

Questions to Ask the Dress Retailer



- **1. How long will it take for the dress to be ready?**

It usually takes four to eight months from the order date. If you get an answer that specifies a longer period of time and you're on a tight deadline, consider going with another retailer.
- **2. How many fittings will I need?**

The average is three. (You will probably require more if a pattern is being created for you from scratch.) At the first fitting, the seamstress and you figure out what needs to be done: Is the hem too long or too short? Is the dress puckering anywhere? At the second fitting, you'll determine whether those initial goals were achieved, see if the dress is fitting as it should, and decide if any fine-tuning is required. By the third fitting, the dress is supposed to look just as it should on your wedding day. Ask a bridesmaid or a friend to tag along for a crash course in need-to-knows, like how to bustle the train.
- **3. Are fittings included in the cost of the dress?**

Some stores offer a set number of fittings (usually three), which are included in the price, and they will charge an additional fee for more. (When it comes to couture gowns, unlimited fittings are usually included.) Some retailers do not provide any complimentary alterations but recommend that you use the in-house seamstress for fittings.
- **4. Can I customize anything on this dress?**

This answer will vary, depending on the designer and the retailer. Some offer unlimited options. (Different neckline? Sure! Another color? Why not?) Others won't change a thing. If the answer is a flat no, you can take the gown elsewhere for customization, such as additional beadwork or a lace overlay.
- **5. How far in advance do I need to book fittings?**

Depending on the popularity of the store or the seamstress, you may have to plan way ahead to get the dates and the times you want. (The alteration process usually begins about six weeks from the wedding day.)
- **6. What happens if I gain or lose weight after the final fitting?**

Seamstresses are used to dealing with fluctuations, as long as the changes are not too dramatic. So last-minute adjustments can probably be made without a big fuss. (If you think that gaining or losing a substantial amount of weight is in the cards, give your seamstress a heads-up as early as possible. That way, she'll be able to take needed measures, such as leaving extra fabric around the seams.) Check before-hand to see what those final tweaks will cost.
- **7. What are your refund and exchange policies?**

Bridal shops are notorious for a tough-as-nails return policy—particularly if alterations have been made. It's a good idea to learn the rules upfront.
- **8. Will the dress have a built-in corset?**

Built-in corsets tend to provide the best silhouettes, but if one is not available for your dress, ask the retailer what type to buy and if he or she can recommend a particular brand. (If the gown is made of a clingy, whisper-thin fabric, you may choose to forgo a corset, since its lines could be visible.)
- **9. What undergarments will I need?**

If the dress has a built-in corset, you may not need additional undergarments. However, some women choose to wear their own lingerie under their corsets. If that's your plan, bring the goods along to every fitting. Scope out the wide range of bridal-undergarment options—from bras to shapewear—at www.bare necessities.com.
- **10. Can I order extra fabric to have a wrap or a headpiece made?**

When ordering additional fabric, make sure to specify that it comes from the exact same dye lot as that used for the dress; otherwise there could be variations in shade or tone that will prevent a perfect match.

Questions to Ask the Dress Retailer (continued)



- **11. Is the cost of the materials included in the price of making the dress?**
Some retailers expect you to spring for fabric and other materials, which can add up fast when there are 100 miniature crystal buttons running up the back of the gown.
- **12. What will the back of the dress look like when it's bustled?**
You'll spend the majority of your day with the dress bustled, so you want to be comfortable (a longer train can translate into a cumbersome bustle) and love the look of the silhouette.
- **13. Can I have a written contract confirming all of the agreed-upon details, including the date my dress will be ready?**
Reputable stores should be able to provide you with a binding contract that spells out the final price, any customization details, and an approximate date of arrival.
- **14. Do I have to pay a deposit?**
The industry standard is to pay 60 percent of the total cost of the dress upon placing the order. If the retailer is asking for any more or less, it may be a red flag.
- **15. Will the dress I get look exactly like the one I tried on?**
Since you're probably going to try on a sample that's not your exact size, the retailer should explain how the real thing is going to fit. Also, confirm that the fabric and the color on the store model are precisely what the manufacturer will ship out.
- **16. What will the final cost of the dress be?**
Find out if alterations or any customizations are included in the price you're quoted.
- **17. Will the dress be cleaned, pressed, and ready to wear when I pick it up?**
Unless you're buying a dress in as-is condition—say, at a sample sale or from an outlet—receiving it in wedding-ready condition should be part of the deal. Dry-cleaning a wedding dress isn't cheap. Prices start at around \$100 and go well beyond that. So if you buy a gown that does need cleaning, build that expense into your budget.
- **18. How much will it cost to have the dress packed for storage after the wedding?**
Bridal salons often have a dry cleaner they will recommend to clean and preserve the gown. (Once it has been cleaned, the dress should be wrapped in acid-free tissue and put into an acid-free box.) The cost will vary, based on the type of fabric and the quantity of it. (For example, cleaning and storing a simple sheath is less complicated than doing the same with a voluminous ball gown.) Depending on the cleaner you go with, prepare to spend anywhere from \$130 to \$1,000 for the preservation process. Be careful to protect your investment, and check the dry cleaner's credentials.
- **19. Can I hold on to the fabric that is cut from the dress during alterations?**
The answer should be yes! Those precious scraps can be big money savers: Wrap the material around the base of your bouquet, or have it turned into a small evening bag.