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**Wedding Ceremony Guidance
for Couples**



Contents

What is Humanism?	Page 3
What is special about a Humanist Wedding?	Page 4
Structure of a Humanist Wedding Ceremony	Page 5
The Planning Process	Page 6
Your Journey	Page 7
Vows/Promises	Page 8
Legal Declarations and Exchanging Rings	Page 9
Choosing Readings	Page 10
Symbolic Gestures	Page 11
Secret Content	Page 17
The Paperwork (Marriage Schedule)	Page 18
Costs	Page 19
Contacting Me	Page 20
Wedding Checklist	Page 21
Privacy Notice	Page 27

This guide contains live links and is best viewed online.



What is Humanism?

Humanism is built on the belief that we have one life, and that during this one life we should look to find as much happiness and fulfilment in the present as possible.

Humanists value independent thinking, based on the reality we observe rather than religious observance. Humanists believe that people should be able to enjoy their human rights freely and have a fair voice in all matters that affect them.

The core human values of tolerance, respect and kindness are central to the principles of Humanism.

Valuing creative expression through the arts is also an important principle of Humanism.

You can read more about Humanism on the [Humanist Society Scotland website](#).



What is Special About a Humanist Wedding?

Put simply, what makes a Humanist wedding so special, is that it is completely tailored to you as a couple.

It doesn't matter whether you are having 2 witnesses, or 200 guests, it's your day, your way!

Sharing your journey as a couple will form the biggest part of your wedding ceremony, and we'll work together to make sure every little detail in between reflects your story and your values.

As you'll see as you make your way through this guide, there is very little about your ceremony structure which *has* to be set in stone. Other than ensuring the legal part gets carried out carefully (which is a tiny bit of your ceremony) everything else is up for discussion and is limited only by your imagination!

Oh, and I don't do owls. So don't ask!



I can be as hands-on or hands-off as you like, depending on whether you've already imagined every single aspect of your ceremony or you're looking for help just getting started. As your celebrant, I'll be with you every step of the way.

You can read more about what makes Humanist wedding ceremonies unique by visiting this section on the [Humanist Society Scotland website](#) or [watching this video](#) for some inspiration!



Structure of a Humanist Wedding Ceremony

The structure of your wedding ceremony can be very flexible. We will work together closely to make sure that every detail is exactly as you would want it to be to make the celebration as unique and special as possible, including:

- A **welcome** to your guests from me, with an explanation around the significance of the day and a wee bit about Humanism.
- Sharing the story of **your journey as a couple**, which is likely to include bits and pieces around how you met, your dating life, the proposal, and what marriage means to you.
- One or two **readings** which you have chosen, performed by people close to you.
- **Vows (Promises)** which you make to one another to reflect your lasting commitment.
- **Legal Declarations** – this is where you agree to marry one another (*I Jack, accept you Jill, in marriage...*).
- **Exchange of rings**, which isn't a must, but most couples tend to choose to do this. It usually accompanies the **Legal Declarations**, but it doesn't have to!
- **Solemnisation of Marriage** – that's the wee important part where I declare that you are now married!
- **Signing the Marriage Schedule**, alongside me and your witnesses and usually accompanied by some music. This is an important legal part of your ceremony.
- **Symbolic Gestures** – you can read more about these below. Where these feature in your ceremony depends on the gestures you choose. Some work best at the beginning, others at the end, and others wouldn't work at all unless they were in the middle!
- **Secret Content** – again you can read more about this below. It's totally optional, but as you'll have fully approved your ceremony script with me in advance, you might want something special which gives you a bit of a surprise on the day.
- A **final few words** from me where I introduce you as a newly married couple, ***and the crowd goes wild!***



The Planning Process

While every ceremony is unique, the planning process follows the same format for every couple I work with. Here's a step-by-step guide of our journey together towards your big day:

1. We'll have our first meeting together, or our first contact via Google Meet. We'll chat through all the options you have available to you for your wedding.
2. You joining the Humanist Society Scotland with a wedding membership valid for two years through [Secure Your Date](#) and selecting me as your celebrant as part of this process.
3. I confirm your booking from my side to make sure it's locked in my diary.
4. Everything goes quiet for a bit...don't panic!
5. I get back in touch with you around three months before your wedding, where I ask you to organise your [M10 form](#) and I send you your wedding checklist.
6. You take your time filling in your checklist, writing about your journey, and choosing your readings (more info on all of these things below).
7. You send your checklist to me, and I start working on your ceremony first draft.
8. We send drafts back and forward via e-mail until you're 100% happy with your ceremony script.
9. We'll have a final meeting to make sure everything is set and sorted!
10. We can have an optional mini-rehearsal (priced £40) ahead of your ceremony. Most couples feel they don't need one, but the option is always there!
11. I'll invoice you for full payment once we've agreed on your final draft.
12. You'll have an appointment with the registrar local to your venue to pick up your Marriage Schedule – which you'll bring with you on the day.
13. I'll see you on the big day!
14. I'll send you a 'Presentation Copy' of your script for you to keep forever.



Your Journey

The story of your journey as a couple will form a big part of your wedding ceremony, so I'll ask you to send me a page or two about yourselves and why you're getting married. This can also be a great place to add a bit of humour to your wedding ceremony.

To get you started here are some questions that might help. Remember that whatever you tell me is very likely to become part of your ceremony – so make sure you don't share anything you wouldn't want your guests to hear! Remember we'll send drafts of your ceremony back and forward though, so don't overthink it. Have a look at the questions below to help get you started...

1. How did you first meet and what was your first impression of each other? Did you even like each other at the first meeting? What happened next? How did your lives as a couple progress?
2. What are your similarities and differences?
3. How does it make you feel having this person in your life, has your life changed dramatically or not? The answer can be light-hearted if that's what you want your guests to hear; after all, you know them better than I do!
4. What was the story of the proposal? Was it expected, or a total surprise? Did everything go to plan or were there any bumps on the road?!
5. What does marriage mean to you? Why is now the right time?
6. What are your hopes and dreams for your future together?



Vows/Promises

An important part of your wedding ceremony is the vows/promises you make to one another, as your promise to love one another from now until always. The vows/promises you make are non-legal (so you won't be committed to doing the washing up forever) and they can essentially be whatever you like!

It's also important to note that your vows/promises don't have to match. You can absolutely say something different from your partner if you want to.

I love it when couples write their own vows/promises, which also gives you the chance to throw in something a bit light-hearted in there too. We'll chat more about this when we meet.

Writing original vows/promises certainly isn't for everyone though, so please do [have a look at this collection](#) which you can easily choose from if you like!

When it comes to actually making your vows/promises, you have a variety of options for how you actually say these:

- Memorising them (almost nobody does this, and I wouldn't recommend it!)
- [Reading them from a prompt card, which I'll make for you](#)
- Repeating after me, a few words at a time (my most popular option)
- [Saying 'I do' after I read each line, or saying 'I do' after the whole vows/promises have been read](#)
- Saying 'we do' together after I've read some collective vows (the best option for very shy couples!)

As with every aspect of your wedding – if you find this tricky, just give me a call and we'll talk it through. If you're finding it impossible...I'm happy to choose vows/promises for you!



Legal Declarations and Exchange of Rings

There are very few parts of your ceremony which are absolutely essential – your legal declaration is one which definitely is!

Put simply, you have to be heard to accept one another in marriage in the presence of one another, your witnesses, and me.

It can be as simple as:

I Jack, accept you Jill, in marriage.

I Jill, accept you Jack, in marriage.

I'll break your legal declarations into small chunks for you.

Most couples choose to exchange rings alongside their legal declarations, and most couples choose to extend their legal declarations a little. My personal favourite goes like this:

I Jack, accept you Jill, in marriage. I give you this ring, as a reminder that I am here, and will be here for you always.

I Jill, accept you Jack, in marriage. I give you this ring, as a reminder that I am here, and will be here for you always.

When it comes to making those legal declarations, you don't have to use full names, or even your legal name, so long as you use a name which people recognise that you are known by.

If that all sounds a bit confusing, there's a wee bit more information on legal declarations [available for you here](#).



Choosing Readings

Including a couple of nice readings in your wedding ceremony can be a lovely way of adding some variety to the occasion, and could also give you a nice opportunity to further recognise some important people in your lives by choosing them as readers.

Again, there are no rules as to how many readings you choose to use – you can have as few or as many as you like, but I'd recommend 1-2 readings. Some ideas you might choose to use are:

- An excerpt from one of your favourite songs
- One of the many hundreds of lovely poems about marriage and relationships you can find online
- A short poem written by a creative relative
- Something a bit more left field, like a piece from your favourite book, movie or TV Programme

Readings are the most meaningful and memorable when you are able to choose something which is special to you as a couple.

If you'd like to see some of my favourite examples, you can [download them from my website](#).



Symbolic Gestures

Including a symbolic gesture can also add a further meaningful and personal touch to your Wedding Ceremony.

Here are some of the most popular symbolic gestures you may wish to think about for your wedding day:

- Hand Fasting
- Oathing Stone
- Band Warming
- Unity Candle
- Sand Ceremony
- Drinking from the Quaich
- Jumping the Broom

If any of these options sound interesting to you, take a look at the pages below for more details.

I'd love to talk to you about what feels like a good fit for you. Often, we can use aspects of your story to make any symbolic gesture you choose feel a little more special.

You may also want to do something completely different or unique – I'm always open to trying something new!



Handfasting

The traditional handfasting is where the expression ‘tying the knot’ comes from. It is symbolic of showing how your lives are now linked, as well as being symbolic of the joining of two families.

Often couples use two strips of family tartan, presented by members of the family which are then used to lightly bind your hands together.

You can involve anyone you like, and it definitely doesn’t have to be tartan. Be creative, and let me know what you think!

The most natural place to include this in your ceremony is to tie it (pardon the pun) to the exchange of vows/promises.

Once removed, your handfasting makes a nice centrepiece for the signing of your marriage schedule and can also then be displayed at home as a tangible memory of the big day.

Not 100% convinced? Have a [look at this video!](#)



Oathing Stone

In the past, promises were thought to be more binding if they were made over stone, or near water. It's where the expression 'set in stone' comes from. It's also why kings and queens of Scotland were crowned on the Stone of Destiny!

If you have a favourite beach walk where you're likely to come across stones, or nice stones in your garden, you could collect one of these as your oathing stone.

You would hold this together in your hands as you make your vows/promises to one another. For that reason, I wouldn't recommend choosing it alongside a handfasting (although we can definitely make it work if you're keen for both!)

Some couples also choose to engrave their initials into their oathing stone.

Check out our HSS [oathing stone video](#) here.



Band Warming

A really simple gesture, and one my wife and I chose to have at our wedding.

I would ask you to either gently tie your wedding bands together with lace or ribbon, or secure them in a bag or box, which we would then pass round all your guests as the ceremony is taking place.

Each guest would take a moment to hold your wedding bands in their hands, and they would be asked to infuse them with all of their best wishes for you as a married couple.

By the time you're ready to exchange rings, they will (hopefully) have made their way back to the front of your venue, all-the-more valuable for the extra love they will have collected along the way.



Unity Candle

Candles form a beautiful backdrop to any (indoor!) ceremony.

At the beginning of your ceremony, I'd ask each of you to light a small candle, symbolic of yourself as an individual, but also of the light you are bringing into the life of your partner. [Check out the video!](#)

Once you've made your legal declarations and you're officially hitched, you'd then take a taper each from your smaller candle to light a larger, central candle together. Symbolic of your unity and increased strength as a couple, noting that your individual flame is not lost, but is now also part of something bigger.

Candles can also be a nice way of showing the blending of a family when one or both of you has children, and are also often used to remember a loved one who you wish could have joined you on your wedding day.



You can really go to town with your candles, which can be shaped, painted and engraved any which way you choose...my personal recommendation...get some big pillar candles at Tesco, because your wedding is already expensive enough!

Sand Ceremony

Sand ceremonies ([take a look at our video here](#)) are most popular when either you or your partner have children (either together or separately).

After signing your marriage schedule, you'd add your own colour of sand from a small container into a larger one, recognising the growth of your family.

Each layer of sand is still distinct, and plays its own part in something bigger and more beautiful. Once the grains of sand have been added, they are near impossible to separate, which I think is a really nice symbol of your strength and unity as a family!



Drinking from the Quaich

Probably the most popular symbolic gesture I'm asked to include in couples' weddings...

Usually we'd do this at the very end of your ceremony, as you share your first drink as a newly married couple.

The history of the quaich at Scottish weddings can be traced back to 1589 when King James VI of Scotland gave Anne of Denmark a decorative quaich on their wedding day.

It's also historically linked to the ancient Scottish clans. As a quaich has two handles, clan chiefs would drink from it together, unable to hold a weapon at the same time (hopefully not a *significant* concern on your wedding day!).

Traditionally the quaich is filled with two types of whisky, which are presented by a member of each family. Nowadays though, you can have anything from a gin and tonic to tonic wine – whatever floats your boat!

Find out more about including drinking from the quaich in your wedding by [watching this video](#).



Jumping the Broom

Another tradition which has historic Scottish roots. In times gone by on the Scottish islands, there wasn't always a minister who lived close by. Couples would gather and make promises of love and commitment in front of others in the community – they'd then jump over a broom as a symbol of their new commitment and their new home together.

Couples would then display the broom above the door of their croft, which would alert the minister on his next visit to the couples he had to marry! Who knew!?

Couples choosing this gesture would bring along a broom (I hear B and Q has a lovely range) which would often be decorated with tartan, lace and ribbon.

At the very end of your ceremony, as you're about to make your first step into married life, you'd *step* over the broom on your way back up the aisle as I introduce you to your guests as a newly married couple!

We almost definitely wouldn't *actually* make you jump the broom. *Probably. I think.*



Secret Content

As you'll have already approved virtually every word of your ceremony in advance, some couples are keen for a wee surprise on the day! For that purpose, I have a few options I offer in terms of 'Secret Content' i.e. something that is kept out of your script which you'll hear for the very first time at the same time as your guests do. This can add a bit of extra romance, or a bit of extra humour to your ceremony.

My suggestions are:

- Three things you love about your partner and one thing you might change
- Advice from your parents about how to 'survive' marriage with each of you
- Notes from your best friends on when they realised each of you was 'the one' for each other

Depending on what you choose, I'd be in touch with the necessary people to collect the information I need. I'd then write it separately from your script to keep it safe and secret for the big reveal as part of your ceremony!



The Paperwork

Between 3 months and 29 days before your ceremony, you'll need to submit an [M10 Form](#) to the registry office which is nearest to the wedding venue. From there, your registry office will organise to meet with one of you around a week before your wedding where you'll pick up your **marriage schedule**.

When filling in your M10 Form, you'll need to add my full legal name and the body I'm attached to:

Jamie Ross Innes

Humanist Society Scotland

It's really important to get this in on time as without your marriage schedule you can't be legally married! It's the first thing I'll ask for when I arrive at the venue on the day of your ceremony.

As part of your ceremony, you will both sign the marriage schedule, along with me, and two witnesses which you'll have agreed in advance.

When we sign your marriage schedule we have to do this using a fountain pen, with black permanent ink. I'll bring the pen – trust me, it's just easier that way!



Costs

In short, booking your wedding ceremony with me will cost you about **£500** in total.

You'll need to '[Secure Your Date](#)' with Humanist Society Scotland by taking out a two-year Wedding Membership. This costs **£98**. Humanist Society Scotland is a charity, and your money helps to support the various campaigns HSS is involved in. You can find out more about these [here](#).

Securing your date with Humanist Society Scotland also ensures that you are covered by 'The Promise', which means that should anything unexpected happen to me (eek!) another registered celebrant will be with you on the day to deliver the exact ceremony we have agreed together.

My fee for writing and conducting your ceremony is **£400**. I don't charge travel expenses, unless I need to stay overnight to conduct your ceremony, or I need to get a ferry to your venue.

I'll support and advise you at every stage in the process of planning your wedding. We'll meet at least a couple of times, but I'll be available by e-mail or phone whenever you need me – with no query too small. I love what I do and I don't take days off when it comes to my wedding couples!

If you wish, we can have an optional mini-rehearsal of your wedding for **£40**. You'll probably find that you won't need this – you'll have fully approved the script well in advance of your ceremony date, and you'll find my choreography in your script too (i.e. who does what and when) which will help you visualise things. But – if you're a belt and braces sort of couple, I'd be delighted to meet you for a rehearsal!



Contacting Me

The best ways to contact me are either through e-mail or via WhatsApp.

E-mail works best when we have documents to share, or formal plans to make. If you've just got a quick question or thought about your wedding ceremony, then absolutely feel free to send me a message or a voice note on WhatsApp.

Whichever way you choose to contact me, you'll find I'll get back to you really quickly.

When it comes to your wedding, there are no silly questions!

E-mail: jamie.innes@humanism.scot

WhatsApp: 07815992006



Wedding Checklist

I'll send you a wedding checklist, where you'll fill in all the key details around your ceremony. This is the document which will let me write your ceremony, and the more detail you include in this, the more special and personal your ceremony can be. Here's a blank copy of what that checklist looks like:

Ceremony Details	
Ceremony Date (day of week and date)	
Time of guest arrival	
Ceremony start time	
Location/Venue of Ceremony	
Is there a dedicated wedding planner/co-ordinator at the venue? <i>Provide name and contact number</i>	
Indoors or outdoors? <i>If outdoors:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>please say if covered e.g. marquee.</i> • <i>what is Plan B in case of weather issues?</i> 	
Number of expected guests	
Any child guests?	
Registry Office (name and telephone)	
Photographer / Videographer name	
Is anyone being piped in / out of the ceremony?	
Do you have any animals attending?	
Anyone attending with any specific needs? <i>(For example, if you have a relative who is hard to hearing I could give them a hard copy of the script).</i>	
Anything you'd particularly like me to wear on the day? <i>(Usually tartan trousers but happy to wear my kilt or a suit if you'd prefer!)</i>	
Couple's Details	
Partner 1	
Full legal name	
Are you known by another name <i>(e.g. Christopher known as Chris)</i> that you would like to be referred to during the ceremony?	
Mobile telephone	
Email	



Tell me what you would like to be referred to as – bride, groom, or something else	
If your parents / those who raised you will be attending please tell me their first names and their relationship to you	
Partner 2	
Full legal name	
Are you known by another name (e.g. <i>Christopher known as Chris</i>) that you would like to be referred to during the ceremony?	
Mobile telephone	
Email	
Tell me what you would like to be referred to as – bride, groom, or something else	
If your parents / those who raised you will be attending please tell me their first names and their relationship to you	
The Wedding Party	
For any Best Men / Best Women / Maid of Honour / Man of Honour / Bridesmaids / Groomsmen / Ushers please tell me <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their role e.g. Best Man • their names • how you know them and • why you've chosen them to play a special role 	
Flower girl(s) / Flower boy(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their names • how you know them and • why you've chosen them to play a special role 	
Page boys / Ring bearer / Ring Security: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their names • how you know them and • why you've chosen them to play a special role 	
Anyone else special who will be attending and playing a role in your day?	
Getting Ready for the Ceremony	
Are either or both partners staying at the venue the night before?	
Would you require a ceremony mini rehearsal prior to the big day? (This can usually be done informally at home at a cost of £40)	
Are guests allowed to take photos during the ceremony?	



Are guests allowed to post any content on social media?	
Am I allowed to post any pictures on my celebrant social media pages?	
What is happening immediately after your ceremony for guests to know <i>e.g. head off for a drink reception but be on standby for photographer</i>	
If you're having children there, would you like me to politely request at the beginning that their parents take them outside if they are fussy/vocal?	
The Ceremony	
Will either or both partners be waiting with me at the beginning of the ceremony? Will there be anyone else in the wedding party alongside waiting?	
Will either or both partners be making an entrance after guests are seated?	
If making an entrance, please tell me: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who is making entrance • who is accompanying (if anyone) 	
Please list who is all making an entrance and in what order	
During the ceremony will the wedding party be standing with you, or seated with guests? <i>Think about how much space you have; if there are children it's good to have someone for them to sit with amongst the guests</i>	
For any entrances, what music will be played and when (and is there any special reason this has been chosen?)	
During the ceremony I can introduce the wedding party – would you like me to do this?	
Ceremony Thoughts	
Is there anyone who has travelled from afar that you would like to mention and thank?	
Is there anyone else who you would like to give a special welcome shoutout to?	
Would you like your parents/guardians to be thanked for their support?	
Would you like a moment of reflection for those close to you who have passed away?	
Why did you choose to have a Humanist ceremony?	
Is the date of the ceremony, or the venue location, of significance to you at all?	



Your Journey	
Your journey will form a large part of the ceremony content. Please share with me your story from first meeting all the way through to now. Include only things you'd be comfortable for me to share with your guests. Some fun stories are also great for everyone to hear!	Please send this in as a separate document (1-2 pages) Remember to include the story of the proposal!
Your Relationship and Thoughts on Marriage	
<i>These relationship questions are optional, to give me a flavour of your relationship, if there's anything you don't want to answer or have me talk about please leave blank.</i>	
Your first thoughts when you met your future wife/husband?	
When did you know they were 'the one'?	
What did your family say to you after meeting your partner for the first time?	
Why have you chosen to get married?	
What does marriage mean to you?	
Your Promises (Vows)	
Will you be writing your own vows? <i>(Not essential if you don't want to!)</i>	
Will you be writing them in secret from each other? <i>If yes, please email them to me separately</i>	
How would you like to recite your vows on the day: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recite from memory • Read from cards • Repeat after me • I read them and you respond with 'I do' • I read collective vows and you respond together with 'we do' 	
The Rings	
Are you planning to exchange rings (both), not at all, or only one of you will wear a ring?	
Who will have the rings on the day?	
Is there any special backstory to the rings?	
Would you like to do a band warming gesture as part of the ceremony? <i>This is where the rings are passed around your guests to hold and infuse well-wishes, and happens during the rest of the ceremony so they make it back to us in time!</i>	
The Legal Part	
Would you like to exchange your rings at the same time as making your required legal	



declarations? <i>(Most people choose to do this, but you don't have to!)</i>	
Have you submitted your M10 forms to the registrar? <i>(3 months to 1 month before)</i>	
Who will bring the Marriage Schedule and any other items needed for the ceremony on the day (e.g. for symbolic gestures)? <i>Please note that I will bring fountain pens for signing the Marriage Schedule (this has to be done with black permanent ink)</i>	
After the ceremony who should I give the signed schedule to?	
Who are your two witnesses – please share their full names, relationship to you and why you have chosen them.	
What music will play during the signing and why has it been chosen? <i>I suggest 3 songs to give plenty of time for photographs</i>	
When I do the declaration of marriage during the ceremony, tell me how you would like me to refer to you e.g. <i>declare you wife and wife, husband and wife, husband and husband, or something else.</i>	
Do you plan to share a kiss when you are declared married?	
Readings / Poetry / Lyrics	
Will you be having any readings, poetry or song lyrics being read out during the ceremony?	If yes, please send me the exact readings in a separate document
Who would you like to read these and what is their relationship to you? <i>I can also read if you don't have anyone you'd like to read</i>	
Symbolic Gestures	
Would you like to include any symbolic gestures in your ceremony, most popular examples are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • handfasting • oathing stone • sand ceremony • unity candle (not for outdoors please!) • drinking from the quaich • jumping the broom <i>If handfasting, or quaich, it's good to involve 2 people to participate, if you want to. I will ask some follow up questions about your gesture as we move forward in planning .e.g. significance</i>	



<i>of your oath stone, what's in the quail, what fabric is the handfasting etc.</i>	
Is there anything you'd like to do as a gesture that's not a traditional gesture, or something you'd like us to get creative about?	
Closing Words	
When we come to end the ceremony, how are you leaving – together? up an aisle?	
What music will play for your exit – does it have special significance to you?	
When I bring the ceremony to a close, how do you want me to address you as you exit <i>e.g. Mrs and Mrs, Mr and Mr, Mr and Mrs, something different</i>	
Anything we've missed	
Please add in any additional details you think are important to the ceremony	

Secret Content	
(I'd recommend choosing one of these to further personalise your ceremony and add a wee bit of a surprise for you on the day)	
These can be e-mailed to me separately	
3 things you love about your partner and 1 thing you would change	Advice from parents on how to 'survive' marriage with each of you
Notes from your best friends on when they realised each of you was 'the one' for one another	



Privacy Notice

Your privacy is important to me. For full information on how any data you share with me is used, [please click here.](#)

