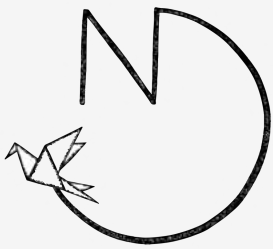


Nicola Dawson



10 STEPS
TO PHOTOGRAPH YOUR
FIRST WEDDING
LIKE A *pro*

hello



Back in 2017 my family photography business was a sideline and I had NO intentions to photograph a wedding. Then two colleagues asked me out of the blue if I fancied photographing their big day.

My immediate thought to myself was a resounding NO WAY. I had never understood why anyone would want the pressure of photographing a wedding and I couldn't get past what a huge responsibility it would be.

But, and thank goodness there is a but, I thought super long and hard about it and realised that they were presenting me with an opportunity that I may never have again.

There is a first time for everything right? So in a moment of bravery I agreed and subsequently threw myself into anything

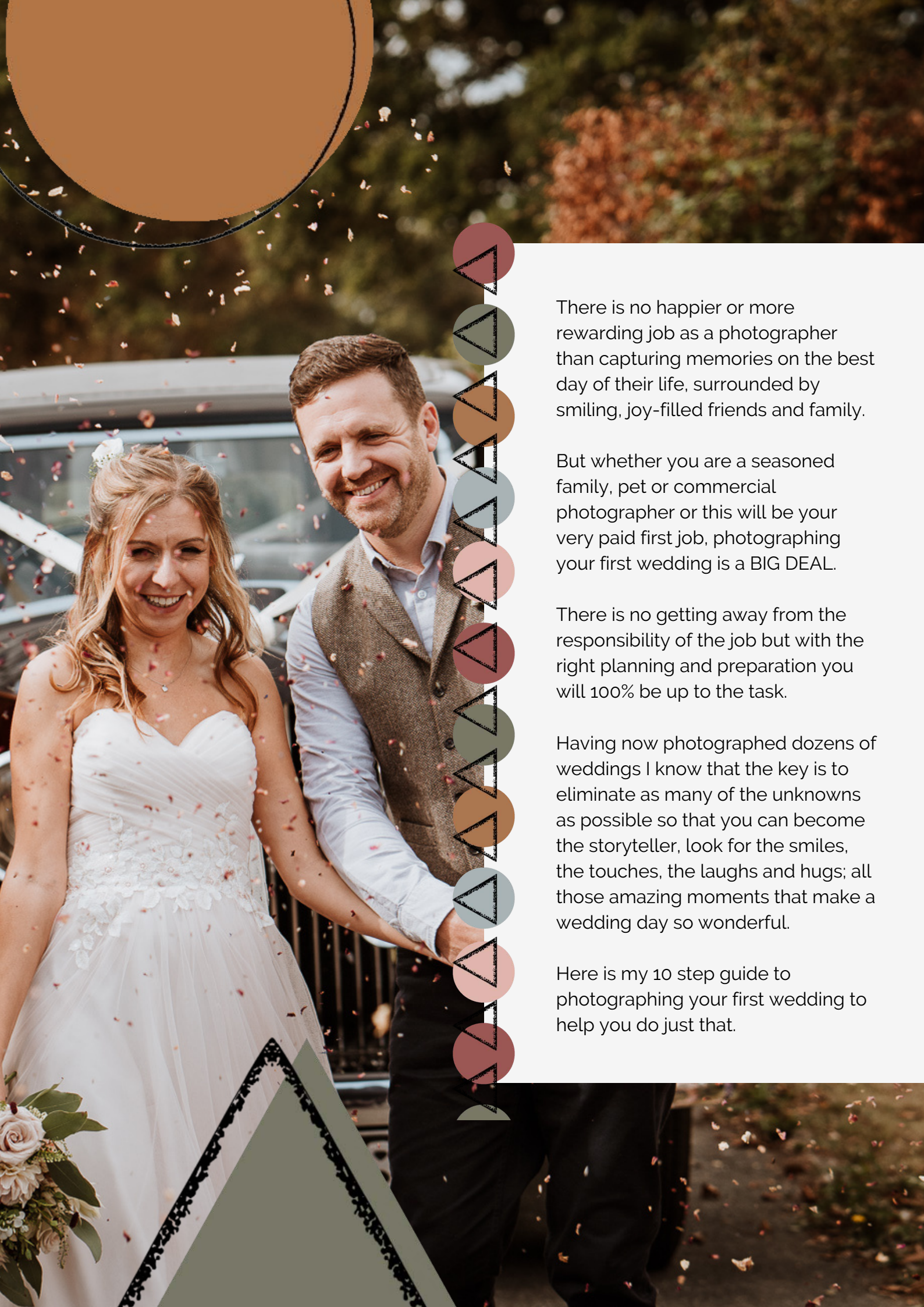
and everything wedding photography related. I was NOT going to mess it up!

I KNEW that I could take a decent photograph but it was the uncertainty of how I would react on the day under that pressure that was the unknown.

But do you know what? From the second I started shooting I was BUZZING and I loved EVERY second of it.

The rest, as they say, is history

Not only am I now a full time wedding photographer consistently booking my ideal clients, I am also passionate about helping other photographers realise their dream of escaping the unfulfilling day job, creating their own wedding photography business and achieving work life freedom in a career they love.



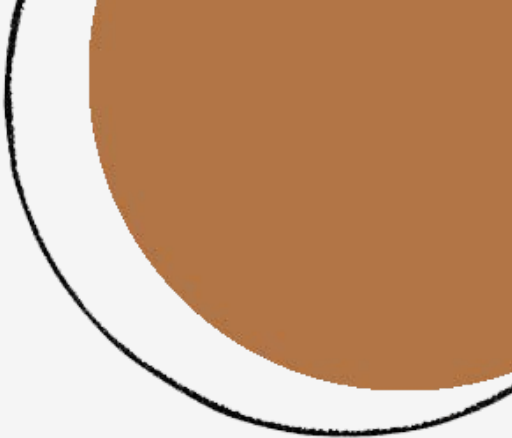
There is no happier or more rewarding job as a photographer than capturing memories on the best day of their life, surrounded by smiling, joy-filled friends and family.

But whether you are a seasoned family, pet or commercial photographer or this will be your very paid first job, photographing your first wedding is a BIG DEAL.

There is no getting away from the responsibility of the job but with the right planning and preparation you will 100% be up to the task.

Having now photographed dozens of weddings I know that the key is to eliminate as many of the unknowns as possible so that you can become the storyteller, look for the smiles, the touches, the laughs and hugs; all those amazing moments that make a wedding day so wonderful.

Here is my 10 step guide to photographing your first wedding to help you do just that.



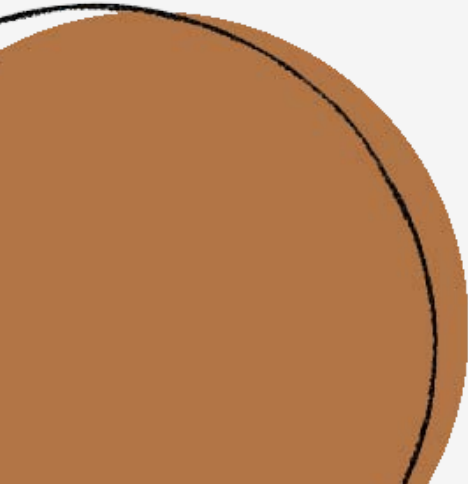
01 GET TO KNOW YOUR COUPLE

The key to getting the best wedding photographs is for the couple to like and trust you.

Meet face to face and spend time talking all about their day.

Ask questions to find out what they are **most** looking forward to about their wedding and who will be the most important people there. It will help you understand the 'vibe' of the day and make sure that expectations on both sides are clear.

If it is your first wedding, it is likely that you already know the couple. But make sure to treat them like a client; make them feel like they are getting a service from you, not a favour.



02 HAVE A CONTRACT

No matter what your relationship with the couple is, I would 100% recommend having a contract. It doesn't have to be a long, fancy document but it does need to cover a few vital points to protect you both.

Payment terms - set the expectation. Include the date that you want payment by to avoid any awkward conversations trying to get your money. I have a booking fee payable at the time of booking and balance payable 4 weeks before the wedding date.

What they are getting and when - how many hours of coverage, how many images, whether the images are edited, whether they will be in an online gallery or on a USB and how many weeks after the wedding will they have their images.

Whilst we are on the slightly less 'sexy' subjects within wedding photography, don't forget to have a basic level of insurance for liability and equipment damage.

Insurance companies often have a standard contract template you can use.



Image use - A photographer retains copyright of the images but the contract is to agree terms of use with the couple which is generally personal use for printing or social media and excludes sale, promotion or commercial use. Make sure you include that you can use the images for social media, website, commercial, competition etc.

Image content - Ask for creative control of the content of the images. Although they may provide you with a list of shots that you will endeavour to fulfil, it cannot be guaranteed and no individual shot shall be deemed more important than any other.

Postponement/cancellation clauses - what will happen to their deposit or booking fee? Will their balance still be due? Will it depend on how far in advance the event is postponed or cancelled? What if you cannot make the new date?



03 FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THE VENUE

Minimise the element of surprise on the day and pay a visit to the venue.

Have a good look around. You can't plan every shot completely as the light may differ on the day of the actual wedding but look for areas of shade in case of bright midday sun or sheltered spots in case of wind or rain.

Check out other photographers galleries taken at the same venue before you go so you can consider your positioning during the important bits.

Talk to the coordinators at the venue and tell them you haven't shot a wedding before. You'll be amazed what you can learn from them about the best spots used by other photographers.

04 EQUIPMENT

Two cameras is a must!

You can't photograph a wedding if your one and only camera decides to stop working or falls out of your bag when you arrive.

I shot my first wedding with a full frame Canon and I had my older crop sensor Canon in the bag. If you don't own two then consider hiring an extra body for the day. Make sure it is a model you are familiar with - remember, no surprises!

Shoot in RAW format - you will be able to recover a lot more information from an iffy RAW file than a camera compressed jpeg.

Lens choices - a good quality zoom lens or 2 prime lenses will give you a good focal length range. Just always remember to have a back up plan. You can't rely on one lens. My 'go to' lenses are a 35mm prime, an 85mm prime and I have a 24-70mm which I occasionally use for a wide angle or sits in my bag as a backup.

Flash/video light - depending on the venue and time of year of the wedding, consider your lighting when conditions get darker. Don't over complicate it but have a plan.

Batteries and memory cards - having spares means you have peace of mind and you can concentrate on the action rather than worrying about kit.

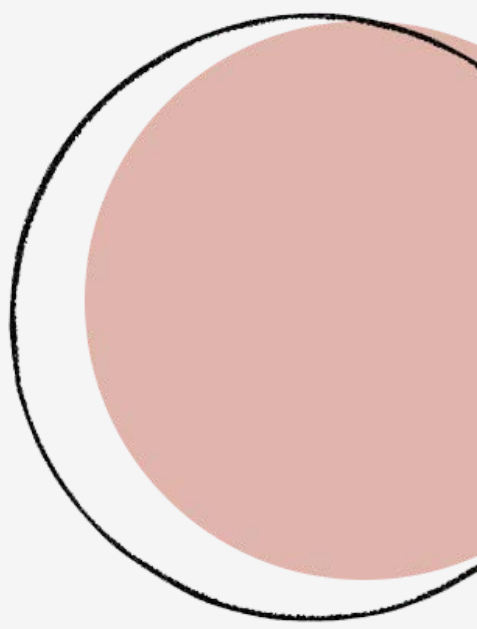



05 PRACTICE

Our brain learns from repetition and when we try something for the first time it connects two dots inside it and makes a little line, called a neural pathway. If we then repeat the same action the path gets more obvious and eventually becomes ingrained.

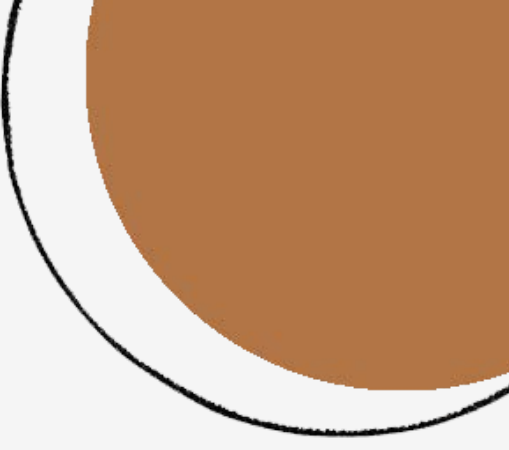
So practice!

Ask friends to model for you and recreate parts of a wedding; the entrance, the first kiss, walking back down the aisle, confetti. They don't have to be at the venue but become familiar with positioning yourself in the right place, adjusting your settings, walking backwards, how you talk to the couple.



Offer the couple an engagement shoot. You get to see how they interact together and they learn how you work and experience what it is like to be in front of your camera. Not only will it build their trust in you but you get more images for your portfolio and the opportunity to practice.





06 PORTRAITS AND POSES

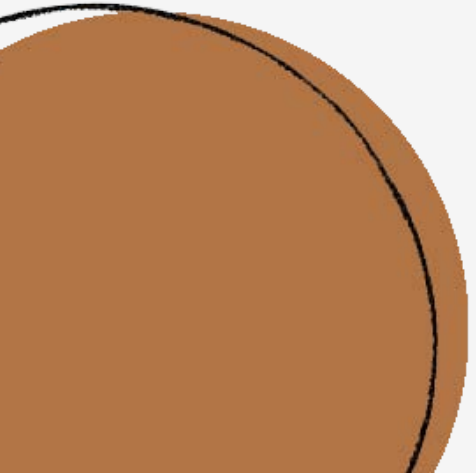
You don't need a huge repertoire of poses for a wedding.

The majority of the day will be reportage and when it comes to portraits most couples don't actually want to be away from the guests for an hour and a half whilst you take them through a dozen different poses in loads of different places around the grounds.

So pick 3 or 4 simple poses or prompts that you want to achieve, keep them simple and execute them well.

And be efficient with your time together.

Start wide angle and then swap to a longer focal length to achieve two different looks from the same prompt/pose.



my favourites



Walking hand in hand - You can get these shots on the way to one of your portrait locations. Ask one to walk one or two paces in front of the other and to look at one another or draw in close and wrap around one arm.

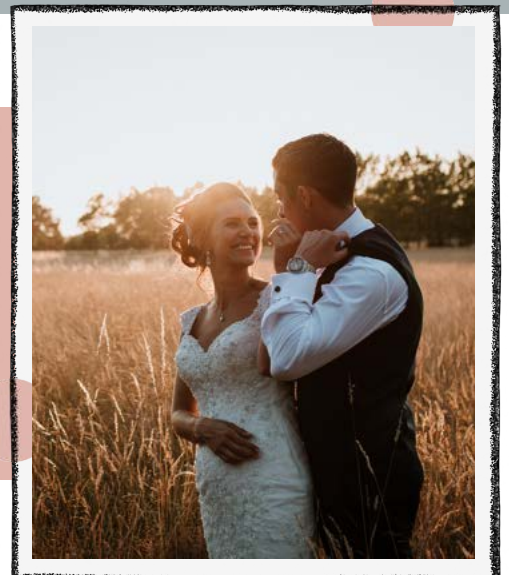
The Wrap - Stand one behind the other both facing you and out stretch their hands (Think 'I'm on top of the World' from The Titanic Film) Ask them to interlink their fingers and then when you say ask the person at the back to wrap their arms around the other. Tell them to really 'feel' the cuddle and you can get some really emotional expressions.



Face to Face - holding hands then move into a kiss. Move closer to be tummy to tummy. You can ask for a kiss, wrap around each other, touching foreheads, whisper something funny in an ear. All can be achieved from the same starting position.



Keep shooting - keep watching once they have done what you asked them to. The couple will relax or laugh together, wipe a hair from the others cheek, grab a quick kiss; they are all really lovely authentic moments to capture





07 HAVE A PLAN

Have a generic shot list - For your first wedding have with you a generic list of shots expected at a wedding in case your mind goes blank. Include details such as the rings, bouquet, dress, shoes, flowers, venue outside, ceremony room buttonholes, bride, bridesmaids, groom, groomsmen etc. In the event of a panic you can take a breath, have a quick peek and get yourself back on track.

Create a timeline - 6 weeks before every wedding I send a detailed questionnaire to my couples about their day; locations (including postcodes), times of arrival, methods of transport between locations to check the timings will work, names of the bridal party members, group shot list (advise them to keep it to less than 10 as they can be time consuming), and then the time of the wedding breakfast, cake cut and first dance.

I use this information to create a timeline and have it all on one document which as well as having saved on my phone, I also print out so that I have a hard copy. It can also come in handy to give to a member of the wedding party to help gather all the guests for the group shots for you.



08 BE COMFORTABLE



Comfortable shoes - You may never have worn the smart shoes that you thought would look best for 10 hours at a time so make sure you choose wisely. Dress appropriately - I tend to think that smart but practical is the way to go. Some will recommend looking like a wedding guest but a skirt and heels or three piece suit will probably not make for a comfortable days shooting. Make sure you are smart AND comfortable

Take supplies - Have a bottle of water and an energy bar or snack with you. Despite it being in my contract to be provided with a hot meal for weddings over 5 hours in length, sometimes things happen and you could find yourself without anything. Have something in reserve just in case.

09 TAKE THE PRESSURE OFF

Don't shoot wide open - my usual shooting style is with my aperture as wide as I can get away with and with a really shallow depth of field.

BUT for your first wedding, unless you are super comfortable shooting that way already, be sure to adjust your aperture a few stops down to minimise the risk of missing focus at that vital moment.

Don't feel that you have to shoot in manual the whole day. Our camera can adjust settings for the correct exposure much faster than we can so at important, fast flowing parts of the day change to aperture priority mode (or shutter priority for confetti for example) to really minimise the risk of missing THE shot.

BE READY
RATHER
THAN
REACTIVE



Take breaks - there is the temptation in your first weddings to feel like you have to be shooting the entire time. But this will quickly lead to burn out and also a gallery full of dull images which you will later cull anyway.

Take a few minutes here and there to stop and look at the bigger picture. There may be something going on that you are not seeing because you are too absorbed looking through the camera. Then think about what is coming next and position yourself in the best place for it.

Be ready rather than reactive.



10 GET YOUR MIND READY

Just as practicing physical things connects neural pathways in your brain which makes you better at it, so does thinking and saying things. It is in fact how we form beliefs, by hearing things over again. So start forming your own beliefs.

Write out positive affirmations like 'I've got this', 'I will do a great job' or make a pretty graphic.

Print it out and stick it on your fridge, your computer, your phone screensaver. Read it regularly and say it out loud and you will start to believe it.

Keep a journal as a way to get any doubts that creep into your thoughts out of your head and into a book and acknowledge closing the pages and putting those thoughts away and out of reach.

This is THE most important piece of the puzzle.



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DON'T underestimate the power of self belief and positivity in your ability to do the very best for your couple on their day.

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NICOLA DAWSON

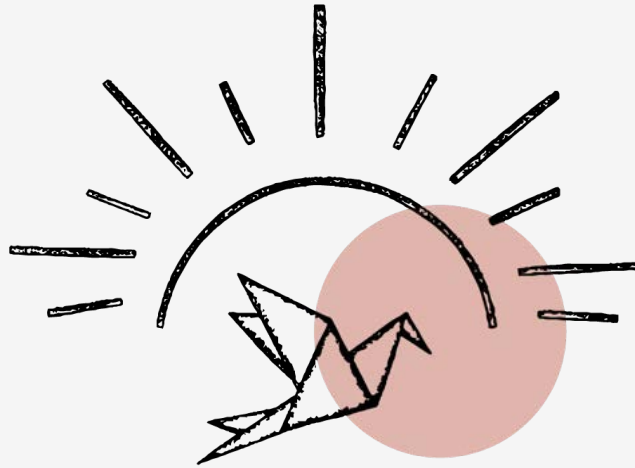


THAT'S IT

You now have all the tools you need to say YES to that first wedding and shoot it with confidence.

Use the checklist on the next page to mark when you feel each step is achieved and you are ready for the next.

You've got this.



Checklist

Tick

☐

Get to know your couple

☐

Have a contract and insurance

☐

Familiarise yourself with the venue

☐

Have an equipment back up plan

☐

Practice

Tick

☐

Portraits and Poses

☐

Have a plan and timeline

☐

Be comfortable

☐

Minimise the pressures

☐

Get your mind ready

I empower, support and teach new and aspiring wedding photographers to confidently start their businesses in the wedding industry and achieve creative fulfilment and work life freedom.

Come and connect with me.

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