

### The Etiquette of Wedding Gifts



I still remember the first time I saw *The Philadelphia Story*, a classic black-and-white film starring Katherine Hepburn (at her most lock-jawed and blue-blooded) alongside Cary Grant and Jimmy Stewart. The theme of the film was her (latest) wedding, and one of the scenes that stands out in my memory shows table after table of wedding gifts in view. Formal china, full sets of silver, crystal glasses by the carton-full... extravagance was the point, and the film made it well. But for all that many couples still register for formal items, there is now a much broader mix of fun and everyday gifts, too, from margarita makers to pots and pans. This makes the registry much more accessible for guests with a range of budgets and interests – after all, gift givers should feel good about the wedding present they choose for you.



The Basics

The etiquette of wedding gifts and wedding registries is one of the funniest topics I talk about with brides and wedding guests. There is a wonderful balance between unspoken tradition and the need for very explicit, detailed information. On the one hand, wedding invitations are the only kind that carry an unspoken obligation to give a gift, regardless of whether or not a guest can attend. But, there is no mention of gifts – not even “no gifts, please” – and never any mention of registry information on a wedding invitation. Information about registries is traditionally spread by word of mouth: The couple lets their close family and friends (usually the wedding party) know where they are registered, so that they can help answer questions from

## Inside Weddings: Registry Rules

Written by Anna Post

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guests. As a guest, it's okay to ask, even of the couple themselves. Wedding websites have also given couples another terrific option. You can post a link or links to your online registries or list your brick-and-mortar ones with contact information right on your site. Since this is a place for guests to come for practical information about the wedding, such as hotels and flights, registry information will fit right into this helpful category.

### Registry Etiquette

Registries are incredibly organized and helpful, and it is not "greedy" to register. Most guests find registries a very efficient way to select a gift that the couple would like, would need, and that wouldn't be duplicated by other guests. While it's okay to have more than one registry, draw the line at three or four. You want to be helpful by offering your guests variety, not self-indulgent by listing your every wish in the world.

It's fine to have a less traditional registry – one with gardening equipment or camping gear – but include a traditional one, too, even if it isn't very full. Many guests, especially older ones, will feel much more comfortable with a few classic options. As shower gifts are typically less expensive than wedding gifts, it might be a good idea to set up a shower registry separate from your wedding registry with lower-priced items, especially if there is a shower theme.

The best registries have a mix of both prices and types of items, so that all of your guests will feel comfortable finding something they will be excited to give you. An eager young groom once asked if it was okay for him to register for an electric razor for himself. Technically, there isn't a "rule" against it. But there's also a high likelihood that the razor will linger unchosen, as it's a personal item, rather than something for the bride and groom to share in their new life together.

### "Registering" for Cash

It has always been acceptable to give cash (or a check) to the bride and groom; it is also now okay for the couple to signal that gifts of money would be welcome. As with registries, give this information out by word of mouth: "Of course we would love anything you give us, but we could really use help with a down-payment on our first home." It's okay to say "cash," but if that makes you uncomfortable, "donation," "help," or "contribution" are all good substitutes. While there are websites that help to facilitate cash gifts, it's best to have at least one other online registry as well, as many guests may not feel comfortable having no traditional gift options to choose from. Just remember: In the end, the choice of gift is always up to the giver, so great aunt Edna might still buy you a blender.

### The One-Year Myth

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At the risk of causing panic, it's a myth that you have a year to send thank-you notes for your wedding presents. In the best-case scenario, thank yous are sent out within a day or so of receiving a gift. This isn't just to be super-bride; it keeps you from being bogged down later on, and it also lets the giver know that their gift has been received. So, that said, between caterers, dress fittings, showers (which come with their own set of thank yous), and your day-to-day job, it's understandable if you fall behind. Should this happen, aim to have all of your thank-you notes sent within a month of returning from your honeymoon. Still worried? Thank-you notes can also come from the groom!

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