

Getting Your Marriage License

Rev. Katherine Revoir, Wedding Officiant

There are two types of marriage licenses: Public (recommended) and Confidential

PUBLIC MARRIAGE LICENSE

This is the most common license. For this license, one witness is required, with room for two to sign on the license. When this license is issued anywhere in California, you can get married in any county in California. The record is returned to the county from which it was issued, not the county the marriage was performed in. After recording the marriage license, the original will be sent to the State of California. Anyone can get an informational copy of it. If you get married in Tahoe, stay on the California side.

CONFIDENTIAL MARRIAGE LICENSE

For this license, you don't need witnesses to the ceremony and the record is not made public. The ceremony has to be performed in the same county where the licence was issued. You will be required to swear or affirm that you are already living together as husband and wife. The records are kept in the county it was issued in, and a copy goes to the State of California. The officiant can't release it to anyone else, and the only people that can get copies are the bride and groom or by a court order.

Confidential marriage licenses cannot be issued to minors. The state gets the license for both types, but with a confidential license there is not an indexing system where they can look it up.

STARTING THE PROCESS

Either type of license is good for 90 days after purchase and a ceremony must take place on or before the expiration of the marriage license. The groom and bride must appear together in order to get the license.

To get your license, either go in person and do your paperwork at the County Clerk's office in your county, or go online to fill out the form for a marriage licence and then come in to meet with the clerk. You can apply online or print out an application for your marriage license. When you fill it out online, you don't have to print it out because they will have it on file when the two of you go to the clerk's office.

You need to have decided before getting the license if you will be changing your name. The only names you can change are your middle and last name. If you say you're going to change your name, you must legally do that within 2 years of the marriage. Otherwise, you will need to go through a petitioning of the court to have it changed, and this is a big hassle. If you have questions, call your county clerk.

COMING TO THE CLERKS OFFICE

Check the hours before coming. Most clerks do not accept appointments, it's first come first served. Bring a government issued picture ID, e.g. a driver's license or passport. If either bride or groom were married before, you will need to state the date that the previous marriage ended. If you were divorced recently (within the last 6 months), you must bring in a certified copy of the divorce judgement.

Bring the marriage licence to the wedding ceremony and your officiant and witnesses will complete it. Anything written on the license must be in black ink, and you can't write outside the boxes or make corrections on the license, so be mindful!

AFTER THE WEDDING — GETTING A COPY OF YOUR LICENSE

In order for your license to be legal, it must be returned to the County. If you need to quickly prove that you were legally married, the license must be returned within 10 days of your wedding in order to be registered/recorded. Otherwise, either you or your officiant should return it within a month.

There are two types of copies you can get. I strongly suggest getting an authorized certified copy and not an informational copy (both copies will be certified). *You can get an informational copy by sending your marriage license back to the county with the check and blue form. For this copy you do not need it to be notarized.* However, you will need an authorized certified copy if you ever want to change your name or get a passport with your new name on it.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN THE FOLLOWING FORMS TO FILL OUT AT THE TIME YOU APPLY FOR YOUR MARRIAGE LICENSE:

For a Public Marriage license:

You will be given a blue form (unless printed from the website, and then the form will of course be white), titled "Request for Authorized Certified Copy of Marriage Record." If ordering your copy by mail, have it notarized (preferably before the wedding) by either the bride or groom. If you check "Authorized Certified Copy" on the blue form called "Request for Authorized Certified Copy of Marriage Record," and then send it in without a notarized request form, you won't get an Authorized Certified Copy. You will get an Informational Copy.

For a Confidential Marriage license:

You will be given a white form, titled "Application for Certified Copy of a Confidential Marriage Certificate." If ordering your copy by mail, have it notarized (preferably before the wedding) by either the bride or groom.

When returning the license in the envelope provided (preferably within 10 days of your marriage), include the check for your copy and the blue/white filled out form. Informational copies are not available for confidential marriages — only an authorized certified copy will be issued.

If you both come in person (again, either form), you need only bring your completed license and ID to the clerk — you won't need a notarized form. If you are honeymooning and you have not applied in person for your certified copy between the wedding and the honeymoon, travel under your maiden name, or whatever ID matches your travel documents. If your maiden name isn't on your travel documents, bring the notarized form and a copy of the completed license.



May your wedding day be all you envision it to be!

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