

Gratuities: to give or not to give?

You are nearing your wedding day and many of your vendors have been very kind and helpful throughout the planning process. Should you give them a gratuity? Since tipping is largely considered a voluntary expression of appreciation for good service, it's up to you whether to tip, but while tipping is not demanded, in many circumstances you are expected to give a gratuity. Ultimately, you as the customer make the decision about who gets tipped and how much.

Gratuities are normally extended to vendors who have done more than you expected before the wedding day and on the actual day of your wedding. The estimates presented here are based on more than 12 years of professional experience and over 400 weddings.

Preparing to give:

Reflect on the planning process and how the various vendors helped you with the details that led up to your day. Follow your conscience to determine what you feel is right. Be sure to clarify with your vendors if the fee for their service already includes tips for support staff. Since some establishments automatically add a tip to the bill for service to large parties, be careful to avoid unnecessary double tipping. If you choose to extend gratuities, here are a few ideas to help you get them in order:

1) In advance, estimate each gratuity and then write a check or place cash into an envelope with the recipient's name, and/or their title on the front of the envelope. The envelopes can be distributed to the appropriate vendors during or at the conclusion of services on the wedding day. An additional envelope can carry cash to make up for discrepancies once the final bill arrives and the percentages can be tabulated.

2) Write thank you notes to the vendors who helped you throughout the planning process. Often, a sincere note of thanks is appreciated as much or more than a tip.

3) Give the planner cash in an envelope and have the wedding planner discreetly pass out the tips to various vendors who have surpassed expectations. Since your planner witnesses more levels of services from your vendors, in public and in private, the planner usually has a broad view of how well the vendors actually execute their services.

Mandatory Gratuities

Transportation and catering always include gratuities (15% to 20%) in the total service fee. Gift basket delivery requires a \$2 to \$3 per bag or basket to have a bellman deliver to a guest room at a hotel. On occasion, hotel staff will hold a bag or basket behind the front desk and give it to the guest upon check-in, in which case it is wise to tip the front desk manager when you drop off the bags or baskets, just to ensure that your request is executed.

How much to give?

Since all your vendors are in the service business, gratuities are a kind and generous gesture of appreciation for going the extra mile to make your wedding day perfect. The following list is of vendors that usually receive gratuities on the wedding day. Keep in mind that gratuities are customary, but not mandatory.

Almost all of the time, the following receive a gratuity/tip:

Banquet Captain

Oversees the servers and makes sure your guest's food and beverage wishes are met. They often act as the head maitre d' for the reception and work closely with wedding coordinator. **Tip: \$1 - \$5 per guest.**

Hair and Makeup

Assists with all the beauty needs of your bridal party, keeps flow of group while everyone is getting ready. **Tip: 10% -15% of the total fee, whether you go to the salon or they come to you.**

Bellman

Assists with loading wedding items, i.e. gifts, flowers at the end of the night, luggage, etc. to your hotel room or car. **Tip: \$10 - \$20 each.**

60-70% of the time, the following receive a gratuity/tip:

Wedding Planner & Team

Assists with all aspects of the pre-wedding planning and wedding day execution. They often serve as the designer, director, producer, therapist, seamstress, drycleaner, touch-up makeup beauty stylist, coach, consultant, honeymoon suite decorator, bell-hop and bridal party assistant. It is impossible to categorize all the services your professional planner is capable of executing. **Tip: 10% of total service fee.**

Catering Manager/Director of Catering / Food and Beverage Director

Assists primarily with the pre-planning of the wedding day and occasionally oversees the Banquet Captain on the day of your wedding. At the hotel, they can usually make sure your hotel suite is upgraded, amenities are given and your stay is special. At a private venue or country club, they can additionally oversee the kitchen and bars. **Tip: \$50 - \$500.**

Entertainment

Musicians. **Tip: \$20 - \$50 each.** DJ. **Tip: \$50 - \$300.**

50% or less of the time, the following receive a gratuity/tip:

Photographer & Videographer

A gratuity can be given to the "lead shooter" and/or the assistants on the wedding day or on the day you receive your finished product. **Tip: \$40 - \$100 each.**

Florist/Designer and Team

Whatever the tip, the florist/designer should divide it among the set-up and break-down team. **Tip: \$50 - \$200.**

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