THE ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

SARA vars PHOTOGRAPHY

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YOUR
ENGAGEMENT

Now that you have picked a date, a photographer and probably a venue as well, you can celebrate! Those are some of the toughest decisions in wedding planning and you can cross them off your list! Hooray!! Now on to the fun stuff...like your engagement session!

I highly encourage engagement sessions because I truly believe that they are a VITAL part of the entire process. During your engagement session, you'll have the chance to get to know me, experience how I shoot and how I handle posing and lighting. This session will make a HUGE impact on how the wedding day flows. I'll arrive on your wedding day already knowing how you two interact, what your best poses are and how to photograph you in a genuine way! What I will learn about you during your engagement session is invaluable! You will feel like such a pro on your big day because of the great practice you had during your engagement session!

Your engagement session can be scheduled anytime before your wedding day. I normally suggest booking it at least 3-6 months in advance to avoid stress. Because my weekends are filled with weddings, I shoot engagement sessions on weekday evenings, normally from 5-7pm depending on the light and the time of the year. In the winter months, 3-5pm is a normal time frame for an engagement shoot!

As you start to plan for your engagement shoot, you will need to start brainstorming about location ideas. I LOVE it when couples pick a location that is special or sentimental to them in some way! If you can't think of anywhere specific that you would like to shoot, I can help you decide on a location. As long as the light is great, I can make ANY location look awesome! Do not shy away from unique ideas. The more creative, the better! Be sure to keep reading to find out more about outfit ideas and inspiration!

ENGAGEMENT PREP

It's always a little intimidating to have your picture taken...even if it's just a photo on an iPhone that is taken by a friend. We still want to look nice, make sure nothing is in our teeth and that our hair is behaving! I realize that preparing for your engagement session can be a little overwhelming. Over the next few pages, I'll be providing tips for outfits, handling nerves and recommendations that will make your shoot the best it can possibly be!

the basics + what to bring

POCKETS | Empty your pockets! You don't want to have key chains or phones showing through your pockets. This is easy to overlook but very hard to edit out.

TIMING | The sun sets quickly especially if your shoot is not in the summer months. The later you arrive, the less time we have to shoot! Once the sun is set, the shoot will be over.

RING CLEANING | If possible, it is ideal to clean your ring before your shoot. I love to shoot a few macro shots of your ring while you change outfits! The cleaner the better.

CHANGING CLOTHES | As much as I would like to say that we always have restrooms for outfit changes, more often than not, my clients do quick outfit changes in their car if there are no other options.

DEEP BREATHS | I'm going to help you along the way and it's going to be a blast! I will instruct you on everything you need to know. Enjoy this time together, and make a date out of it! Plan dinner afterwards and celebrate!!

PARKING FEE | This may not apply to your shoot, but you always want to plan in advance for a cash-only parking fee that we may encounter or any tolls. I've had instances where this has caused some stress, and stress is what we want to avoid.

CLOTHING | I'll explain this more in-depth in the next few pages but generally, my couples like to bring one casual outfit and one dressier outfit. If you're unsure about a few pieces, feel free to bring all options, and I can help you decide or you can text me pics about it beforehand!

LIP COLOR & HAIRSPRAY | You may need to apply more lip color after one outfit change and a few kisses. (If you have a bold lip color, try to have a matte finish so it won't transfer to your groom as intensely!). Hairspray and a brush will be helpful if your hair struggles in the humidity!

FLIP FLOPS | If you're wearing shoes that are difficult to walk in but look awesome, bring some comfy shoes to change into while we walk to each shooting location!

CHESAPEAKE

OUTFITS & STYLING

Believe it or not, you have so much control over the outcome of your shoot and what it looks and feels like! What you choose to wear is a big decision that often causes some stress for the bride beforehand. However, my hope is that with a little education, you will be able to determine the style and feel you desire for your shoot which will make your outfit selection so much easier and less complicated! Let's start by debunking some very common outfit myths that a lot of people believe about what they should wear to their session!

outfit myths:

1. MYTH ONE: *Avoid neutrals, they wash you out!*

Whoever started this myth couldn't have been further from the truth. There are some colors that don't work for some people, but for the majority of people, they look amazing in neutrals and those colors shouldn't be avoided. The truth is, neutrals are the most photogenic color for portraits.

2. MYTH TWO: *Always wear black or you won't look thin!*

Sure, black is slimming, but it also photographs very heavy in portraits. There is nothing wrong with black, but if you're only wearing it to look thinner and deep down you're hoping for light and airy portraits, it may not be the best choice.

3. MYTH THREE: *You two need to match!*

Please don't try to match your significant other. Instead, try to coordinate! Coordinating is a completely different concept than "matching." Coordination means you are usually choosing different colors that look good together but are not close to being the same. I have some more tips about this concept in the following pages.

4. MYTH FOUR: *Your location determines your style more than your outfit!*

False! Your outfit has way more impact than your location. Your location is just a setting in the background but you two will still be the main focus of the images. If you want an overall romantic look to your photos, you will need to wear lighter, more neutral colors in your photos to achieve this look!

5. MYTH FIVE : *You have to buy something new!*

False! If you know you look awesome in an outfit that you already have and it fits the style you want for your engagement session, that would be a great choice!

DECIDING ON YOUR

STYLE

what style do you prefer?

BOLD or NEUTRAL

DRESSY or CASUAL

CLASSIC or TRENDY

These choices represent the three main decisions you will have to make in regards to your outfit choices. There are no right or wrong answers! Maybe you want one outfit to be dressy and the other to be casual. Maybe you want one outfit to be very light and neutral but you want to wear more color in the next outfit. These categories will hopefully help you determine what you're hoping for in your engagement session. If you're feeling stuck and can't seem to determine what you prefer, that's very normal!

Here are some general "rules of thumb" when it comes to styling during an engagement session. Once you read through these, you may have a better understanding of what you prefer, and you can start planning your outfits. These "rules of thumb" are based on my experience and aren't concrete rules that can't be broken. However, if you have questions about one of them in regards to what you want to wear, just email me and we can talk about what would be best!

Things to Avoid:

1. Colors to avoid: bright reds, neons, bright oranges (they reflect color onto skin and can be difficult to edit!).

2. Avoid patterns smaller than a quarter: Tiny patterns cause something called "Chromatic Aberration" in digital images. Men's checkered shirts are fine if the "checks" are on the larger side.

3. Alternate Heaviness: If one of you is wearing very dark jeans, the other may want to wear lighter pants. If one of you is wearing a navy top, the other shouldn't wear a dark/heavy-colored top. To a certain degree, alternating the "heaviness" of your outfits can make your images look more balanced.

4. Avoid one of you being casual while the other is more dressy: This can look a bit awkward in your photos.

5. Other things to avoid: Tennis shoes, Graphic tees, Bold logos on shirts, Sunglasses & Baseball Hats.

ROMANTIC STYLE RECIPE

If you're hoping for a more romantic style of shoot, you can actually make outfit choices that will allow your images to turn out brighter, softer, and extra photogenic! Here are some ingredients that go into creating a romantic-styled shoot. It's important to note that you do not need to choose all of these ingredients in order to have a softer style to your images but the more ingredients you include, the more romantic and bright your images will be:

- *Neutral Colors*: Blushes, tans, light pinks, faint blues and light minty teals, creams, grays and whites will always result in more of a light and airy look in your images. These colors photograph softer and more romantically!

- *Long, Flowy Skirts/Dresses*: Dresses and skirts with feminine ruffles, multiple layers of fabric and the ability to blow and move in the wind will always photograph beautifully! You would be amazed at how impactful moving fabric softens an image.

- *Khakis vs. Jeans:* If you really want your images to be as bright as possible, consider having your groom wear lighter pants instead of dark dress pants or dark jeans.

BRIGHT & BOLD RECIPE

Just like the "Romantic" recipe, you don't have to apply all of these "ingredients" to get a perfectly BRIGHT & BOLD look to your engagement session. These ingredients include:

- *Only One Wears a Pattern:* If one of you has a bold pattern, it's very important that the other doesn't. The bolder the pattern, the more important this rule becomes!

- *Bold Backgrounds:* A lot of time, if my couples are going for a bold and bright look, I will look for solid colored backgrounds to use for part of their engagement session! It's a double win if the background coordinates with their outfits!

- *Only One Bold Color:* If you really want a bold and bright look but you want to do it well and tastefully, I would suggest that only one of you have a bright and bold colored outfit and the other stay in a solid neutral to avoid overdoing it!

- *Large Patterns are Preferred:* If you really want to wear a pattern, my only request is that your pattern is on the larger side. Patterns that are smaller than a quarter can be difficult to photograph. This isn't true of all patterns but it's a good general rule to go by!

- *Consider Muting your Favorite Color:* If you love a certain bold color and you want to include it in your outfit selection, I would recommend selecting a muted tone of this favorite color. For example, if you love purple, instead of selecting a deep, dark and bold purple shirt, you can get the purple vibes through a lavender or even a periwinkle color!

ENGAGEMENT SESSION

*Approximate **Start** Times*

WINTER

Dec-Mar 3:00-4:00pm

During December through Mid-March you can plan on your engagement session start time between 3-4pm. However, the time changes in Mid-March so that will make the start time one hour later.

SUMMER

Jun-Aug 6:30-7:30pm

Summer engagements, just like all engagements, take place 1.5 hours before sunset. This will hopefully mean that the shoot will be during the cooler part of the day.

SPRING

Apr/May - Varies

The sunset time drastically changes throughout the course of these two months and so our shooting times change as well. You can plan on starting approximately 5:30-6:00pm in April and 6:00-6:30pm in May.

FALL

Sept/Nov - Varies

The sunset time changes drastically during these three months. In Sept, you can plan on starting 5:30-6:00pm until the third week, and then you can plan on 5:00-5:30pm until Mid-Oct. After the first week of Nov, plan on 3:00-3:30pm.

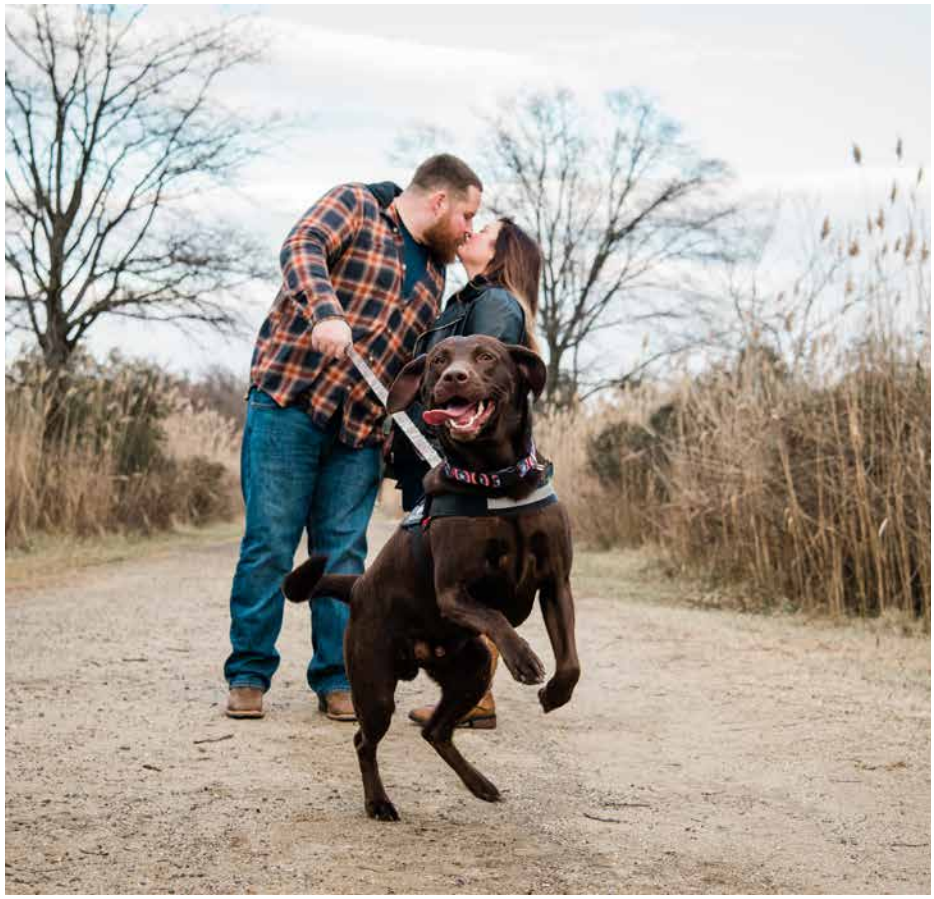
LOGISTICS

- I photograph engagement sessions on weekday evenings because my weekends are dedicated to photographing weddings!

- I love shooting at gorgeous locations. I recommend two locations max for engagements. A general rule of thumb is the more locations and outfits, the less images, but the more variety you'll have!

- I can do sunrise sessions if necessary! I require sunrise shoots for those who want to take portraits in a very crowded location like the Cherry Blossom Festival in DC.

- I love to travel to my shoots! However, if I have never been to your desired location, I may need some advice on where to park!



WHAT'S NEXT?

If you've already booked me for your wedding date, ***time to schedule your session***! Build a timeline according to when you'd like the save-the-dates to reach your guests. Engagement galleries take two weeks to edit and then printing will take a week or two depending on what company you use! Feel free to use my name saravars for a discount from Basic Invite.

THANK YOU for trusting me with your special day. I am so honored to be capturing your memories, and I cannot WAIT to celebrate alongside of you! As you continue to plan, please feel free to contact me with ANY questions you may have along the way! I hope this guide has been helpful as you continue to plan and prepare for your engagement session!

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