shirt buttons showing. Vents on the sides of the jacket should lay smoothly and follow bodylines. The collar should hug the neck and the lapels shouldn't buckle.

Grooming the Groom

With all the attention given to the men's clothes, an important detail that is sometimes overlooked is the groomsmen's hair. Men are generally more casual about haircuts than women, but they should be sure to get a trim two weeks before the wedding to add the finishing touch to their wedding finery.

A Groom's Glossary

Tails: The ultimate formal attire, which should only be worn after 6 p.m., this ensemble features a winged-collar tuxedo shirt, ascot or bow tie, vest, tuxedo trousers and tailcoat. The full-dress ensemble comes in black, midnight blue, or grey, with a white shirt and matching or all white accessories.

Tuxedo: Either single or double-breasted, this formal suit has satin shawl or notched lapels. Matching pants sport a satin stripe down the pant-legs. Tailored in silk, mohair, wool or blend, in black, grey, ivory or white, tuxedos come in a range of styles sure to suit any taste.

Vest: This is often referred to as a waistcoat and comes in single- or double-breasted styles easily worn with nearly any tuxedo ensemble. With the open back vest, a band goes around the neck and another is fastened across the back. Tails, strollers, white-tie and director's suits require a different style of vest.

White tie: Worn only to the most formal evening weddings, this ensemble consists of a black tailcoat and black tuxedo trousers with a white bow tie, winged-collar shirt and white vest.