

Forms of Address

Address book, cup of tea and stationery at the ready, you start addressing invitations for your husband's fortieth birthday party. All of a sudden you realize you are in a potential etiquette minefield. Jane and John are married, but she does not want to be addressed as "and Mrs. John Kelly;" Sam and Sue are not married, but live together; and Tanya is separated but not yet divorced. **What are the correct forms of address for each of these invitations?**

Help is on the way! Simply refer to our handy chart and take the mystery out of addressing your social correspondence correctly.

Situation	Options/Notes
Addressing a Woman	

Maiden name

Ms. Jane Johnson
Miss Jane Johnson*
*usually 'Miss' is for girls under 18

Married, keeping maiden name

Ms. Jane Johnson

Married, uses husband's name socially

Mrs. John Kelly
Mrs. Jane Kelly*
*Nowadays this is acceptable

Ms. Jane Kelly

Separated, not divorced

Mrs. John Kelly
Mrs. Jane Kelly
Ms. Jane Kelly

Divorced

Mrs. Jane Kelly
Ms. Jane Kelly
Ms. Jane Johnson (maiden name)

Widowed

Mrs. John Kelly*
*If you don't know the widow's preference, this is the traditional and preferred form
Mrs. Jane Kelly
Ms. Jane Kelly

Addressing a Couple

Married, she uses her husband's name socially

Mr. and Mrs. John Kelly

NOTE: Traditionally, a woman's name preceded a man's on an envelope address, and

Married, she prefers Ms.

Mr. John Kelly and Ms. Jane Kelly
Ms. Jane Kelly and Mr. John Kelly
*Do not link Ms. to the husband's name:
Mr. and Ms. John Kelly is incorrect

Married, informal address

Jane and John Kelly
John and Jane Kelly

Married, she uses maiden name

Mr. John Kelly and Ms. Jane Johnson
Ms. Jane Johnson and Mr. John Kelly

If you can't fit the names on one line:
Mr. John Kelly
and Ms. Jane Johnson
*Note the indent, either name may be used first

Unmarried, living together

Mr. John Kelly & Ms. Jane Johnson

Note: Use one line

A woman who outranks her husband:
elected office, military rank

The Honorable Jane Kelly and Mr. John Kelly

If you can't fit both names on one line (note indent):
The Honorable Jane Kelly
and Mr. John Kelly

A woman who outranks her husband:
professional or educational degree

Dr. Jane Kelly and Mr. John Kelly

Both are doctors (PhD or medical) and use the same last name

The Doctors Kelly (omit first names)

Drs. Jane and John Kelly / Drs. John and Jane Kelly
Dr. John Kelly and Dr. Jane Kelly / Dr. Jane Kelly and Dr. John Kelly

Both are doctors (PhD or medical), she uses her maiden name

Dr. Jane Johnson and Dr. John Kelly
Dr. John Kelly and Dr. Jane Johnson

Business

Woman

Ms. is the default form of address, unless you know positively that a woman wishes to be addressed as

Professional designations—use only for business

Jane Kelly, CPA

Note: Do not use Ms. or Mr. if using a professional designation.
Socially, drop the professional designation and use Mr., Ms., or Mrs.: Ms. Jane Kelly

Esquire:
Attorneys and some court officials

Jane Kelly, Esquire

Note: If using Esquire, do not use Ms. or Mr.
In conversation or socially, 'Esquire' is not used; use Mr. or Ms.: Ms. Jane Kelly

Attorney at Law

Ms. Jane Kelly
Attorney at Law

This is an alternative to 'Esquire' for attorneys. Use Mr. or Ms. and use two lines with no indent