

the
ultimate
bridal session guide



HOLLY MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY

intro

to this lengthy guide

Oooh hello future Mrs.!

The purpose of this guide is to answer any and all of your questions about your bridal session. From the very basics to what to do after your session, this guide talks about it ALL!

For that reason, it is super duper thorough, and a ton of information! Take it in small bits or study it all at once - totally up to you! I would encourage you to read it as you're planning for your session and revisit it a couple days before your session date.

OKAY! Let's dive in, shall we? :)





contents

04 history of bridals

a brief history of where bridal sessions originated, and how they made their way to modern day

11 session tips

including what to do about your dress getting dirty, what to expect, and how to not feel awkward!

05 the basics

the gist of what a bridal session is, what we'll be doing, and what you need to start prepping.

15 iphone pics

this goes out to whoever comes with you, snapping photos needs to be addressed before your session!

06 choosing locations

the location is totally up to you, so here are some ways to decide where to go! including some of my recs.

17 a bride's take

perspectives from two of my past HM brides on their experiences during their bridal sessions.

09 what to bring

just like on your wedding day, there's a long list of things you don't want to forget!

19 after your session

traditionally, here's what your photos can be used for.

the history of bridal sessions

The tradition of a bridal session originated all the way back in Europe, **before** photography was even invented!

Bridal portraits originally were oil paintings commissioned by **royalty**, similar to family portraits that were hung on the walls of castles. They were commissioned to celebrate the big occasion of getting married!

Pre World War II, photography existed primarily **in a studio**, so having a photographer on your wedding day was out of the question. Bridal portraits were taken in a studio before the wedding day, again to commemorate the big occasion!

You've most likely seen a black and white portrait of your grandma in her wedding dress with a bouquet. Guess what - that was from **her** bridal session!

And most recently, debutantes in the South had bridal sessions as a rite of passage and a family keepsake. Often they would be used for newspaper announcements! Then the portraits

would be printed out and **displayed** on an easel next to the guest book at the reception (which a lot of brides do to this day!). Her parents would then have the portrait hung in their house.

Modern day, bridal portraits are used in a very similar way. A lot of our brides have two or three portraits printed and displayed during the reception. (Personally I think it's a great way to let guests **marvel** at your beautiful dress right after the ceremony while you're away taking family formals!!)

These traditions are both meaningful and practical (in the gift giving sense). But it's super important to consider the session itself - not just the resulting photos - being meaningful and practical too!





the basics

of bridal sessions

Okay **what** does a bridal session even entail?? I'll go deeper on each of these things but here's the lowdown:

You can probably gather after learning the history, a bridal session takes place before the wedding day (usually about a month before).

You can bring friends or family along (I encourage it!)

It's a practice sesh' - in lots of ways! You'll be in your full wedding day bridal get up: **dress, shoes, hair and makeup, bouquet, veil, and even jewelry.**

Your florist should be able to craft a 'test' bouquet just for your bridal session. Most hair and makeup teams offer a trial run, which you should absolutely use for your session so you see everything together!

You can try out your wedding shoes - wear them in and make sure they're comfy! Test out jewelry and see what looks best (you can even bring a few along and try them all during your session). We can see just how **~flowy~** your veil is!! You can make sure you're still in love with your bouquet and see exactly how to hold it. Most importantly is to see how your hairstyle and make up look on camera and IRL!

Choosing your location

First off - **you can have your bridal session wherever the heck you want!** There are nooo rules!

Most brides opt to have their session at their wedding venue for a couple of reasons. It's likely some portrait time was included for free when you booked. If you print your photos to display at the reception, they will match perfectly. They also flow seamlessly in your gallery and, if you order one, your album.

That said, I always ask if there's a venue that a bride particularly loves - **not her actual wedding venue!** Usually you tour 3-5 venues before finding your dream one! Maybe your runner up venue is still one of your favorite places. So let's have your session there!

The only con to having your session at another venue is most of them charge a fee. But - your venue might also charge you, in which case it's a toss up! **Most of my brides are 50/50**, half have their session at their venue and half book portrait time at another venue.

I would encourage you to think outside the box as well! If there's a place like a park, venue, art installation, etc. that's meaningful to you and you think would be an awesome backdrop, or that you feel fits your personality, let's go there! Don't feel tied down to a wedding venue just because that's what most brides do.

Wherever you choose, I really recommend finding a place that has both **indoor and outdoor portrait locations**. Or very least an indoor space for you to get ready, touch up, and cool down in!

ideas

Here are some of my favorite ideas for bridal session locations! These are a mix of places I have shot at and places I dream of shooting at! :) And some general ideas to get you thinking.

WEDDING VENUES

- Laguna Gloria (hands down the most popular bridal session location!)
- Woodbine Mansion
- Barr Mansion
- One Eleven East
- Hotel Ella
- Texas Federation Of Women's Club Mansion
- The Addison Grove
- The Ivory Oak
- Le San Michele
- Villa del Lago
- Commodore Perry Estate

NON WEDDING VENUES

- South Congress Hotel
- San Jose Hotel
- Blanton Museum (This is a dream shoot spot for me!)
- Sekrit Theater

PARKS

- Mayfield Park
- Ladybird Wildflower Center
- McKinney Falls
- Mueller Lake Park
- Butler Park / Town Lake
- Umlauf Sculpture Garden

MORE GENRAL

- Downtown - if this is your vibe (colorful, bold, modern) this would be SO COOL
- Winery - there are so many surrounding Austin!
- Austin Public Library - in or around! This is a cool modern place
- Peerspace / Airbnb rental

[Click here to get a click-able page of this list!](#)

Scheduling your bridal session

The first thing is to figure out your **alterations**, and when your dress will be in its final form! Even if you have your final fitting way before your wedding date, I usually recommend scheduling your bridals **about a month before your wedding**. It's the perfect opportunity for a practice run, so you want it to be as close to the real day as possible! That said, if you want to time it right with the bluebonnets blooming, that's certainly not a bad idea :)

Coordinating with all your vendors is the next step. There are a lot of different schedules at play! Once you've picked your location, reach out to the venue to see when they schedule sessions. Most likely, they only allow sessions during the week. Sometimes your full service planner can help coordinate with them, see if they can! Next I would reach out to your hair and make-up team. You would be surprised how busy they can get, especially if they don't just do weddings!

We want to shoot is 2 hours before sunset or after sunrise. Venues can sometimes be picky about when they let you on the grounds. If they only give you 9-5, during the summer that means the hottest, brightest hours of the day! If you ask nicely, they can usually make it work to get us in during that ideal light!

Once you've cross-referenced your venue and your hair and make up artists, reach out to me (hi!) and your florist.

At the time I'm writing this, our **weekday** flexibility throughout the year is super open. I always feel that we're the most open when it comes to availability among your vendors!

Your florist will just need to know ahead of time to be able to order your flowers needed. Usually florists can create a smaller version of your wedding day bouquet, so it's less expensive. Side note: you **do not** have to get a bouquet from your florist! I've had a few brides create their own bouquets, with both real and silk flowers.

things to bring

Pack **EVERYTHING**! It really is a practice run so wear everything that you would on your wedding day. **Your veil, your jewelry, shoes, any accessories** (jean jackets included)! You can bring different jewelry or extra accessories that you want just for your bridal session, just make sure to pack them!

Friends + family can also make you feel more comfortable...and give you somewhere to look when you need to **laugh**! This really makes your session super fun and you get to be fawned over! They are also great helpers to fluff your train out, make sure your veil is perfect, and hype you up like you deserve!

Bring your **most positive, hype-up, ego-boosting** friend or (two)! Someone who knows you well, can make you laugh, and will fix all your little baby hairs without a thought.

If you can trust that your mom won't drive you crazy (I love moms, but I get it), bridal sessions can be a really sweet, meaningful time together. Really anyone is welcome! Sisters, bridesmaids, aunts, grandmas, bffs, and so on! I had a bride once bring her HMU friend and it was like she **ACTUALLY** had a style team I felt like we were on ANTM!

Bring extras! One time a bride brought champagne and it was **hands down** the most fun I've had at a bridal session! (Plus it calmed some nerves - win win!)

If you decide on a non-venue location, consider **renting** a cool chair or couch to lounge on!

This is also a great opportunity to feature important **details** that you'll have on your wedding day.

For example if there's a special champagne glass, maybe it's been handed down, bring that and we can get you sippin' on it! Or a family heirloom piece of jewelry you **won't** wear on your wedding day, we can get a beautiful photo of you wearing the necklace, etc



what

to expect during your session

Bridals usually don't last **more than an hour**. Depending on your location and how you're feeling, it could be even less! Like all portrait time, I try to be as efficient as possible to keep your energy up and keep your photos happy and genuine!

If you've already had your engagement session, you know we like to have FUN and make you and your fiancé do some silly, random and cute things. Your bridal session is going to be a little different - **it's just you!** And we won't be moving around as much. Often, especially if your dress has a fussy train (usually the most beautiful ones are fussy) I'll put you in perfect light and keep your feet planted for a while!

I'll bring the tunes! This is a new thing I've been doing is bringing a little speaker and playing some music (now we're **really** modeling, amirite??) To lighten the mood, to give you something to focus on, and to make twirling **THAT** much more fun!

11

tips & tricks for your session

All of my best reminders and advice to get the most out of your session, to not over-fret, and how to shift your mindset a little!

how dirty

will your dress get?

I'll tell you the same thing on your wedding day - your beeeautiful dress is meant to be worn!! **Dirt is everywhere**, and your dress will get dirty underneath (not on top) during portraits. It's inevitable! I promise you it will get suuuper dirty after you've been breakin it down on the dance floor all night on your wedding day!

That doesn't mean that I won't help you do **everything** we can to keep it clean! While walking between spots, we'll be sure to pick it up and not let it drag against the ground. We will need to fluff it and set it on the ground though. And that means some sticks might get in it, or some dirt might smudge on the bottom. Again, this is just **inevitable**!

If your dress is your baby and you just **cannot** have it get dirty at all, you can bring a white shower curtain liner to put down underneath you. I really don't recommend this, because we will be **so** limited with the fun stuff we can do (no twirling, sad face) Plus, once we tuck it all the way under in order to get that train shot...your dress is touching the ground!

I know you want to keep your dress pristine, but to wear it means it will get dirt on it. Trust me that the "dirty" will only exist on the bottom, underneath, where it **won't be seen**!

AFTER YOUR SESSION:

After our session, hang up your dress and carefully inspect it from top to especially the bottom. Remove any sticks, mulch, leaves, etc. and spot clean if you need to. The sooner you do this, the sooner you can get it professionally cleaned if you feel the need.

If your dress needs to be steamed, be sure to do this before the week of your wedding or at least 2 days before. When you steam it, it becomes slightly damp and will attract dirt and dust. So be sure to tuck it back up in its bag immediately after! This is why I wouldn't recommend steaming it in your getting ready room :)

don't forget

these few random things

Your hair and makeup:

If your HMU team did not include a trial when you booked, I highly highly recommend tacking it on. You can always go somewhere like Drybar to get professionally done up, but it's so valuable to get to try out your actual look with your actual HMUA! The last thing you want is to not love your make up day of and not have time to have them fix it! You also want to see how it will look in photos, and if you want to change anything based on that.

Avoid red marks:

If your dress is backless - take off your bra while you get your hair and make up done. Sounds weird, but we want to avoid the red marks on your back that we all get!

Getchu a mani + pedi:

Absolutely make sure your nails are done! We'll get lots of ring shots, I'll have you play with your hair and your dress and your jewelry ! So make sure they look FRESH!

Avoid spray tans:

As a fair lady myself, trust me I understand the temptation. But it's so easy for you to look orange. So just say no to spray tans :)

Pack snacks and water

It can really take a lot out of you to be smiling, laughing, and twirling! So be sure to pack a water bottle, especially if it'll be hot out! And always pack snacks because they are essential.



how to avoid feeling awkward

Regardless how comfy or uncomfy you feel in front of the camera, bridals can be a little intense and **draining**!

My biggest piece of advice to you is try to have ~fun~ during your whole session!

I'm going to ask you to do some silly things. We'll be twirling, laughing, leaning funny ways, walking, running?? (maybe, tbd), playing with your dress, etc.

If it helps to think of yourself as a little kid playing dress up - **DO IT!**

Okay actually the biggest piece of advice is come ready to **laugh**. Now I don't mean come expecting me to be hilarious (gotta keep the bar low, I'm not a comedian)

But the more you can **exhale**, laugh (even if it's fake!) out your nerves, the more **natural** you'll appear and eventually you'll start feeling natural too!

Let's talk iphone pics...

Your sweet mama or your bff will feel inclined to capture this wonderful session and all of your beeeauty, and will want to **snap photos on their phones**.

We are all different, but if it were me, I would say pleeease keep your phones away! For one, it means your bridal self will stay a **secret** until the big day. You don't want to risk someone accidentally seeing the photo because who can trust moms with their phones these days...!

More importantly, their pic is going to look much different than the photos I take. I'll be posing you to look most flattered from the angle I'm shooting - so it's possible you will look unflattered from the vantage point your friend has off to the side. Here's something one of my past brides Ashley said:

"My mom would take photos of me in my dress but the angles she was taking photos at were **uhhh** not that flattering and the lighting was always off, so I was not super confident in my dress leading up to my bridal session or wedding day!"

Your bridal session has many purposes, but the most important one to me is that it **boosts your confidence like CRAZY!** If your mom goes and shows you the iphone photo she took from the side of you and you're like - "wait, that's what I look like??" It would break my heart for that little iphone photo to make you **insecure** in any way.

Unless you are sure that this wouldn't happen if you saw a phone photo of yourself, I recommend talking to whoever you're brining along and express how important it is that they **stay present** with you, and refrain from taking photos. Know that they just want to capture how gorgeous of a bride you are, but let them know why it's important to you!

16

post-session effects and advice

a few experiences straight from my HM brides, advice on what to do with your photos, and some traditions you can follow

a bride's perspective

I interviewed two of my brides after their bridal session to get their take on what the experience is like and how they felt afterwards. Here's Ashley's experience in her own words!

What was your favorite thing about having a bridal session?

"I think the photos I got out of it! They are soooo special to me. You take so many photos the day of the wedding with your bridesmaids, parents, husband and friends that it's really hard to find a second to just take photos of yourself and you don't want to disappear for an hour to take photos by yourself.

You spend so much on a dress for one day that you should get a million photos of yourself in and be able to look back at them for years after and just remember everything about that day."

What was an unexpected result that came from having a bridal session?

"Confidence! I felt like I planned everything out for the wedding to a tee but I was not super comfortable in my dress. I had the constant thought that maybe I didn't pick the right dress for me. I thought the

champagne underlay was too dark and the neckline was too deep for a Catholic wedding... at least those were the thoughts that kept me up at night. It wasn't was the cake the right flavor or had I picked the right cream color for tablecloths, it was me in my dress that I had picked out 8 months ago.

"When I saw the photos that Holly sent me back I was soooooo relieved and EXCITED! I looked at the photos and I felt beautiful and all of those thoughts that kept me up at night drifted away!

I was excited to get into my dress the morning of my wedding and I never wanted to get out! I was able to walk down the aisle to my best friend feeling confident and beautiful and I knew he would absolutely love me in it. Like seriously I was squealing with delight when I saw the photos! I wanted to run and show Braden but he couldn't see me in my dress before the wedding... it was such a hard 2 weeks of not showing him! We also loved looking at them on our honeymoon since I could finally show them to him.

Any last thoughts?

"I'd highly recommend bringing your Mom with you or someone who loves you like your Mom does. It was such a special experience for my Mom and I and she knew exactly what I wasn't comfortable with my body and she wasn't afraid to tell me to stand up straight and put my shoulders back (I never had good posture, thanks Mom)"

cont'd

bride's perspective

Here's McKenzie's experience:

What was your favorite part of your session?

"Honestly, HOLLY was my most favorite part about the session. She was so great throughout the entire session. Having solo pictures taken is awkward but she made me feel so at ease and beautiful that I could have done a full day session. She was so sweet and motivating the whole time. I walked away feeling extra confident because of her and the photos she captured are PERFECT."

Going back to the day of your bridal session, what was going through your mind?"

"I was SOOO nervous yet excited! There were many thoughts running through my head all day. My hair and makeup was getting done pretty early in the day so sitting still most of the day was not ideal for my nerves. I hadn't tried my dress on in a month leading up to my bridals. Needless to say I was a bit worried it wouldn't fit as well as I remembered."

"I was nervous that my hand made faux bouquet would look like just that. I made it the night before because I had forgot that

I needed something to hold for the photos. It actually doesn't look too bad in my photos which was such a relief."

What was an unexpected result that came from having a bridal session?

"The confidence boost that I felt when I saw my pictures for the first time. From the moment I found my dress, I kept telling myself that I needed to get serious about working out so I would feel 100% confident on the day of the wedding. Welllll, fast forward to the bridal session which was a month before the wedding and I still hadn't been serious about my workout routine. The whole day leading up to the session, I was so worried that I wasn't going to look how I've always envisioned myself looking on my wedding day."

"When I saw the photos, all of these thoughts left my mind and I was no longer worried about how I'd look in my dress. I wanted to show Steven all of the photos immediately because I felt so beautiful and wanted to see his reaction. I LOVE every single picture and I've looked at them once sometimes twice a day since I received them."

Anything last thing you'd like to add?

"I recommend not scheduling more than a month away from your wedding either because I was about to pop from not being able to show Steven. Oh, and don't forget about the bouquet :)"

post-session

how to use your photos

Traditionally, smaller prints (**5x7 or 8x10**) are framed and given to your parents (or just your dad) and your groom as a gift on the wedding day. A larger print (**16x20 or larger!**) is framed and displayed usually on an easel at the cocktail hour and reception. This is always a really beautiful vignette for guests to admire! This larger print is traditionally given to the mother of the bride, but you can also gift her a smaller print!

■ WHERE TO ORDER PRINTS

If you order them through me, they come from a professional lab. The only other place I would recommend is Mpix photo lab. You can go to Costco but your beautiful bridal self really deserves the highest quality print, IMHO :)

■ FAVORITE FRAMES

My all time favorite frames are CB2 gallery frames. They are simple and modern and will last forever! You could check out Hobby Lobby and getchu that 40% off, or even try to thrift a cool ornate one!

■ INTO YOUR ALBUM

If you're ordering an album, we'll make sure to put your bridals in with the getting ready photos. If you choose to have your session at your wedding venue, they will flow seamlessly!

A FEW TIPS:

- Before your ceremony, be sure **flip** the photos displayed on your wedding day around so you only see the back of the frame. No sneak peeks!!
- If you're gifting these on your wedding day, you'll want to wrap it nice and pretty and present it to your groom and parents.
- P.S. these are all just traditions, but you are in no way obligated to do this with your bridals!! :) Just a reminder, friend!



that's all!

you finished this crazy long guide!

I am SO EXCITED about your bridal session, it is truly one of my favorite things in the world and that time together is so valuable!!

Chances are, you most likely are not used to wearing gowns (or maybe you are, in which case you are pretty close to being a princess so you are goals). But I promise all of your worries and questions will fade away after we practice walking, twirling, your signature dance moves, and sitting in your dress!

Hopefully this answered any and all your questions about your bridal session! If there's anything you're still unsure about, please reach out to me!!

xoxo,
Holly

HOLLY MARIE