

The Usher's Complete Guide

Everything You Need to Know About Being an Usher (Without Making a Mess of It)

By Tony Winyard | Wedding Host & MC | 2,500+ Weddings

The "Wait, What Do I Actually Do?" Moment

You've been asked to be an usher. You said yes. Now you're realising you have absolutely no idea what that involves.

Is it just handing out orders of service? Do you have to give a speech? What if someone asks you a question and you don't know the answer? What if you seat the groom's grandmother on the bride's side and cause a family incident?

Here's the good news: being an usher is one of the most straightforward wedding roles. There's no speech. No hen or stag do to organise. No months of preparation.

Here's the other news: on the day, you're genuinely important. You're the first person guests see when they arrive. You set the tone. You keep things moving. You handle the small problems before they become big ones.

I've watched over 2,500 ushers in action. The ones who looked completely in control. The ones who winged it and survived. And the one who directed the registrar to the wrong room because he was too nervous to ask for clarification.

The difference between looking professional and looking lost? It's about 20 minutes of preparation and knowing what actually matters.

This guide gives you everything. The duties. The timeline. The guest-handling tactics. And the confidence to do it well.

Part 1: What Being an Usher Actually Means

The Core Duties

Your job covers four main areas:

1. Greeting guests as they arrive
2. Handing out orders of service (and buttonholes, confetti, whatever's needed)
3. Helping guests find their seats

4. General problem-solving on the day

The Supporting Duties

Depending on the wedding, you might also:

- Direct guests to the toilets, bar, or car park
- Help with parking if the venue needs coordination
- Carry things between locations
- Help with photos (rounding up family members, holding coats)
- Support the best man with any tasks he delegates
- Look after elderly or disabled guests who need extra help

What You're NOT Responsible For

- The stag do (that's the best man)
- Organising anything in advance (that's the couple or their families)
- Giving a speech (unless specifically asked)
- Knowing everything about the venue (you'll get a briefing on the day)

Your job is to be helpful and present on the wedding day itself. That's it.

Part 2: Before the Day

Getting Your Information

A good couple or best man will brief you properly. If they don't, ask for:

Essential:

- What time to arrive
- Where to arrive
- What you're wearing (and whether they're providing it)
- Who the other ushers are

Helpful:

- Ceremony seating plan (bride's side, groom's side, or open seating)
- Names of immediate family members (so you recognise key people)
- Any guests who need extra assistance

- Where the toilets are
- Where to direct latecomers

Your Outfit

Usually, ushers wear the same as the groomsmen or something coordinated. Confirm:

- Suit colour and style
- Whether to buy, hire, or wear your own
- Tie, pocket square, buttonhole (will they be provided?)
- Shoes (usually polished black or brown)

Get everything ready at least a week before. Try it on. Check everything fits.

Part 3: The Wedding Day

Arrival

Turn up early. At least 45 minutes before guests are due to arrive.

When you arrive:

- Find the best man or lead usher
- Get your buttonhole
- Collect orders of service, confetti, or anything else to hand out
- Confirm seating arrangements
- Do a quick walk of the venue: toilets, bar, ceremony room, exits
- Identify anyone who'll need extra help (wheelchair access, elderly relatives)

Greeting Guests

Your position:

Stand near the entrance. Visible but not blocking. Usually there are 2-4 ushers, so coordinate who's doing what.

Your approach:

1. Smile. Make eye contact.
2. "Welcome! Great to see you. Can I take your name?"
3. Hand them an order of service (and anything else)

4. "Bride's side is on the left, groom's on the right. Make yourselves comfortable."

If seating is open:

"Sit wherever you'd like. We're filling from the front."

If someone looks lost:

"Can I help you find something? The toilets are just through there. Bar's that way."

Handling Different Guests

The early arrivals:

Great. Chat briefly. Let them settle in.

The late arrivals:

Don't make a fuss. Quietly direct them to seats at the back. "The ceremony's just started—there are seats at the back if you follow me."

The elderly or disabled guests:

Ask: "Would you like any help finding your seat?" Offer an arm if needed. Check if they're near the toilets in case they need to leave.

The VIPs (parents, grandparents, close family):

Know who they are beforehand. Seat them in the reserved front rows. A brief personal touch:

"Lovely to meet you. Your seat is right at the front."

The awkward guests:

Some people are shy or anxious. Don't push conversation. Be warm but give them space.

The rowdy guests:

If someone's had too much at the pub beforehand, gently suggest they sit near the back. "I've saved you a good spot."

During the Ceremony

Once guests are seated and the ceremony begins, your active duties pause.

Your job:

- Stand at the back or slip into a seat
- Keep an eye out for latecomers (seat them quietly)
- Be ready to help if anything unexpected happens
- Don't check your phone

- Look attentive and respectful

After the Ceremony

Immediate tasks:

- Help clear the ceremony space if needed
- Direct guests to drinks reception, signing area, or photos
- Collect discarded orders of service if the couple wants to keep them
- Round up family members for group photos when called

Photo assistance:

The photographer or videographer might need help gathering specific people. "Has anyone seen the groom's uncle?" Be the person who actually goes and finds him.

Guest assistance:

Point people toward the bar, toilets, garden, or wherever the reception is happening.

The Reception

Once the reception starts, your formal duties are mostly done. But stay available:

- Help with seating if there's a sit-down meal
- Assist elderly guests if needed
- Be an extra pair of hands if the venue staff need something moved
- Enjoy yourself—you've earned it

Part 4: Problem-Solving

Common Issues (and What to Do)

Guest sat in a reserved seat:

"I'm so sorry, these front rows are reserved for family. Can I find you another great spot?"

Someone's upset or unwell:

Quietly check if they're okay. Offer water. Find a quiet spot for them. Alert the best man if it's serious.

Something's gone wrong with the venue:

Don't panic. Find a venue staff member. If it's urgent, tell the best man. Don't bother the couple.

Lost child:

Stay calm. Find the parent. Don't make a public announcement unless absolutely necessary.

Photographer needs help:

Do what they ask. Round people up quickly. Don't argue with them about poses or timing.

Late vendor (florist, cake, etc.):

Not your problem to solve, but point them to the right person (wedding planner, best man, or venue coordinator).

Part 5: Quick Reference Card

Print this. Keep it in your jacket pocket.

Before Guests Arrive

- Arrive 45+ minutes early
- Collect buttonhole
- Collect orders of service/confetti
- Confirm seating (bride's side, groom's side, or open)
- Walk the venue: toilets, bar, ceremony room
- Identify who needs extra help

Guest Arrival

- Stand near entrance
- Smile, greet, hand out materials
- Direct to correct side or open seating
- Help elderly/disabled guests
- Seat VIPs in front rows

During Ceremony

- Watch from back or slip into a seat
- Handle latecomers quietly
- Stay attentive

- Phone away

After Ceremony

- Direct guests to drinks/photos
- Help round up people for group photos
- Clear orders of service if needed
- Be generally helpful

If Something Goes Wrong

- Stay calm
- Solve quietly if you can
- Escalate to best man if needed
- Never bother the couple with minor issues

What to Wear Checklist

- Suit (correct colour, cleaned, pressed)
- Shirt (ironed, check for loose buttons)
- Tie/cravat (as instructed)
- Pocket square (if required)
- Buttonhole (collected on the day)
- Shoes (polished)
- Socks (matching, appropriate colour)
- Belt (if needed, matching shoes)
- Watch (optional, but useful)

About Tony Winyard

2,500+ weddings. Thousands of ushers briefed.

The best ushers I've seen weren't the most confident or experienced. They were the most prepared. Twenty minutes of understanding the venue and the plan made them look like professionals.

If you want any guidance on your usher duties—or any other aspect of the wedding day—I'm happy to help.

Book a free 15-minute consultation: <https://www.winyard.com/contact>

You don't have to be an expert. You just have to be ready.

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