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Amber Murphy

*Professional wedding
and portrait photographer*



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***Digital Wedding
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FOR
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by Amber Murphy



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About the Author

Amber Murphy is a professional wedding and portrait photographer who is known for bringing a fresh and unique perspective to the art of photography. Her work moves past the traditional stiff posing and incorporates the distinct personalities of the people she photographs. Amber holds a bachelor of arts degree in communication and is a member of the Wedding Photography Association (WPPI) and Professional Photographers of America (PPA).

Amber currently lives with her family in Boise, Idaho.

Dedication

To Andrew, my best friend, soul mate, and husband. Thank you for all of your encouragement and support. I couldn't have gotten this book done without you!

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I'd also like to thank all of the couples I've had the privilege of working with over the last few years. It was a joy to shoot each and every one of your weddings, and I appreciate you all more than words can say!

To Dr. Jack Simons, thank you for teaching me everything I know about writing.

Last, but certainly not least, to my family. Thank you all for sharing in my excitement with this project and for being willing photography subjects over the years so I could develop my skill. I love you!

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Introduction



So there you are, at a sunset ceremony in the little chapel down by the creek, where you've always dreamed of photographing a wedding. The doors in the back open, and you raise your camera to start capturing what you're sure will be award-winning shots of the bride as she enters. At that moment, you realize you have forgotten batteries for your camera. It won't turn on, and to make matters worse, you aren't wearing pants. Everyone is looking at you! The granny in the front row is having a heart attack! And then you wake up in a cold sweat, terrified that someday you'll find yourself unprepared, ruining a couple's wedding day.

I've had variations of this dream before almost every wedding I've photographed. Shooting weddings is stressful. A lot is on the line, and people have high expectations. But that's no reason to panic!

Wedding photography, unlike other forms of portraiture, certainly comes with some added stresses, but none are insurmountable when you go into a wedding prepared. This book is designed to help with that. Because being prepared makes pretty much everything more enjoyable and more successful, I focus a lot of attention on helping get you ready to shoot a wedding. I also help you look ahead at potential situations you may experience so you can devise appropriate plans for reacting. I include instructions, directions, suggestions, and guidance aplenty. Enjoy!

About This Book

Digital Wedding Photography For Dummies gives you a comprehensive look at the skills needed to photograph and process a wedding, from beginning to end. In this book, I break down all the details of shooting weddings and some of the key points of photography in general, in simple and easy-to-understand terms. My goal is to help you to be prepared for the next (or first) wedding you plan to shoot. Whether you're an amateur helping your friends save some money by taking their pictures for them or you're an established photographer looking for a different take on what you've already been doing, you'll find something useful in here. If you're considering photographing your first wedding, maybe you'll find a new passion. After my first wedding job, I was hooked!

This book follows a natural progression from beginner to advanced topics, starting with an overview of basic photography principles and followed by an in-depth look at what to take with you on a wedding day and how to get great results while shooting. I also explain what to do after the wedding and give you a few ideas of how to turn your passion into a business, if you so desire.

You don't have to read this book cover to cover (although I won't complain if you do!); simply find the details you need and put away the book until you need it again.

Writing *Digital Wedding Photography For Dummies* was especially satisfying because I was essentially able to write the book I wished were available when I first started out as a photographer. I hope it gets you going, literally and figuratively, on your way to shooting great weddings!

Conventions Used in This Book

Throughout this book, I use the following conventions to ensure that the text is consistent and easy to understand:

- ✓ The photos in the book are followed by information in small print that looks like this: *35mm, 1/150 sec., f/2.4, 200*. These terms describe the settings at which the camera was set when I took that picture. The first number is the focal length of the lens, the second is the shutter speed, the third is the aperture, and the fourth is the ISO. (Flip to Chapter 2 for details on these settings.)
- ✓ New terms in the book appear in *italics* and are followed by a simple definition.
- ✓ I use **bold** text to highlight key words in bulleted lists and the action steps in numbered lists.
- ✓ All web addresses in the book appear in `monofont`.
- ✓ When this book was printed, some web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that I haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So when using one of these web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist.

What You're Not to Read

What you read (and what you don't read) is really up to you! I absolutely love wedding photography and put as much useful information into this book as I possibly could, but I realize that some information may not be relevant to everyone. So feel free to skip anything that you already know or that you don't find helpful. You can also pass over the shaded boxes known as *sidebars*, which usually contain technical information about a particular topic in a chapter. (The same goes for any text marked with the Technical Stuff icon.)

Foolish Assumptions

I assumed a few things about you as I wrote this book:

- ✓ You love weddings and want to start photographing them.
- ✓ You may want to go into the wedding photography business full-time.
- ✓ You either already own, or are looking to purchase, a digital SLR camera.
- ✓ Your knowledge of photography is anywhere between complete beginner and advanced.
- ✓ You want to learn the ins and outs of wedding photography and how to do the job well.

If any or all of those descriptions apply to you, you'll find the information you need in this book.

How This Book Is Organized

In order to make the information in this book easy to understand, I broke the content down into five parts. You may notice that the information follows a natural progression from basic information to principles to follow while shooting a wedding to the editing process after the big day. However, you should always feel free to dive into any part, chapter, or section that is useful to you, no matter what order it's in!

Part I: Getting the Big Picture: Becoming a Wedding Photographer

This part is where I go over the information that lays the groundwork for the rest of the book. I cover what to look for when purchasing your photography equipment and tips on how to use it along with an overview of specific techniques you need in order to capture a wedding effectively, including those related to lighting and composition.

Part II: Lights, Camera, Action: Capturing the Wedding Day

This part is the place where I get down to the nuts and bolts of shooting a wedding. I include a detailed checklist of things to do before the day arrives,

and then you find out all about capturing the wedding day itself. I give you a lot of example pictures and outline how you can achieve similar results. If you like lists, Chapter 9 gives you a detailed shot list so that you can be sure to photograph all the important moments of the day.

Part III: Creating the Package for the Newlyweds: Editing and Album Design

In this part I cover what to do after the wedding is over. I take you through downloading and backing up all your images, editing them, and delivering them to your clients (a couple of ways), and I discuss a few things to consider as you design the wedding album.

Part IV: Building Your Portfolio and Business

Here you find a few chapters devoted to making wedding photography into a business. I go over how to put together a portfolio and ways to get your portfolio seen by prospective clients. I also outline all the nitty-gritty details of starting a wedding photography business, from establishing a business identity to getting your work published.

Part V: The Part of Tens

In true *For Dummies* fashion, this part of the book is where I share useful information that is broken down into concise ten-item lists. Here you discover ways to avoid common mistakes and how to work with a second shooter.

Icons Used in This Book



You'll probably notice the following little icons scattered throughout the text. Their job is to point you to ideas and information that I think are important.

This icon points to key information that you want to make sure you don't forget.



Every once in a while, I include information that's interesting but not a necessity. Feel free to skip this info if you don't want to get into too much photography jargon.



This icon highlights information that can save you money, time, or frustration. It may also point out creative ways of getting certain shots or handling specific situations you encounter on a wedding day.



This icon is like a little red flag that alerts you to situations that can damage your gear, your photos, or even yourself.

Where to Go from Here

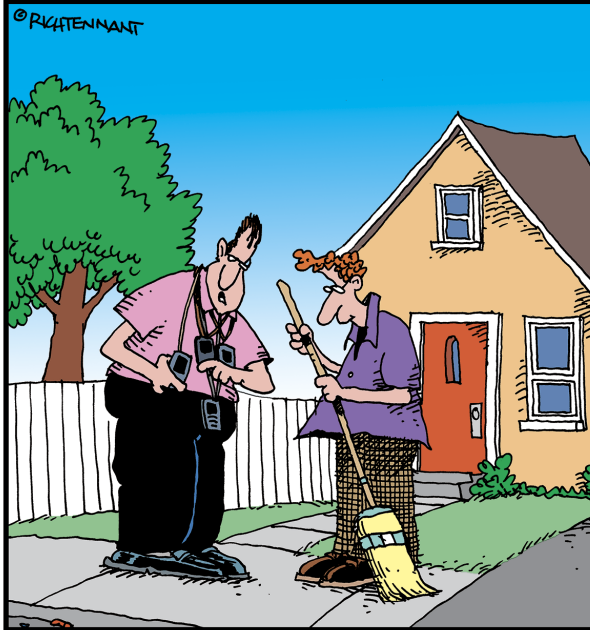
Where you go from here really depends on what information you want first. If you already have a camera and basic knowledge of how it works and want to jump right in to shooting a wedding, you can start with Chapter 7. If you want more information on building your portfolio, check out Chapter 14. And if you want a solid grasp on wedding photography from beginning to end, start with Chapter 1 and read on through!

Part I

Getting the Big Picture: Becoming a Wedding Photographer

The 5th Wave

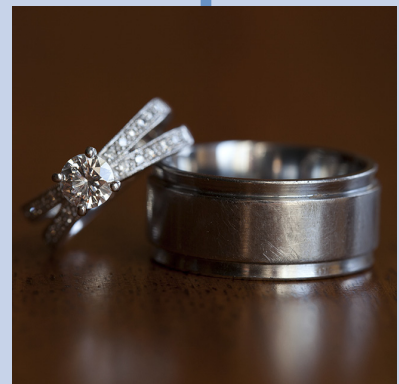
By Rich Tennant



"I think I'd be a very good wedding photographer. I have people skills, I love photography, and I've got the equipment – an iPhone 4, a Nokia E71, a Sony Ericsson, a Samsung Solstice a887..."

In this part . . .

Before you can dive in and start shooting pictures of gorgeous brides, dashing grooms, and everything a wedding day entails, a few foundations need to be laid first. In this part I cover it all. I give you an overview of what the wedding photographer's "toolbelt" looks like, from camera equipment to editing software. I also cover some basic photography concepts, such as lighting and composition, and teach you how to apply them to any given wedding day.



The Wide-Angle View of Wedding Photography

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding what wedding photographers do
- ▶ Discovering the skills necessary for navigating a wedding

Wedding photography has become increasingly popular in the last decade, and it's no surprise given that the advances in digital technology have made capturing a wedding and sharing the photos easier than ever. The explosion of social media allows a couple to share the details of their special day with anyone they choose, anywhere in the world. The growth and change in the wedding industry are exciting things to be a part of.

Although wedding photos have become more accessible to the public than they were when just the couple's relatives and close friends might get to flip through a wedding album, capturing the images of a couple is still as personal as it was the first time a wedding was photographed. As a wedding photographer, you have the opportunity to be a part of each unique wedding and build relationships with many different couples. You get to witness the celebration of love and the joining of two lives while the couple is surrounded by family and friends. I can't imagine a better job!

In this chapter, I talk about what it takes to be a wedding photographer: from the ways you'll be involved before and after the wedding day and the types of pictures you need to be comfortable taking to having an artistic vision and honing your storytelling abilities. I also go over the responsibilities you take on for each wedding and the specific skills you should have, with and without your camera.



Grasping the Scope of the Wedding Photographer's Job

At first glance, being a wedding photographer may seem pretty easy. You buy a camera and show up for a wedding, take some pictures, and give them to the happy couple, right? Well . . . not exactly.

When I was asked to shoot my first wedding, I thought, “I’ve done families and portraits, so how hard can a wedding be?” Much harder than I anticipated, it turned out. Halfway through the wedding, I found myself wondering what I’d gotten myself into, and when the wedding was over I was completely overwhelmed by the editing process. Your job includes a lot of work that takes place before and after the wedding and requires a handle on photographing a variety of subjects. To spare you the mid-wedding freak-out and to help you get prepared, the following sections tackle the specifics of the wedding photographer’s job.

Getting involved before the wedding day

Much of the work of a wedding photographer starts long before the wedding day. It begins with the initial client inquiry, which can be months to years in advance. Always have an up-to-date calendar of your bookings so you can let prospective clients know your availability immediately. After you let a client know that you’re available to photograph the wedding, you can take a few steps to prepare for the big day, as you find out in the following sections.

Setting up a consultation

Having a consultation is a great way to get some face time with your clients. After I receive an inquiry from a prospective couple, I ask if we can meet up for lunch or coffee to go over the packages I offer. If your clients live in a different state, setting up a web meeting (on something like Skype or Face Time) also works well. Either way, the consultation offers you the opportunity to get to know your clients and show that you’re genuinely interested in them, and it gives them the chance to ask you questions directly, without having to go back and forth through e-mail. It also allows you to fully explain each photography package you offer, the approximate turnaround time for giving them their photos, prints, and albums, and your pricing. (See Chapter 15 for details on establishing packages and prices.) Getting to know your prospective clients in a consultation can also help the couples you meet with feel more comfortable with you, which can lead to better pictures on the day of the wedding.



Because you’re trying to sell yourself as the photographer, be sure to bring examples of your previous work. Show clients your work in formats that they’re likely to want themselves, such as a tablet or laptop with a slideshow as well as a wedding album or prints.



During the consultation, you'll also want to go over the wedding contract (which is covered more fully in Chapter 15) and, after the contract is signed, collect the deposit to hold the wedding date. In addition, you should make sure to get the following information:

- ✓ Time of the wedding
- ✓ Location of the ceremony, reception, and where the bride is getting ready
- ✓ Whether or not the couple is doing a First Look (a private moment when the bride and the groom see each other before the ceremony; see Chapter 9)
- ✓ Full contact information for the couple
- ✓ Contact information for the wedding coordinator, if applicable

Let the couple know at this time that you need a list of people for the family pictures along with a schedule of the wedding day (which I cover in more detail in Chapter 8). And if you're going to photograph the couple's engagement pictures (see the next section), start communication about the time and place that works for both parties.

Shooting the engagement pictures

Engagement photos are like a trial run before the wedding day. Doing an engagement session gives you the opportunity to learn more about the couple and get a feel for how comfortable (or uncomfortable) they are in front of the camera (see Figure 1-1 for an example of an engagement photo). Similarly, the engagement session allows the couple to learn how you set up and pose portraits in a more relaxed environment. They also get the opportunity to communicate what kind of pictures they do and don't like.



24mm, 1/100 sec., f/4.5, 125

Figure 1-1: Shooting an engagement session helps to break the ice with your couple.

You can schedule the engagement session any time between the consultation date and the wedding day, depending on your clients' availability. Some couples like to use their engagement pictures as a "Save the Date" card or may want to include a photo with the invitations, so make sure to take that into consideration as you schedule the session. Engagement pictures usually take two to three hours, so schedule your session accordingly.

Finalizing the schedule

In the months leading up to the wedding, follow up with the couple to remind them that you need a list of who to include in family portraits and a schedule of the wedding day. Ask to be notified of any changes as soon as possible. I recommend requiring a final schedule at least two weeks prior to the wedding, just to make sure that you and the couple are on the same page. For more on creating a wedding schedule, check out Chapter 8.

Scoping out the wedding location and visualizing the big day



Always try to be familiar with the setting of the wedding beforehand, including the ceremony location, reception area, and extra locations for portraits, such as a nearby park. If you don't know what the venue looks like, try to visit around the time of day the wedding will take place so you can evaluate the lighting and find good locations to shoot the portraits. After you've scoped out the location of the wedding, use the knowledge you've gained to plan out and visualize how you can use certain elements in the area to arrange your photos. Doing your homework ahead of time helps you feel more comfortable on the wedding day, and you won't have to scramble to find spots with decent lighting.

For example, if you know that the couple's portraits are taking place around 2:00 p.m. when the sunlight is harsh, and you noticed a lovely gazebo that offers some shade, you can plan ahead to take some of the couple's portraits at the gazebo. Or if you observed a gorgeous spiral staircase, you can visualize how to pose the bride on the stairs for her bridal portraits. Being armed with a plan helps to ease the stress of the wedding day.

Figure 1-2 is a great example of possibilities that open up if you plan ahead. In this image you will see a couple posed on a piano. The bride and I communicated in the months leading up to the wedding and picked out several spots to take pictures after the wedding. They ended up being some of the most fun shots of the day!



If the wedding isn't taking place in your area, most venues have pictures up on their website. Consider browsing through the photos and showing up early on the actual wedding day to scout for picturesque spots.



17mm, 1/800 sec., f/5.0, 125

Figure 1-2: Planning and visualizing ahead of time can lead to great photo opportunities.

Telling stories through pictures

When the wedding day arrives, your primary job is to be the storyteller. You get to narrate the couple's love story with each photo that you take, capturing each little moment to make it last forever. Most couples, when looking back on their wedding, recall very little of the details of the day and say that it was all such a blur. That's why your job is so important! Your photos help keep their story consistently tied to the present and immortalize the things that otherwise may have been missed or forgotten.



Because your clients rely on you to document their story, you have to be able to communicate a narrative well. The elements of a photographic narrative are the same as a book or movie, and identifying these key components will be helpful to you as you photograph the wedding:

- ✓ **The characters:** The star roles are, of course, given to the bride and groom. But don't forget the people in the supporting roles as well: the family, friends, officiant, guests, and so on. Be sure to capture the interactions between the bride and groom and the rest of the cast and include detailed photos that describe the relationship between them.
- ✓ **The plot:** In this case, the plot of the story is how the wedding day unfolds. The climax of the wedding story arc is at the ceremony when the couple says "I do" and officially starts a new life together.

So consider the points before the ceremony that build up the story's tension (like the bride putting on her dress and the groom anxiously waiting to see his bride) and catch those moments as they happen. The highest point of the story arc is the moment when the bride and groom are announced as Mr. and Mrs., and afterward the story moves toward the resolution. Look for those congratulatory hugs, toast, laughs, and smiles that depict the closing of the story.

- ✓ **The setting:** Wedding narratives tend to feature a couple of different settings, like the bride's house or hotel room where she gets ready, the ceremony location, and reception site. Make sure to grab a few photos that encompass the entire area at each location as well as a few detail shots of things that make the venues unique. You can also include some exterior shots of the venue that help to create a mood for your pictures. Photographing the sunset or snow falling outside of the church is always a nice addition to the overall story.
- ✓ **The theme:** Each wedding has two themes. The first is the overarching idea of love and the joining of two lives as one. The second is the theme that the couple has chosen for the event, such as a nautical theme, or a rustic-chic theme set in a barn. It can even be as simple as the color palette the couple chose. These ideas are usually a reflection of the bride and groom's personalities, so be sure to document these details that add to the overall story as well as focus on the theme of love.
- ✓ **The tone:** As you narrate the wedding, be aware of the tone, or mood, of what is taking place, and make sure your photos reflect the right emotion. For example, if you take a candid of the groom making his bride laugh, you probably don't want to edit your photo to be in black and white with stark contrasts and shadows, which would give the photo a more somber look. Instead, you want to give the picture a clean and bright look that reflects the happiness of the couple.

Flip to Chapter 7 for full details on shooting scenes to tell a wedding story, and check out the must-have moments to photograph in Chapter 9.

Taking a variety of photos

Not only do you need to be able to communicate a narrative well, but you must also know how to photograph a variety of subjects. The wedding photographer is a Jack (or Jane) of all trades. Here are the types of photography you should be familiar with:

- ✓ **Portrait photography:** A wedding photographer should know how to pose and frame individuals in a way that catches their expressions and presents them in a flattering light (see Figure 1-3). Chapter 8 contains a list of portraits to shoot at a wedding.
- ✓ **Candid photography:** Most of the pictures you'll take at a wedding are candid, where the subjects are not looking at the camera (check out

Figure 1-4). You must be able to quietly observe the people interacting in a scene without drawing attention to yourself. When people don't know you're snapping photos, you'll get the most genuine emotions from them.

✓ **Fashion photography:** Fashion photography is all about the clothes and accessories. At a wedding, you want to showcase the bride's dress and shoes as well as the groom in his tux and the bridal party all dressed to the nines. When photographing the clothing, imagine that you're a vendor trying to sell the item and be sure to look for aspects of the clothing that make it unique. The bride chose her dress and the bridesmaids' dresses for a reason, so pay attention to the details.



28mm, 1/100 sec., f/2.8, 125

Figure 1-3: A wedding photographer needs to be able to capture people effectively.



50mm, 1/200 sec., f/5.0, 100

Figure 1-4: A wedding photographer should be able to capture candid moments that make up a wedding day.



- ✓ **Food photography:** Some weddings have a lot of food and beverages: hors d'oeuvres, a main course, signature drinks, champagne, and cake, to name a few. The meal is a detail you don't want to miss. But although taking pictures of food may seem pretty simple, in reality, making it look good in pictures can be tricky. Luckily, this type of photography is also one of the easiest to practice at home!

Because you are alive and reading this book, I'm assuming you eat on a regular basis, so whip out your camera and practice on your dinner.

Keep in mind when photographing food that you want to use natural light whenever possible and to get up close and personal with the subject (Figure 1-5 is a good example). I suggest picking up a culinary magazine the next time you're checking out at the grocery store and observing the angles and details food photographers choose when arranging their photos.



31mm, 1/100 sec., f/3.2, 250

Figure 1-5: When photographing food at a wedding, use natural light if possible and use a tight shot to show detail.



- ✓ **Architectural photography:** As I mention in the previous section, you want to make sure you take some photos of the setting of the wedding. When you're getting the shots of the venue, keep in mind that when photographing building and structural details, you need to focus on lines and symmetry. If you have the option to use grid lines in your viewfinder, now would be the time to turn that on. The grid lines help you to keep your vertical and horizontal lines straight.

You can take the preceding types of photos in different styles, such as traditional and artistic; check out Chapter 5 for more information. Chapter 3 talks about lighting and composition techniques, and Chapter 4 provides guidance on capturing a wedding's excitement and emotions.

Processing your photos

Even when the wedding day has come and gone, your work is far from over. Now you must sort through all your photos and begin to process them in a streamlined manner. Here are the different tasks left to complete: