



The secrets of a zero-drama guest list

If only your bank account could balloon like your guest list. In the time it takes to post a #ringselfie, it can easily go from two—you + boo—to roughly 437.

THAT'S WHY it really does pay to be efficient, methodical, and maybe a little *Game of Thrones* when finalizing your invite list.

Bear in mind, your number is inextricably linked to both your venue (how many does it hold?) and your budget. (How many can you actually afford?) Oh, and who's paying. For example, if the two of you are shouldering the cost, assume you'll get 70 percent of the invites and all parents, combined, will get 30 percent. If one or more sets of parents are kicking in, each group usually gets one third (including you guys). Of course, speak to all the parents to negotiate—and be prepared for pushback. Your partner's mom may



bloat the list with her long-ago sorority sisters, while your dad *has* to invite his fishing buddies. But who knows, you may be pleasantly surprised by how few invites they need. (Turns out, your stepdad's social awkwardness has an occasional upside.)

Everyone needs to create a super A-list of nonnegotiables, which will be the baseline for your guest count. Establish a few ironclad rules, like “no kids or colleagues” or “no ring, no bring,” that all parties have to stick to. This way, you won't pit your friend's boyfriend against your uncle's age-inappropriate arm candy—and you'll have a cop-out if anyone dares to throw shade. In which case, address the situation with a simple “Sorry, but this is what we decided across the board.” (Or lie and blame your future in-laws. Up to you.)

Think about who you've seen the most in the past six months, and invite them—even if their inclusion comes at the expense of your summer-camp BFFs. When in doubt, invite for your future, not your past. Do you really see yourself keeping in touch with someone over the next five years? Not to be too mercenary, but is this person worth the price per head? Do you often screen-grab texts from this person, add the eye-roll emoji, and forward them to someone else? Seriously, look inward!

If by some miracle there's room for a few more after all the RSVPs roll in, it's OK to offer plus-ones to friends whose SOs you truly like, to someone who teetered on the edge of the A-list, and even to some late-breaking wild card you've recently befriended. Just do so personally, acknowledge that these are last-minute offers—and make sure they're people who'll make your wedding more fun. —*Katie James*

