

Robyn Ashley Weddings

NYC WEDDING OFFICIANT

THE OFFICIANT'S CUT

Write Your Wedding Vows.

The structure I give every couple: one story, real promises, one line about the future. With openings you can lift and the cues for reading them aloud.

AS SEEN IN

Tamron Hall · Brides · The Knot

FROM ROBYN'S DESK

The blank page is *where vows go to die.*

A groom once handed me his vows folded into a tiny square, the paper soft from being opened a hundred times. One line was on it. "I don't know how to do this."

I told him to forget the paper and tell me the coffee story he had let slip at the rehearsal. He did. Two hundred people went quiet, because he described exactly how his partner pretends to hate mornings but always steals the first sip.

That is the whole secret, and it is why I stopped letting my couples open a blank document. You do not need to be poetic. You need to be specific, and you need an order to put things in.

That order is in here, with the prompts I use to pull the story out of people, lines you can lift, and the cues for reading it at the altar without falling apart.

Robyn

ROBYN ASHLEY WEDDINGS · BROOKLYN ·
NYC



Story, promises, *forward line*.

THE WHOLE STRUCTURE

One specific story, then three to six concrete promises, then a single line about the future. Do those three things and you can write vows that work, whether or not you have written anything in your life.

Think of your vows as three short movements. Each one runs only a few sentences. Together they come in under three minutes, and they give the room something to feel at every stage.

The line that makes guests cry is almost never the most beautiful sentence. It is the most specific one. "*You complete me*" moves no one, because it could be said to anyone. The small, slightly embarrassing detail you want to cut for being too little is usually the exact line that catches the room.

ROBYN'S NOTE

My couples try to delete the small detail every single time. I make them keep it. The greeting-card feeling is a *specificity* problem, never a writing-talent one.

One scene, *not the highlight reel.*

Pick a single moment, not a summary of the whole relationship. One true thing that happened. Four or five sentences is plenty.

— *[To find it, finish this out loud: "I knew this was different when..." Then write down what you actually said, in your actual words. That is your opening.]*

Pick the day you knew, or the fight that turned into something, or the ordinary Tuesday that somehow stuck, or the first time they did the small annoying loving thing they still do. One scene with real detail beats five years of summary.

ROBYN'S NOTE

Detail does the work. *The umbrella, the coffee, the exact thing they said.* None of it needs talent. It needs honesty and a moment you both remember.

Promises a person can *actually keep.*

This is where most vows go vague, and vague is where guests check out.

"I promise to always love and support you" gives the room nothing to picture. Write three to six, most of them sincere, maybe one playful.

— *[The test for every promise: could your partner picture themselves living inside it on a normal Wednesday?]*

"I promise to keep making your coffee before you are awake enough to ask." "I promise to be the one who handles the spiders." "I promise to apologize first more often than I want to." Those are promises a person can keep, and a crowd can feel.

ROBYN'S NOTE

Trade the noble-sounding promise for the recognizable one, every time. *"I'll support your dreams"* fails the Wednesday test. "I'll bring you tea and leave you alone on deadline" passes it.

Point at the *life ahead*.

End by pointing at the life ahead, not the day you are standing in. This is the line that lifts the vow off the page and puts the lump in everyone's throat on the way out.

"And whatever the next fifty years hand us, I want to meet it next to you."

"I can't wait to be old and unbearable with you." One sentence about the future, and you are done.

— *[Resist the urge to keep going. The forward line is your mic drop. Three more thoughts after it only soften the ending.]*

ROBYN'S NOTE

Story, promises, forward line. Roughly *ten to thirteen sentences* total, under three minutes. Write those three movements, then stop, and you have real vows.

Openings you can *start from*.

"Three years ago you showed up to our second date forty minutes late, soaked from the rain, holding an umbrella you'd bought for me because you'd watched me get caught without one. You just handed it over and said, 'I figured.'"

"I knew this was different the night the power went out and we ended up talking until the sun came up, and I realized I was disappointed when it came back on."

"Everyone warned me about your driving. Nobody warned me I'd one day call shotgun in your beat-up car the safest place I know."

ROBYN'S NOTE

Do not read these word for word. They show the *shape*: a real scene, a small line of dialogue, then the turn. Replace every detail with one only the two of you would recognize.

Promises and *closers*.

Promises to make your own.

"I promise to keep buying you the good coffee, even when the budget says otherwise. To be the calm one when you are spiraling, and to let you be the calm one when it is my turn, because it will be my turn. To laugh at your bad jokes, which are most of them."

Forward lines to close on.

"I don't know what we're walking into. I just know I want to walk into all of it with you, umbrella or no umbrella, for the rest of my life."

ROBYN'S NOTE

Notice how plain the language is, without one fancy word in there. The work is done by the *specifics*, the coffee and the umbrella, never the vocabulary.

Match the *weight*.

Aim for roughly 150 to 300 words, one to two minutes per person.

Long enough to mean something, short enough to read without falling apart. Past five minutes the room starts to drift, no matter how lovely the words.

The part that causes quiet hurt. Coordinate length with your partner.

One person reading thirty seconds while the other reads four minutes makes the short set feel thin and the long one feel like a monologue.

— *[Agree on a rough length together. Two paragraphs each, or one page each in big type. Then hold each other to it.]*

ROBYN'S NOTE

If your draft runs long, do not trim evenly. Cut whole sentences that summarize and *protect the specific ones*. A vow gets stronger as it gets shorter, right up until you delete the detail carrying it.

What to *leave out*.

Inside jokes that need a backstory. If a line takes three sentences of setup the guests do not have, it falls into silence. The couple cracks up, and the room smiles politely. Save it for the private letter.

Anything too raw for a microphone. Some things are true and tender and absolutely not meant for a sound system and a videographer. Those belong in a note you exchange privately.

The borrowed clichés. "You're my rock," "my better half," "my soulmate." If you have heard the line at three other weddings, so have your guests.

ROBYN'S NOTE

The grandparent test saves more vows than any writing tip I know. *Picture your eldest relatives in the front row.* If a line would confuse or embarrass them, move it to a letter before the ceremony.

Reading them *without falling apart.*

— *[Read your draft aloud before the day, more than once. To your dog, in the shower, alone in the car. That is how you find where your voice cracks before the moment ambushes you.]*

Print them properly. Large font, double-spaced, in a little vow book or on nice paper. Please, not your phone. The screen dies, photographs badly, and pulls you out of the moment with a thumb-scroll. The vow book costs ten dollars and shows up in every photo looking like you meant it.

— *[Break your lines short. Write the way you would breathe, a few words a line, so when you pause to cry or laugh you can look up, find their eyes, and drop back to your place.]*

ROBYN'S NOTE

When the tears come, hold the paper, take one breath, and let the pause sit. The room is with you. *A crack in the voice is the moment, never the mistake.*

Three things *before you read them aloud.*

Everything here you can do with a notebook and an honest hour. Treat the structure as scaffolding and your own true things fill it in.

i

Draft the three movements in one sitting.

One story, three to six promises, one forward line. Do not edit while you write. Get the true things down first, ugly is fine, then shape them on a second pass.

ii

Agree on a length with your partner.

Set a rough word count together so neither set feels thin or runs long. Two paragraphs each, or one page in big type. Keep both under about two minutes spoken.

iii

Read it aloud, then print it big.

Say it out loud until you find the crack. Print large and double-spaced in a vow book, lines broken short so you can look up. Leave the phone in your pocket.

"I told Robyn I had no story worth telling. Twenty minutes of her questions later I was crying over a parking-lot memory I'd forgotten. That ended up being the line everyone talked about at the reception."

PRIYA · MARRIED IN BROOKLYN, 2025

IF THE STRUCTURE HELPED

The hard part is *finding the story.*

The structure is the easy half. The hard half is pulling out the specific story and the real promises when your mind goes blank under pressure. The Couple's Ceremony Kit carries the vow-writing prompts I use to unfreeze people, the questions that find the umbrella story when you swear you do not have one, with worked examples for your situation and the rest of the ceremony around it so the vows do not float alone.

\$79

Open the Ceremony Kit →

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Where this *came from*.

PULLED FROM

The structure I give every couple before they write, watched up close from three feet away at weddings across NYC and the Hudson Valley. Field-tested over *more than 300 ceremonies*.

WHAT IS IN THE KIT

The vow-writing prompts that unfreeze people, worked examples for your situation, and the whole ceremony around the vows so they do not float alone. All of it in *the Couple's Ceremony Kit*.

USE THIS FREELY

Print it, mark it up, write your draft in the margins, hand a copy to your partner so you both start from the same shape.

IF YOU WRITE A SET

Email me. I read every one.
hello@robynashleyweddings.com.

Built from the prompts I use to pull the true, specific thing out of a couple who swear they are not writers.

About this structure, and where it has been read.