

Possible Elements of a wedding/commitment ceremony

Preparation: Meeting with the couple a couple times before the ceremony is important. It helps them to be clear about what they are doing and issues they need to talk about between themselves. It also lays the groundwork for creating the intention and atmosphere for the ceremony. Questions: How do you understand marriage? How do you see each other? What do you think your partner doesn't understand about you? Have you discussed finances?

1. **Entrance** – can include music, flower bearers and flower scatterers.
 - decide how and with whom the bride and groom make their entrance
 - need to have made altar and a sacred space for the wedding.
2. **Welcome** - Officiant welcomes everyone and talks about why and for what everyone is gathered. This might be the time for a talk on marriage/commitment and on role of the community in witnessing the wedding. Possibly evoke the intention of the ceremony or other spiritual qualities or presences.
3. **Short meditation or period of silence**, perhaps having people reflect on their wishes and feelings for the couple being joined. Or perhaps doing loving-kindness.
4. **Refuge and precepts** – these are usually repeated after the officiant. Some couples will re-write the refuges and precepts. When something close to the traditional refuges and precepts are used this is the heart of what makes the ceremony Buddhist.
5. **Poetry and song** – offered by bride, groom, or friends and family
6. **Exchange of vows and rings** (or Tibetan scarves) preceded by a short talk. Usually couple writes their own vows.
7. **Pronouncement** of union and kiss
8. **Blessings** or well wishes from family and friends
9. **Blessing by officiant** – e.g., metta meditation, sprinkling of holy water, blessing cord.
10. **Other possible elements:** chanting, balloon launch, ringing of bells (it is nice to use a small, new bell as part of the ceremony and then give the bell to the couple to keep as a reminder of their commitment.
11. **Exiting** – it is often a good idea to have the couple exit before the guests and if it is going to be a legal wedding to immediately go off to a private location with two witnesses to complete the signing of the marriage certificate (it could be hard to gather people together later and the signing is more anti-climatic later).