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Envelope Etiquette

THE WHEN AND HOW OF WHOSE NAME GOES WHERE

Finding and sending the perfect invitation sets the mood for your wedding, making it an essential part of the planning process. It's not just the look and feel of invites that couples should take into consideration, how the envelope is addressed is just as important!

While tradition surrounding envelope etiquette abounds, the formality of the past

is slowly loosening. Experts on stationery and invitations urge couples to keep etiquette in mind, but they are also adapting to new trends.

"Etiquette has gotten to the point where it's flexible and couples should decide what really fits best for them and their guests," says Tara Vanderheyden, owner of **Invitations by Design**.

WRITTEN BY NICOLETTE HOUSE



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Couples are leaving their mark on each facet of their big day, including spicing up invitations and envelopes with personal touches.

"Couples are managing most aspects of the wedding themselves, now (as opposed to the parents)," says Kasey Larson, president and co-founder of **DBY invitations**. "Their personality is coming through in all aspects of the wedding, especially custom designed invitations."

Eloquent Etiquette

Sending out properly addressed invites makes guests feel wanted and welcomed, and signals the event is sure to be fabulous and fun.

With so many different situations out there, couples want to be careful not to

offend anyone by misaddressing an invitation. Couples can stress about properly addressing envelopes and come down with a bad case of writer's block, or they can consult the experts to help them navigate envelope etiquette.

Melissa Mizel, proprietor of stationery design house **Dear Emily**, shared the following tips:

1) When couples are unmarried and living together, tradition says to put the name of the first guest on one line and the name of the second guest on the second line. However, when it's a close call (because the two people think of themselves as "practically married"), consider what would please the recipients, and if your intuition tells you to, put the names on one line joined by the word "and" or an ampersand.

2) When couples are unmarried and not living together, it's nice (and correct) to send a separate invitation to each individual's address. This is because some couples may take offense at the thought that the sender believes that they receive mail at a single address.

3) If a woman is married and chooses to keep her last name, keep the husband's and wife's names on the same line, if possible. The prefix in front of the woman's name would be Ms. and the last name would be her own: Mr. Jonathan Reynolds & Ms. Rebecca Lundquist.

4) If a woman has been widowed, take into consideration how recently this occurred. The more recent the death, the more likely an elderly woman, in particular, will appreciate seeing her husband's



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name, thus: Mrs. Ignatius Clarke rather than Ms. Amelia Clarke. A younger woman, though, may have been called Ms. Amelia Clarke for decades and wouldn't necessarily appreciate a name "makeover" just because she is now widowed. Always remember to respect what you know about a person's past practice.

Pay attention to how addresses are written out, as well. Vanderheyden noted that couples sometimes forget to fully write everything out on the envelope. Weddings are a time to be formal, and it's best to write out guests' full names and not use common abbreviations such as "St., Ln., or P.O. Box."

"It seems silly, but writing out lane, street, post office box, or apartment gives it a more formal feel," says Vanderheyden.

"When guests see it, it makes them think, 'Ooh, this is important.'"

Tiny Attendees

Choosing to invite or not invite children to weddings can be awkward for many couples. However, there are polite ways to indicate their decision via the invitation and envelope.

If children are not invited, do not place their names on outer or inner envelopes. Additionally, leave a space on RSVP cards for guests to fill in the number of people attending from each household. If only the couple's names appear on the envelope, but the RSVP card indicates more than two guests will be in attendance, that lets the host know something is off. They can then handle it on a per-guest basis.

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“RSVP cards can also say, ‘We have reserved two seats in the guests’ honor,’” says Larson. This politely lets guests know that a place has been reserved strictly for the couple.

“Couples have been asking to include ‘Adult reception to follow’ directly on the invitation, as well,” Larson adds.

If children are invited to the wedding, couples can clearly indicate that on the front of the envelope.

“Children’s names can appear on the second line of the invitation or you can address the invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Jones and Family,” recommends Mizel.

Mizel also suggests, depending on age, sending an envelope for just the children or, when using formal invitations with inner envelopes, adding children’s names to the parents’ on the inner envelope to indicate they are included. Thus, an outer envelope might say, “Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Jacobson,” and the inner envelope might say, “Uncle Joe, Aunt Kate, Zoey and Hugo.”

Making Your Envelopes Your Own

Experts suggest beginning to design invitations at least four months in advance of your wedding date.

“It takes about a week to get a proof of the invitation and you also need to leave a week for the envelopes to be addressed,” notes Dottie Bucaro, store manager at **Marvelous Party**.

Bucaro recommended several ways couples could create more elaborate envelopes.

“Stamping initials, doves, or interlocking rings on the back of the envelope are ways for couples to add their personal touch,” says Bucaro. Sprinkling aspects of their

reception into the invitations allows couples to customize their invites and gives them an extra wow factor.

“Couples are finding fun places to add spark from the invitation design to the envelope so it's not mixed in with the mail. They're placing details from the invitation onto the envelope,” says Vanderheyden.

“Nothing can get lost in the shuffle like a plain white envelope. Try coordinating your envelope with the color palette used to create your invitation suite. If you must go with a white envelope, try addressing it with a bold color ink. And nice stamps will be sure to grab the attention of your guests,” says Candice Dora, owner and lead creative designer at **aDORable Designs by Candice**.

Stepping Outside the Box

Invitations are still most commonly enclosed in envelopes. However, couples can step outside the box by sending invitations set inside handcrafted boxes.

“I am starting to notice more clients interested in having their invitations delivered in boxes. I think it's a fantabulous way to 'set the tone' to your wedding day,” says Dora.

Boxed invitations are an added expense. If you're watching your budget, opt to send two types of invitations – boxed invites for your bridal party, and VIPs and enveloped invites for your other guests.

“I've had brides send two versions of an invitation – one more elaborate for the family VIPs. We've also done multi-language invitations in both English and French, Spanish, German, and Slovak if a majority of guests speak another language,” says Larson.

Maintaining Tradition

Traditionally, return addresses are printed or written in calligraphy on the back of the envelope. It adds a stunning touch to any invitation, but Vanderheyden warns that invitations might accidentally be mailed back to the original sender if addressed this way. The post office prefers

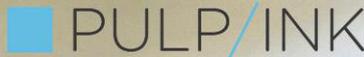
that return addresses appear in the upper left corner. However, it is still acceptable to place them on the back or front of the envelope. Some bold couples are taking their chances and really getting creative, opting to place them in unique locations like the side of the envelope.

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Finally, remember to avoid a common faux pas regarding registry information and invitations.

"Don't put registry/gift information on the invitations," cautions Larson.

Guests are coming to enjoy a fabulous party and celebrate the marriage. While it's customary to bring gifts, refrain from directly supplying registry details on invitations. Instead, add an insert card with the couple's website address, if they have one. That will direct guests to the registry should they choose to bring a gift.

As all the experts pointed out, remember to have fun! The wedding day and all the events leading up to it are special moments to be enjoyed together! 

PLANNING NOTES:

Invitation Dos and Don'ts

Invitation etiquette can be complicated. That's why we asked our experts to give us their advice for Do's and Don'ts.

DO:

- Do mail invitations about six to ten weeks before the wedding.
- Do choose a stationer who's a match for you and your groom. Pick a designer that fits with your style, tell them your vision and they will create fantastic invitations that your guests will rave about.
- Do pick a theme or color you want to coordinate with your entire event.
- Do take your time to choose the right invitations. In the end your stationery and photographs are some of the only tangible things that will remain after that day. Your guests will notice you have taken the time to use the same stationer for your invites all the way through to your reception collaterals and even thank you notes.
- Do send save the dates. Save the date cards are a great idea for your guests to

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reserve the date and make travel arrangements. Additionally, you get a chance to ensure all addresses are correct.

- **Do use correct titles for all guests.** It is proper to address an envelope for a married couple as 'Mr. and Mrs.'
- **Do plan your guest address list in advance.** Otherwise you'll be frantically gathering address info at the last minute.
- **Do double check addresses.** Check all the addresses and zip codes, as the post office will scrawl corrections in big, black marker across your invitation.
- **Do supply the postage.** Place stamps on the RSVP cards or envelopes. Do not leave this task to the recipient.
- **Do have the proper postage.** Always, always weigh your invite before buying the postage.
- **Do order enough invitations the first time.** Many couples have to place multiple orders because they miscounted when they placed their order. It's a lot of work, extra time and money to have to place another invitation order.
- **Do provide directions.** Give your guests as much information about the ceremony and reception locations as possible. Include maps, lodging and dining information, as well as phone numbers of someone they can contact if needed, such as the mother of the bride.
- **Do show gratitude to your guests and your wedding vendors.** Sending out thank you's is a big one. It's important to send a nice handwritten message.

DON'T

- **Don't forget to be gracious.** Don't send save the dates to guests unless you are sure you will invite them to your wedding.
- **Don't have an A and B list.** This is very insulting to the guests on the 'B' list.
- **Don't be too old fashioned.** Do not use words like 'five o'clock in the afternoon'. Guests will know that you are not getting married at 5:00 a.m.
- **Don't give multiple RSVP options like e-mail, online RSVP and mailing cards.** All

the options are confusing and can be a lot of extra work for brides and grooms trying to finalize their head count.

- **Don't use mailing labels, including clear labels.** Remember the invitation will be the first impression of your wedding for your guests and you want it to be personal.
- **Don't be messy.** Organize all the invitations elements like maps and directions so your guests don't have all sorts of loose papers

floating around. Consider using a pocket style invitation to keep things neat.

- **Don't use abbreviations.** When addressing, spell out the word 'road' rather than 'Rd.'. Also spell out the word 'street' and the state. Abbreviations are a no-no.
- **Don't e-mail your thank you notes.** Your guests deserve a handwritten note of appreciation, not an e-mail, which can seem insincere.



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