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Your Wedding Vows

You've probably checked out our Sample Wedding Ceremonies and noticed that the vows are deliberately "simple, positive, and easy to repeat". We're convinced that the stress of speaking *words* must not rob you of the awesome, irreplaceable *emotions* that occur in the moment of your vows. So we recommend simple vows. There have been and will be many opportunities for you to express your love, make promises, exchange sentiments, even joke freely, but your vows are an once-in-a-lifetime experience. We want you to be free to concentrate on the indescribable awe of giving yourselves to one another.

Lovers, poets, philosophers – you! – may be passionate about "saying it just right". Yes, the words of your vows are that important. We just don't want to risk dampening the magic of this moment by choreographing it for the guests or video.

We hope you'll face one another, hold hands, and look into one another's eyes as you exchange vows. We hope you'll allow yourselves to get "all choked up", and even to mumble if words can't come out. Your partner will know what you mean. And we hope you'll allow yourselves to be caught up in a cloud as though everyone else fades from sight at this moment – because the only one who needs to hear you is your partner, and because often what your partner most aches to hear is the whisper that comes through your tears, laughter, asides, and intimate spontaneity rather than pre-written vows.

It's important that you understand the difference between the legal and personal side of wedding ceremonies too. All that is required (legally, presupposing a valid license) is that you both have the capacity and opportunity to comprehend, and agree to, what is occurring – that you are freely and fully changing the legal status of both parties for life (presupposing no later legal alterations to your relationship). That's a long-winded way of saying that it isn't your vows that legalize your marriage – it's the "I do" part that changes you from 'single' to 'married'.

But legalities aren't much of a celebration. You've planned a *wedding*! So let's focus on the personal side of your ceremony – where you are free to "do it your way".

Vows are a wonderful way to personalize what it means to be married. And your faithfulness to these brings passion and permanence to your marriage.

The word "vow" means "solemn pledge". What *do* you want to promise one another – in front of everyone? At your wedding? For a lifetime? Remember, you'll have private



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moments later on your wedding night, as well as the next morning, for intimate words, and you will have similar, less solemn, moments when you'll laugh and tease.

So you can choose vows that are simple or monumental, or make them traditional or use them to tell your story. Just be sure you are both in agreement about their design.

Where to start?

First, consider the traditional "to have and to hold from this day forward; for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, until death do us part." We'd rather you not use these words because we prefer to be positive – we *know* your love will rise to every occasion! That life can occasionally be difficult doesn't need to be mentioned. On the other hand, some brides have looked forward to speaking and hearing these traditional words – so we will include this vow if you request it.

How does the groom feel about his wedding vow?

The groom aims to be trustworthy in all things: worthy of his bride's continuing respect and admiration. Beyond that, most men haven't thought much about their actual wedding (thinking instead about their plans for marriage). When men attend a friend's wedding, few remember the words so much as the result. When men attempt to pledge their love, they often try to say what they think their partner wants to hear – not because they don't mean what they say, but because they don't find it easy to say what they mean. Just as men seldom spend a long time in the Hallmark aisle, searching patiently for the perfect card, they may not be enthralled by a search for the perfect vow.

"Simple, positive, and easy to repeat" vows are often most appropriate for grooms – so long as they are treasured by the bride. These are the vows most requested of us:

I, _____, in the presence of these witnesses, take you, _____, to be my wife, and solemnly pledge to you my loyalty and love, so long as we live.

I, _____, in the presence of these witnesses, take you, _____, to be my husband, and solemnly pledge to you my loyalty and love, so long as we live.

How does the bride feel about her wedding vow?

Whereas the thought process of men is often outcome-based ("Isn't it enough for me to say that I want to spend my whole life with you? Let's get married!"), women may



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be wired differently. The bride, especially when it comes to her wedding, may want to spend a bit more time in the Hallmark aisle. She may think that it will make her fiancé happy, and will certainly make her happier, if they consider and re-consider and then settle on the perfect vow.

The bride often wants to be lost in this magnificent, meaningful life-change called her engagement and wedding. It may feel to her like she is opening the winter windows of her soul to new fragrances of Spring. Her world looks, sounds, and is different than it's ever been. She may cry joyfully over vows that embrace her and her partner's past, present, and future – that open up and set free ideals upon which their most intimate relationship of life will ride forever. She may want to lose control of her thoughts and emotions long enough to feel the simple WOW of it all.

She may also believe that working together to find the perfect vow is, in fact, a part of that vow – that searching together brings her and her fiancé closer and sets the stage for how future verbal intimacies of their marriage will prosper. She may have girlfriends asking about, or describing, marital commitment. Talking with them about her vows is a sweet, sensitive, vivid celebration of her future.

What about writing our own vows?

Writing your own personal vows presents a few risks that must be overcome:

1. Avoid the temptation to memorize your vows. It's terribly stressful and you don't want to chance drawing a momentary blank during the ceremony.
2. Avoid looking away from your partner; looking down to read from a paper.
3. Avoid vows of significantly different lengths – one short and the other long.
4. Avoid vows of significantly different styles – one serious and the other comical.
5. Avoid "inside jokes" that will puzzle your guests.
6. Avoid "otherness" – trying to sound like someone other than who you really are. Your vows don't have to sound like vows; they should sound like you.
7. Avoid being unclear or unbelievable. Promise plainly. Fulfill realistically.
8. Avoid surprising one another. You can write your vows together or keep them hidden until the last minute, but discuss in advance the basic framework of your vows. It's a good idea to make sure that your vows will be similar in nature. Pick a pre-written sample as a good place to start from. Decide on a word-count minimum and maximum. Give yourselves peace of mind about what to expect. And talk about what promises mean to you: promises to respect, admire, appreciate, support, protect, nurture, understand. How do you think these will translate into action? What does your partner expect these to mean? How might these promises play out "in good times and bad"?



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9. Avoid revealing secrets and potential embarrassments.
10. Avoid phrases people associate with particular television shows, movies, magazines, or songs. No matter how much these mean to you, they sound tacky when inserted into your vows. And, often, they were written about tragic love – good gone bad. They bring to mind failure.
11. Avoid worrying about whether your vows are sufficiently romantic, profound, funny, articulate or cute. Don't write competitively. We'll help if you ask.
12. Avoid putting "New Year Resolutions" into your vows, no matter how much you intend to strive to improve for the sake of your partner. You know how New Year Resolutions are usually perceived.

Vow writing may turn out to be the hardest part of your wedding planning process. Maybe the biggest risk (particularly for grooms) is that the vow won't be written until the last minute or, worse, will be delivered extemporaneously. No one means for this to happen. In fact, it's often the admirable desire to write excellently that causes such procrastination. But the result is disappointing. Your wedding and marriage demand thoughtful commitment and meaningful expression. Nevertheless, keep in mind, it's not the uniqueness of your vows that will make your ceremony beautiful. It's your realistic acceptance and care of one another.

Many couples start with an intention of writing their own vows but find it too difficult. We'll gladly recommend successful helps that won't pressure you to perform perfectly.

Finally, even when you prepare self-written vows we recommend adding a short "I give you me, and I take you as mine..." standard vow alongside your more personal promises. We find that this additional moment of holding hands and looking into one another's eyes is too precious to miss. We'll explain why if you ask.

Incidentally, this self-written vow was really once used:

(Bride's name), you have given me the gift of ennoblement — of me becoming myself. Your love, friendship, caring, and communication have made me whole. I thank you for that. But I love you for who you are. And together I want us to discover the limitless depths of what it means to be safe, secure, needed, wanted, cared for, appreciated, beautiful, loving, sexy, listened to and responded to, thought of and fantasized over, soulmated as best friends and companions, important, worthy, and in a word, throughout our life — LOVED.

I, *(Groom's name)*, in the presence of God and these witnesses, take you, *(Bride's name)*, to be my wedded wife, and solemnly pledge to you my loyalty and love, so long as we both shall live.



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The big picture

Personal vows can be chosen and modified without being entirely self-written. We'll illustrate some sample vows. The first few encase marital vows within a larger portion of the ceremony:

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Look at one another and remember this moment in time. Before this moment you have been many things to one another – acquaintance, friend, companion, lover, teammate and even teacher, for you have learned much from one another in these last few years. Now you will say a few words that take you across the threshold of life, and things will never quite be the same between you two. For after these vows, you will say to the world, this – is my husband, this – is my wife.

Do you (*Saying Groom's name / Saying Bride's name*), accept this (*woman / man*), (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), as your (*wife / husband*) – joining with (*her / him*) in matrimony – offering your friendship and loving care – honoring (*her / his*) growth and freedom as well as your own – cherishing and respecting (*her / him*), loving and embracing (*her / him*) in times of adversity and times of joy? If so, answer now, “I do.” [*each responds when asked*]

Please repeat after me:

With this ring I thee wed. Take it as a sign of my everlasting and unconditional love, with all that I am and all that I have, from this day forward as your (*husband / wife*).

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(*Saying Groom's name*) and (*Saying Bride's name*), please take a good look at your partner's hands, so you may see the gift that they are to you.

These are the hands of your best friend, young and strong and vibrant with love, that are holding yours on your wedding day.

These are the hands that will work alongside yours, as together you build your future, as you laugh and cry, as you share your innermost secrets and dreams.

These are the hands that when wrinkled and aged will still be reaching for yours.

May they always be held by one another.

Soon, (*Saying Groom's name*) and (*Saying Bride's name*), I will ask you to speak the vows which will bind you together as husband and wife. The symbolic vows that you are about to make are a way of saying to one another, ‘You know all those things we've promised and hoped and dreamed – well, I meant it all, every word.’ Look at one another and remember this moment in time.

Before this moment you have been many things to one another – acquaintance, friend, companion, lover, and confidant. Now you will say a few words that take you



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across a threshold of life, and things will never quite be the same between you. For after these vows, you will say to the world, this is my husband, this is my wife.

May we have the rings?

(Saying Groom's name / Saying Bride's name), do you take *(Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name)* to be your *(wife / husband)*? *[each responds when asked, 'I do'.]*

Repeat after me *(each speaking in turn to the other)*:

With all that I am, with all that I will become, with this ring, I marry you. I accept unconditionally the way we have been, the way we are, and the way we will likely be. May we live together in unwavering love and good health. Amen.

You have completed your vows to each other. Now please join together in these commitments to your marriage. Please repeat, aloud together, after me:

Life is not meant to be lived alone. I am yours as you are mine.

May we approach our life together with curiosity and joy.

May our love be stronger than our anger.

May we look for the best in each other rather than the worst.

May we confide in each other and ask for help when we need it.

May we give each other the same courtesies and kindnesses we bestow on our friends.

(Saying Groom's name) and *(Saying Bride's name)*, now you will feel no rain, for each of you will be shelter to the other.

Now you will feel no cold, for each of you will be warmth to the other.

Now there is no more loneliness, for each of you will be companion to the other. Your strengths will be twice as great and your hardships only half as hard.

There are times in life when we tend to focus on things we have not yet accomplished, there will also be times of great loss. Yet as you look at your wedding band, it will softly speak of the great gift that you have been given and all that you have in one another. It will also be a reminder in the times of great joy that you have someone to share your happiness with.

Never again will you walk alone.

In the presence of your family and friends who have joined you to share this moment of joy in your lives, you have declared your deep love and affection for each other. You have stated your wish to live together, always open to a deeper, richer friendship and partnership. You have formed your own union, based on respect and honor. Therefore, it is my joyful responsibility to officially acknowledge your union as "Husband and Wife".

You may now seal your marriage with a kiss. *[smooch]*

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And now I ask you, in the presence of God and this assembly: (*Saying Groom's name / Saying Bride's name*), do you take (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*) to be your (*wife / husband*), in joy and in sorrow, to love, to respect, and to cherish (*her / him*) for as long as you both shall live?"

(*Saying Groom's name*) and (*Saying Bride's name*), it is now the moment to speak the words and exchange the rings that make you husband and wife.

(*Saying Groom's name / Saying Bride's name*), I take you to be my (*wife / husband*), my friend, my love, and my lifelong companion: to share my life with yours; to build our dreams together, while allowing you to grow with your dreams; to support you through times of trouble, and rejoice with you in times of happiness; to treat you with respect, love, and loyalty through all the trials and triumphs of our lives together; and to give you all the love I can give my whole life long. This commitment is made in love, kept in faith, lived in hope, and eternally made new.

I, (*Saying Groom's name / Saying Bride's name*), take you, (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), to be my lawfully wedded (*wife / husband*), – to have and to hold from this day on.

I promise to love you every moment of forever.

I promise to love you for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.

I promise to be honest, kind, patient, and forgiving with you.

I promise to comfort you when the drama in your life runs over rapids.

I promise to trust in you, laugh with you and share your tears.

Finally, I promise to respect you, encourage you, and cherish you from this day forward until death do us part.

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Sample Vows

The vows printed here have been used, in one form or another, in ceremonies we've performed. Again, we encourage short vows, but couples may request any type of vow imaginable. We're ready to advise, for the purpose of the best possible ceremony, but not critique. We're ready to assist, because there are creative ways to accomplish what you intend. As you consider the vows listed here and the thousands you may find reported in books, magazines and on the Internet, we hope you will "cut and paste" until your promises uniquely and positively express the two of you.

32. I, (*Saying Groom's name / Saying Bride's name*), in the presence these witnesses, take you, (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), to be my wedded (*wife / husband*), and solemnly pledge to you my loyalty and love, so long as we both shall live.



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2. Today, I take you, (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), as my (*wife / husband*). I offer my life to you as your (*husband / wife*). I love you, and I want to spend all my life with you.

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3. (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), I take you to be my wedded (*wife / husband*), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, so long as we both shall live. With my whole heart and with my complete devotion, I pledge my love to you.

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4. (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), I take you to be my (*wife / husband*), in joy and in sorrow, to love, to respect, and to cherish for as long as we both shall live.

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5. I, (*Saying Groom's name / Saying Bride's name*), take you, (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), to be my (*wife / husband*). I offer you my strength and my support. I pledge my loyalty and faith. I offer my hope. I will trust, respect and encourage you. I give you my love in all the circumstances of life, as long as we both shall live.

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6. (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), I love you for many reasons. I love your spontaneity. I love the dreams you have. I share many of your interests. I love your laugh. I love — you!

Today, as I become your (*husband / wife*), I promise to participate in your spontaneity, to support and encourage your dreams, to continue to share your interests, and to work with all my heart and strength to keep you laughing, to fill our lives with joy. I vow before God and our friends to love you. I cannot promise to always *feel* love, but I do promise to always live lovingly, to truly make love the foundation of our lives together.

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7. (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), I want to be your (*husband / wife*). I want this freely, willingly, passionately and madly. I love you and I wish to spend my life giving — to you and for you. I give you myself today. All



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that I am and hope to be, all of my aspirations and hopes, I give to you. I do this not as an act of reluctant surrender, but because in giving I find myself fulfilled. And I promise not only to give myself, but to willingly receive what you offer: your goals, dreams, the castles you have built in the air, your pain as well as your joy. I am willing and eager to receive and accept you and to offer myself for your acceptance and love.

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8. (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), today I give myself to you as your (*husband / wife*). I have nothing to offer but my hopes for us, my dreams for our future, my strength to invest in our marriage, my all. Today I give you the heart and soul of who I am, not because I think I can lose who I am, but because I know I can be more truly myself with you than without you.

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9. I, (*Saying Groom's name / Saying Bride's name*), take you, (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), to be the (*wife / husband*) of all my today and tomorrows, to be the (*mother / father*) of my children, to be the companion of my house. We shall face together whatever our lives may encounter, and share together our riches of goodness and plenty and love.

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10. I, (*Saying Groom's name / Saying Bride's name*), promise you, (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), that for the rest of my life, I will be your (*husband / wife*), friend and lover.

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11. I take you (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), to be my (*wife / husband*), my friend, my love, and my lifelong companion: to share my life with yours. To build our dreams together, while allowing you to grow with your dreams; to support you through times of trouble, and rejoice with you in times of happiness; to treat you with respect, love, and loyalty through all the trials and triumphs of our lives together; and to give you all the love I can give my whole life long. This commitment is made in love, kept in faith, lived in hope, and will daily be a part of me.

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12. (*Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name*), when I look at you I see everything that I want and need in my life. I feel so blessed every day I wake up



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and find you next to me. My love for you is so overwhelming that at times it leaves me breathless. I feel butterflies when you hold my hand and melt when I look into your eyes. I am so at peace because I have you.

You are my best friend who has been with me through it all. These past ___ years with you have been so wonderful. The bond we have built between us is so strong. I know that nothing can weaken it.

For all that you have done for me and given to me over the years, I promise to do the same for you. All I ask of you is to have faith in us and let the love we share continue to surround you.

(Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name), as I stand here before you readying to be your *(husband / wife)*, know this: you have my heart and I will be yours and stand by you through eternity. You are my love.

I love you.

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13. *(Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name)*, you and I are young as we begin our life together. As husband and wife, I want us to enjoy our youth together, to experience what life has to offer, to drink deeply at the fountain of love.

But I also want us to grow old together, to gather wisdom from all of our shared experiences, to discover the joy of loving more deeply as the years pass. I want us to be inseparably bound by the thousands of events we will live together. I want us to build a past rich with laughter, love and adventure — a past we can always appreciate with fondness, while bravely and enthusiastically facing our future.

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14. *(Saying Bride's name / Saying Groom's name)*, we have come together late in our lives. I wish it could have been earlier, much earlier. But today, as I become your *(husband / wife)*, I thank God for bringing us together. And I promise to make up for lost time by loving you with all my heart and soul. I promise to not sweat the small stuff, to not be set in my ways, to get out of my ruts, to live life earnestly and passionately. I promise, as your *(husband / wife)*, to be your friend and companion for all of our days.

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15. *(Groom speaks, saying Bride's name)*...

In your eyes, I have found my home.



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In your heart, I have found my love.
In your soul, I have found my mate.
With you, I am whole, full, alive.
You make me laugh. You let me cry.
You are my breath, my every heartbeat.

I am yours.
You are mine.
Of this we are certain.

(Bride speaks, saying Groom's name)...

You are my inspiration and my soul's fire.
You are the magic of my days.
You help me laugh, you teach me love.
You provide a safe place for me, unlike I've ever known.
You free me to sing my own song.
You are more of an amazement to me each day I rediscover you.
You are my greatest boon.

I am yours.
You are mine.
Of this we are certain.

Frau Ava (circa 1160), translated by Willis Barnstone

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16. *(Groom, Saying Bride's name)*, you reached out to me and re-opened my heart when I had closed myself to the idea of love. You have taught me to believe in my ability to love and be loved. You have enriched me beyond measure.

(Saying Bride's name), you have restored my faith and enthusiasm about being in a relationship with someone as my partner, my friend, my confidante, my lover, and my soul mate. I thank you, *(Saying Bride's name)*, from the bottom of my heart and the depths of my being.

As we stand here today, I am excited about our journey together as marriage partners. I promise to always be by your side through the joys and sorrows that lie ahead. And I promise to keep my heart open to you for the rest of my life.

(Saying Bride's name), I am truly blessed to stand before you as your husband – and to take you as my wife. With all that I am and all that I have, I will love you each and every day to come.

(Bride, Saying Groom's name), when I look at you, I see everything that I want



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and need in my life. My heart aches when we are separated, yet is filled with anxious anticipation to see you again. I am so at peace because I have you.

You are my best friend. You have been with me through good times and bad. You help me feel safe when I am scared. You help me laugh when I am sad. You comfort me when I am hurting. You reassure me when I am doubting. When you hold me, I feel that everything is possible, and that no matter what happens, we can make it through together.

These past years with you have been so wonderful. The bond we have built between us is so strong, I know that nothing can weaken it. For all that you have done for me and given to me over the years I promise to do the same for you.

All I ask of you is to have faith in us and let the love we share continue to grow.

(Saying Groom's name), as I stand here before you readying to be your wife, know this: you have my heart and I will be yours and stand by you through eternity. You are my love. And I will forever be yours.

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17. My dear, precious, tender *(Saying Bride's name)*, receiving your love and giving my love to you is what I treasure above all else in this world. I promise you that I will pay attention to the needs of our love and continue to place it above all else. You can count on me, as I know I can depend on you, to share life's joys and sorrows; to keep my mind, heart, and soul open to you; to be honest and true.

And just in case you have been wondering why those two rocking chairs are over there, they are my gift to us. They are the rocking chairs that will sit on our patio in every house we own. They are the very chairs that we will sit in.

From this day forward, I make a promise: whatever happens, you shall not be alone. I'll stand by your side and sleep in your arms; I'll be the joy in your heart, and the food for your soul, May you feel deeply loved for indeed you are. Through our brightest days and our darkest nights, I take you into my heart.

May God bless us with a great light around our hearts and around our home. I see your splendor, your innocence and light. May it shine. May the world see how beautiful you are as I see how beautiful you are, but may there always be a special light that only I can see.

I give you my heart. May we feel this joy forever. Thank you God. Amen



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Thought Starters for modifying these vows:

To begin modifying these vows, consider the person you are and, through the love of your partner, are becoming. Think about the qualities in you that are a blessing to your partner. Think about how it is that you feel happy, secure, respected, content, encouraged, grateful, etc. Think about how you contribute to your partner having these same feelings. Think about how strong your marriage will be as you cultivate and support such feelings in one another. Challenge yourself to laminate your promises and put them in your wallet or purse, to remind you every day of their worth. Then consider including in your vows:

Descriptions of your present relationship

18. Your love, friendship and caring have made me happy.
19. I respect, admire, and appreciate you for who you are, as well as for the person you wish to become.
20. You are the greatest gift of my life. Your love is my greatest treasure.
21. I am blessed by the love, patience, and devotion you have shown me.

Sincere promises you are capable of keeping

Every day, I will

22. ... nurture our love and be awed by its power; I will not take this great love for granted.
23. ... hold this marriage sacred, for it is heaven-sent.
24. ... laugh freely with you in times of joy, and cry with you in times of sorrow.
25. ... have the patience that love demands, to speak when words are needed and to share in the silence when they are not.
26. ... stand by your side and sleep in your arms;
27. ... always accept you for who you are, wholly and without reservation.
28. ... believe in you, the person you will grow to be and the couple we will be together.
29. ... support and protect your freedom; because although our lives are intertwined, your choices are still yours alone.
30. ... seek a deep understanding of your wishes, your desires, your fears and your dreams.
31. ... bring out the best in you always.



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32. ... make laughter an integral part of our family.
33. ... give and receive, speak and listen, inspire and respond.
34. ... support you when you need support and to turn to you when I need support.
35. ... be there for you when you need me, whenever you need me.
36. ... encourage your goals and ambitions; support you through misfortune and celebrate your triumphs.
37. ... treat you with tenderness, respect, appreciation and silliness because we are a team, now and for always.
38. ... treasure you like the brightest diamond.
39. ... work to meet our financial responsibilities.
40. ... provide a heart that understands, a warm home to live in and open arms for you to lean on.
41. ... keep our marriage exciting, adventurous, faithful and full of passion.
42. ... show you, every day, that I know exactly how lucky I am to have you in my life.
43. ... be the best I can be, just for you; I will always participate in our relationship.
44. ... commit myself to our lifetime of growth, sharing, and encouragement.
45. ... strive to achieve my potential and celebrate your progress toward the same goal.
46. ... seek peace for ourselves, our children, and for the world which encircles us.
47. ... live with you in the commitment of faith, the security of hope and the joy of love.
48. ... pray for you and thank God for you.
49. ... do all in my power to make you as happy as I am today.
50. ... every day, tell you "I love you."

Thank you for marrying me.

What you vow for me, I will gratefully receive and joyfully restore to you in growing measure. The greatest gift I can give to you is what you have enabled in me — my fullness and my love for you.