

Receiving Line Basics

Let's start by setting the record straight: A receiving line isn't required. However, the bride and groom do have to greet and thank each and every one of their guests for coming to their wedding. A receiving line really is the best way to be sure that they don't miss anyone, especially if the wedding is large (more than 75 people). A receiving line is also a great (and efficient) way to be sure that all the guests have a chance to meet the couple's parents and attendants. At a small wedding, it's fine for the bride and groom to visit with each table—usually during the meal—to greet, thank and chat with their guests.



The receiving line is held either at the ceremony site as people exit the service, followed by formal picture-taking, or as soon as the couple reaches the reception site, after the formal pictures. Ideally, the location is one that flows into the reception area or permits guests to have refreshments while they wait their turn.

Who's in Line?

For some reason, groomsmen often panic about having to be in a receiving line. Relax, guys, you're off the hook.

Whoever is hosting the wedding is the first in line. Traditionally, that's the bride's mother, followed by her father, the groom's mother and father, the bride, the groom, the maid or matron of honor, and one or two bridesmaids (they can take turns and share the duty). But if Aunt Martha and Uncle Fred are hosting, Aunt Martha starts the line. Fathers aren't required to stand in line; they can circulate, with the groomsmen, among the guests. However if one father participates, the other should also. In a military wedding, it's protocol for a groom in uniform to stand before his bride.

□□□□ Thoughtful Tip

When the receiving line is held at the reception site, have a waiter offer a variety of drinks—juice, punch, sparking or still water, Champagne—to those waiting in line. Be sure to have a small table where guests can place their drinks before going through the line. It's more than awkward—and downright tacky—to greet hosts and the wedding party while holding a drink or canapé.