

THE ENGAGEMENT SESSION

# *Style Guide*







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# Style Guide

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Victoria Rayburn  
PHOTOGRAPHY



WHAT EVERY  
*Bride*  
*needs to*  
KNOW

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Hey there, VRP couple! I'm so excited to chat about your engagement photos! The engagement session is one of my favorite parts of our time together because it'll give the two of you a chance to get comfortable in front of the camera before your big day. Think of your engagement photos like wedding photo practice! The goal of your engagement session is to help you relax in front of the camera so that your wedding photos will feel smooth and seamless, allowing you to thoroughly enjoy your big day. Plus, you only get to be fiancés once, and this special season deserves to be documented! This guide is packed with tips to help you get the most out of your engagement session. That said, let's dive in!







## CHOOSING A TIME & DATE

I'm primarily a natural light photographer because I believe that natural light—light from the sun—creates photos that feel fresh, timeless, and natural. Great light is key to great photos, so with this in mind, we'll want to start your engagement session two hours before the scheduled sunset. (Engagement sessions are 90 minutes, but I recommend setting two hours aside in case we happen to go a little over.) Photographers call this time period "golden hour" because it's when the light is the dreamiest and when you'll get the best photos!

I'll help you determine the best time for engagement photos, but you can also use a sunset calculator online to determine the scheduled sunset for the date and location you have in mind. Then, just subtract two hours to figure out your start time. Remember, the sun sets earlier in the winter and later in the summer. You may want to factor the sunset time in when choosing your engagement session date, especially if you're taking off work or have evening plans afterward.

I recommend planning buffer time between getting ready and your session in case of traffic or another delay. We're only able to shoot when natural light is in the sky, so we'll want to take advantage of every minute we have together before the sun goes down. It's going to be so much fun!



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**QUICK TIP:** *Because my weekends are often filled with weddings (Yay!), I shoot engagement sessions Monday-Thursday evenings. If you can, I highly recommend taking a day or half day off work & making your engagement session a fun event & memory!*

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## SELECTING THE RIGHT *Location*

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As you start planning for your engagement session, you'll want to think about location ideas. I'm more than happy to give suggestions (Don't hesitate to let me know if you need help!), but if there's a location that's special or sentimental to you, let's use it! As long as the light is great, whatever you have in mind will be perfect. While I'm based in Indiana, I regularly travel throughout the US for engagement sessions. If you have a dream destination for your session in mind or want me to travel to you, don't hesitate to let me know! I'm more than happy to shoot your session wherever your heart desires.



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## THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

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This is the time to think outside the box! If a sentimental location isn't coming to mind, I want to encourage you to brainstorm unique locations that you might have special access to that most people don't. For example, maybe you—or someone in your personal or professional network—can secure permission to a location that would otherwise be off limits, like a beautiful private estate, country club, or even a quarry. Maybe you have access to a beautiful family farm, a historic site, a boat, museum grounds, or an orchard with incredible blooms.

Spend a few minutes thinking about this and checking around. You'll likely be surprised with what you come up with. Even if something seems out of reach, you never know until you ask!

If you get stuck or need inspiration, don't worry! Check out the **"engagement"** section of my blog and keep browsing through this guide. If you see something you like, let me know, and I'll see what I can do! Whatever you do, don't let this process stress you out.



## DESTINATION ENGAGEMENT PHOTOS

Your engagement session includes my travel time anywhere within 60 miles of Lafayette, Indiana. If you'd like to shoot somewhere else, I'm more than happy (and actually love) to travel! A small travel fee will apply depending on the distance.

For example, if you'd like to shoot your session in Chicago; Bloomington, Indiana; or another location two to three hours from Lafayette, Indiana, approximately a \$299 travel fee will apply.

That said, my husband (Zach) and I love to travel and are actually on the

road quite a bit. If we're already going to be in or near an area where you'd love to have your photos taken and we can coordinate our schedules, let's set something up! I would love to make this work for you, and since we'll already be there, this will save you at least some travel fees.

If you'd like to do your session somewhere more than 60 miles from Lafayette where we don't already have plans to visit, just let me know, and I can get you a custom travel quote. Seriously, friend, don't hesitate to ask!



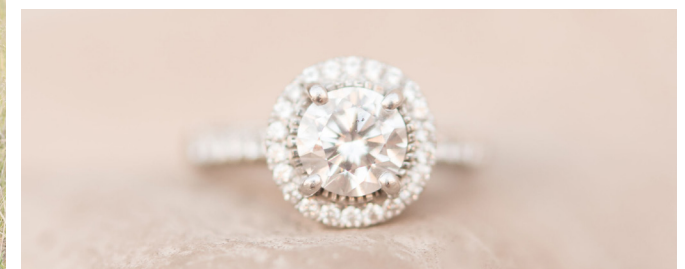


# Styling

## YOUR SESSION

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Want your engagement images to look more editorial and high end? Bring a little something extra with you. For example, if you bring a bouquet or fresh flowers to hold, we can incorporate the flowers into your photos in other creative ways. If you really want to go for it, you could bring a cute bike, picnic basket, rowboat, or a classic car. These kinds of props can add romance and interest to your photos. Whether you incorporate something large (like a vehicle) or small (like a blanket or hat), incorporating just one extra styled item is a fun way to make your session more unique! Oh, and by the way. Your pets are more than welcome to be included in your engagement photos!







STYLE TIPS

# *For Her*

*You deserve to feel beautiful  
in front of the camera!*



FOR HER

# *Dress It Up*

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Have you always wanted to rock a sequined gown, tulle skirt, or flower crown but just haven't had an occasion for it? Well, this is your chance! There is no such thing as "too dressed up" when it comes to your engagement photos, so don't be afraid to have some fun! If you don't want to add a new permanent piece to your closet, consider checking

out Rent the Runway. You don't have to spend a lot to feel like a million bucks! Plus, you can send the outfits back when the session is over. Or, use this as a great excuse to add a new permanent piece (or two!) to your closet. Whatever you decide, just make sure you feel beautiful and excited!

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*There's no such thing as  
"too dressed up"!*

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## SAY YES to the *Dress*



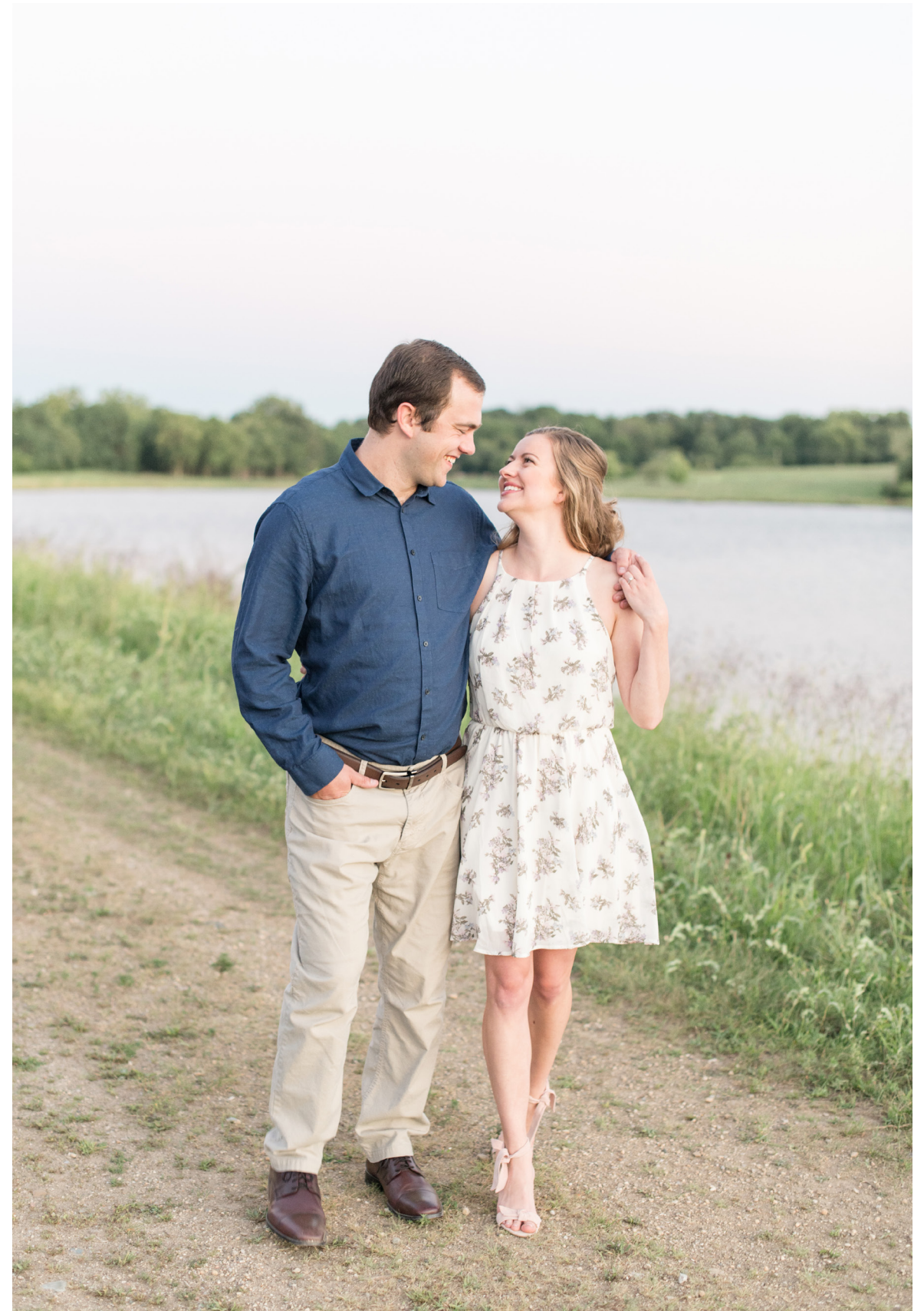
Long, flowy dresses and skirts look amazing on camera, because they bring extra movement to photos—especially when juxtaposed with nature (like a sunset over a field or on the beach). Short dresses photograph beautifully as well. Dresses and skirts tend to look most stunning on camera because they naturally flatter the female body. This is probably why the red carpet is always full of so many dresses and not very many pantsuits! If you're willing, I recommend avoiding pants and shorts for your session and saying yes to a dress or two! But, ultimately, these are YOUR engagement photos. So, wear whatever you feel most comfortable in!



## ONE OR TWO? IT'S UP TO YOU!

Most VRP brides choose two outfits and will bring one "wow" dress and then another shorter sun dress or cocktail dress for a more casual, date-like feel. But, if you want to bring two "wow" dresses or two casual dresses, give yourself permission to do just that! The camera will love you no matter what!

That said, you don't have to bring two looks if that's too stressful or if you'd rather just stick to one fabulous look. Just one outfit that you love will be so much better than one outfit you love and another you aren't very excited about. So, one or two? It's completely up to you!





## CHOOSING *Colors*

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When choosing colors for your outfits, I recommend selecting lighter tones and more muted shades. Bright, bold colors tend to be distracting in photos and can add color casts to your skin. (For example, if you wear a hot pink dress, the hot pink color might reflect off your skin making you look a bit sunburnt.) Muted tones, neutral colors, and pastels—on the other hand—will allow your faces and love be the focus of your photos!

The camera really loves shades of soft pink, muted blues, dusty lavender, and other pastels mixed with sophisticated light neutrals like heather gray, creams, leather brown, and white. Softer color palettes also fit beautifully into both natural, outdoor environments and more urban areas.





## coordinating THE LOOKS

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As you're coordinating your outfit with your fiancé's, keep in mind that your outfits will look more cohesive and natural on camera if you follow a color palette and don't necessarily "match." You should each aim to wear a different dominant color but stay within a similar color palette family.

So, if you wear a blush dress, ivory earrings, and nude heels (blush being your dominant color), your fiancé could wear a navy coat with gray pants, an ivory shirt, brown leather shoes, and maybe even a blush pocket square. Now, he has his own dominant color (navy) while still incorporating a few touches of your color palette. Most VRP brides choose their dress first and then put their fiancé's outfit together accordingly. That's why there's a section for each of you in this book!





# FLATTERING YOUR *Features*

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In my experience, every woman—regardless of her shape—has an area of her body that she's self-conscious about. (Mine is definitely my stomach!) Recognizing what area you're self-conscious about in advance is key. Choosing silhouettes that compliment your figure and favorite features will help ensure you love the way you look in your photos!



## SLEEVES

If you're at all self-conscious about your arms, three-quarter length sleeves can create a lovely slimming effect. You could also add a cute jacket, blazer, or cardigan to your outfit.

If you want to show off your arms, skinny straps or strapless dresses will allow you to do just that!

The choice is entirely up to you. I only bring this up, because I know that this is an area that many women are concerned about.

## SHOES

Now, let's talk shoes! High heels elongate women's legs, making legs look extra fabulous! Heels look great on camera because they carry out the line of your leg all the way down to your toe.

If your toes are showing in a peep-toe heel, you might want to schedule a pedicure before your session. Even this small detail will help you feel more confident and make your engagement photos look more polished!

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### QUICK TIP

*Bring a pair of flats to wear when moving from place to place. Your feet will thank you later!*

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# MAKE A *Statement*

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Pairing an accessory or two with your outfit can bring extra dimension to your images. Big statement necklaces bring a lot of pop to photos, while smaller, delicate necklaces are not as noticeable on camera. Belts, bracelets, and earrings also bring great visual interest. I recommend choosing two to three pieces of jewelry that don't compete for attention (e.g. a statement necklace with a matching bracelet and more delicate earrings or big earrings with a delicate necklace). Fresh florals in a flower crown can also be a very romantic touch!







GO PRO

## *Hair & Makeup*

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It might seem a little "extra," but I highly recommend having your hair and makeup professionally done for your engagement session for three reasons:

1. Professional hair stylists and makeup artists know what looks best on camera.
2. Having someone else take care of your hair and makeup will remove the stress of getting ready on your own.
3. You'll feel oh-so-confident in front of the camera!

Now, just as a heads-up, most brides feel like their makeup is "too much" at first since it will likely be more makeup than you would wear on a normal day. If you feel that way, don't worry! Good makeup artists know how to get makeup just right for the camera, and you'll likely love the way you look in your images!

If you need recommendations for hair and makeup, I regularly work with great professionals and have a go-to team. They're oh-so-sweet and talented as heck. You'll love them! Just let me know, and I'll send you their information. They'll take great care of you. Promise!



# *Confidence.*

*It's always the best accessory!*

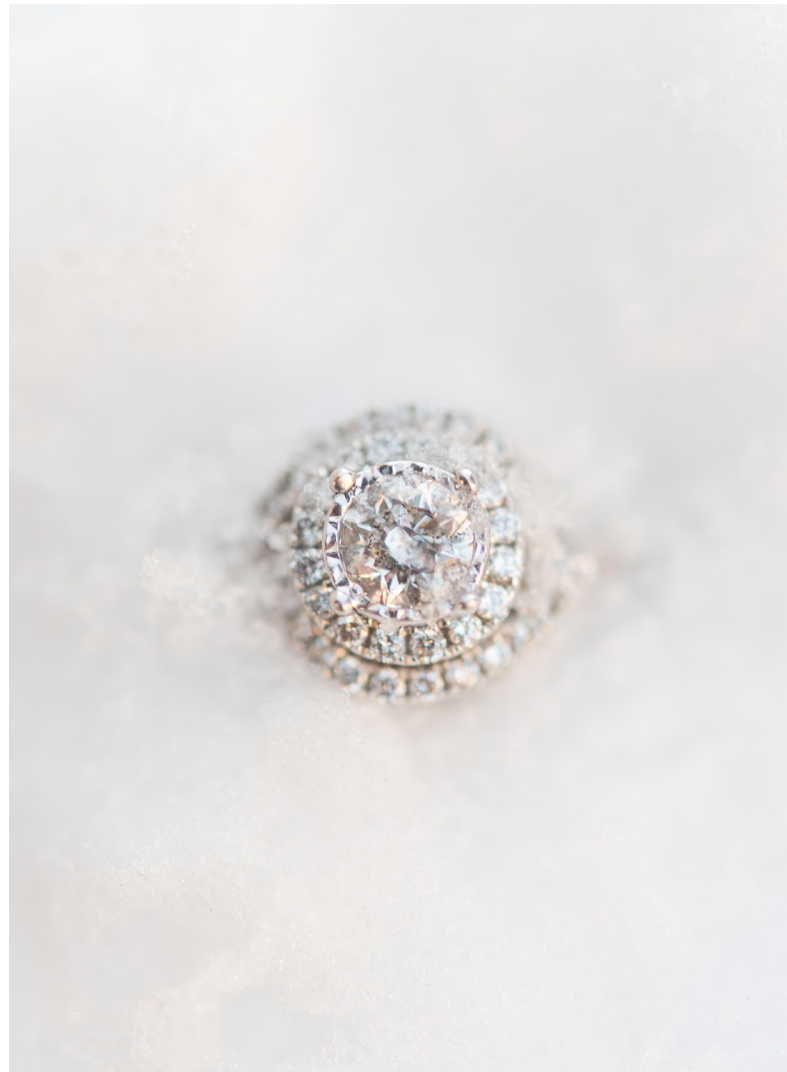
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## A LITTLE EXTRA POLISH

*Don't forget, your ring will be center stage, so give yourself permission to get it cleaned and your nails done, too!*



## SKIP THE SPRAY TAN

Although it might seem counterintuitive, I recommend NOT getting a spray tan (or using self tanner) before your session, even a few days prior. Spray tans

tend to photograph orange even when applied subtly and by a professional. Your actual skin tone will photograph the most beautifully and naturally!





FASHION TIPS

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# *For Him*

*Because dapper and debonair  
never go out of style!*







## AS LONG AS HE'S GOT THAT SUIT & TIE!

From James Bond to Donald Draper, men look most striking in a well-tailored suit. Gentlemen, if you don't own a suit, now's might be the perfect time to invest in something you can wear for the rest of your life!

The best part? Suits are probably a lot less expensive than you think! While custom suits can cost thousands of dollars, some of the most well-known brands have off-the-rack suits in their stores for a fraction of the price.

When picking a suit, solid shades of gray or navy are a strong complement to most women's outfits. In the meantime, loud pinstripes or plaid patterns tend to distract the eye.



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THERE'S NO  
SUBSTITUTE  
*for a*  
WELL-TAILORED  
*Suit*

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## MIX IT UP

Many grooms love to mix a suit coat, blazer, or sport coat with a different pant color (like khakis or different colored slacks). This adds extra visual interest and can be more fun than wearing two full suits in a row. Wearing a jacket with a different pant color is basically a fresh take on a timeline classic!





## LAYERED LOOKS

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Next time you walk by a store like J. Crew, you'll notice the male mannequins and models are always wearing several layers at once. Layers on men look great on camera, so even when it's hot outside, trust me when I say that it's worth a little discomfort for photos that will last a lifetime! Blazers, vests, cardigans, and coats up the level of any look for men. If your guy isn't a suit-wearing kind of guy, a sweater with a pop of color from a long-sleeved, collared shirt underneath (with or without a tie) might be a more comfortable—but still dressy—option for you. At the very least, I recommend wearing long dress pants, a button-up dress shirt, belt, and dress shoes. Styles change, but for men, suits, layers, dress shirts, and slacks will never go out of style. As a result, your engagement photos will always look timeless!





## IT'S ALL IN

Now, let's talk shoes and pants for gentlemen! Long pants and close-toed shoes are the most sophisticated and masculine looks for men. They draw attention away from legs and feet and place the focus where your fiancé (and your mom and grandma) wants it—on your face. So, for your engagement session, it's best to leave the shorts, sandals, and jeans at home. In the meantime, brown leather dress shoes complement almost every look, whether you're wearing a full suit or blazer and colored pants. Plus, brown leather dress shoes go with just about everything, so you'll be able to wear them for years to come!

## *The Details*

Fellas, you can accessorize too! Ties, bowties, pocket squares, colored socks, belts, tie clips, suspenders, vests, and watches are sharp complements to any suit or men's outfit. If you decided to bring two suits to your session, you might start with a traditional necktie and belt, then switch to suspenders and a bow tie for your second look. If two suits are too stressful, no problem! One look will do the trick! If you like, you can still mix and match accessories to complement both of your fiancé's dresses/outfits. This will eliminate the need for a full change during the session but still give variety!



## how to PREP YOUR MAN



Feeling anxious about how your groom is going to react to this whole "photo" thing? You aren't alone! I get messages from brides all the time who are worried their guy won't be into photos. But, I have good news for you, friend. You're both more photogenic than you think! More often than not, people feel self conscious in front of the camera because they don't know what to do or how to pose. I'll tell you and your fiancé exactly what to do (not in a bossy way), so you don't have to worry about a thing! At the end of engagement sessions, receiving specific instructions often leaves VRP grooms saying, "That wasn't as bad as I thought. It was actually fun!"

While I'll be sure to make your groom as comfortable as possible in front of the camera, there are a few things you can do to help him love the engagement photo process even more. First, show him what he can expect by scrolling through 2-3 engagement sessions on my blog together. Second, don't wait until the last minute to choose outfits. This can cause unnecessary stress and rushing. Next, leave plenty of time to get to your session. You don't want to start your photos after arguing about parking and hustling to get to our meeting spot. Last but not least, have patience with him. You're marrying him because he's a keeper. Show him love in this process. I think you'll be surprised how much you'll both enjoy your engagement session!

## THAT'S WHAT *he* SAID



"Engagement photos didn't take long, and they weren't as painful as I thought they'd be. It was actually fun . . . especially when we got to use props (like champagne)! Now, I like to look back at our engagement photos and remember the time we were engaged, so have fun with your engagement photos! The session is what you make it. Go into it with an open mind, and just enjoy the moment."

-LOGAN DEXTER

"Engagement photos were important to me because it is a great opportunity to have professional photographs of the engagement period that'll serve as memories. It is also important because it allows you to know more about the photographer who will be in charge of your wedding, and as a result, you'll be comfortable being around them. Therefore, the photos of the ceremony and reception will be more spontaneous and will be more beautiful."

-JOSE CRUZ

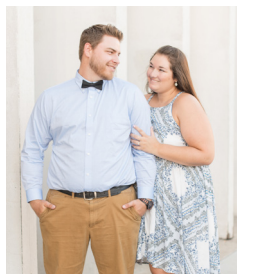


"Having engagement pictures was important for us because it gave us a minute to slow down and celebrate the engagement . . . The engagement photos weren't uncomfortable at all. I think it helped that we took them in places that were comfortable and peaceful for us, but at the same time Victoria made it a relaxing experience. Victoria laid out the plan for what photos we would take with slight modifications along the way, building off of lighting and what our comfort levels were. It was a fluid and easy-going experience . . . All you have to do is be able to follow directions, smile, and enjoy the moment—that's all, nothing more and nothing less. It's a painless and important part of the engagement and wedding timeline that lets you remember where you started, so you can share it with family and friends. Suck it up, buttercup."

-BRET ULYAT

"When I got engaged, one activity I was dreading was engagement photos. I'm not exactly comfortable in front of a camera, so the thought of posing for pictures was making me uncomfortable . . . One concern I had was that I would look awkward. Victoria took care of that and told me exactly how to stand down to the finger. I also felt a little awkward posing with my fiancé at first, but after about a minute, it was actually sort of funny. We weren't really forced to fake smiles; in fact, we could hardly contain ourselves from laughing at times. Looking back, it was a pretty important start to our marriage. My wife printed out a ton of photos and put them on the wall. It made me incredibly happy to see her so excited. If I could pass along some advice to a fellow man, I would absolutely tell you not to stress about engagement photos and definitely hire someone as talented as Victoria Rayburn. She somehow managed to make me not look comfortable and she made me a hero to my wife."

-CHRIS PETERSON





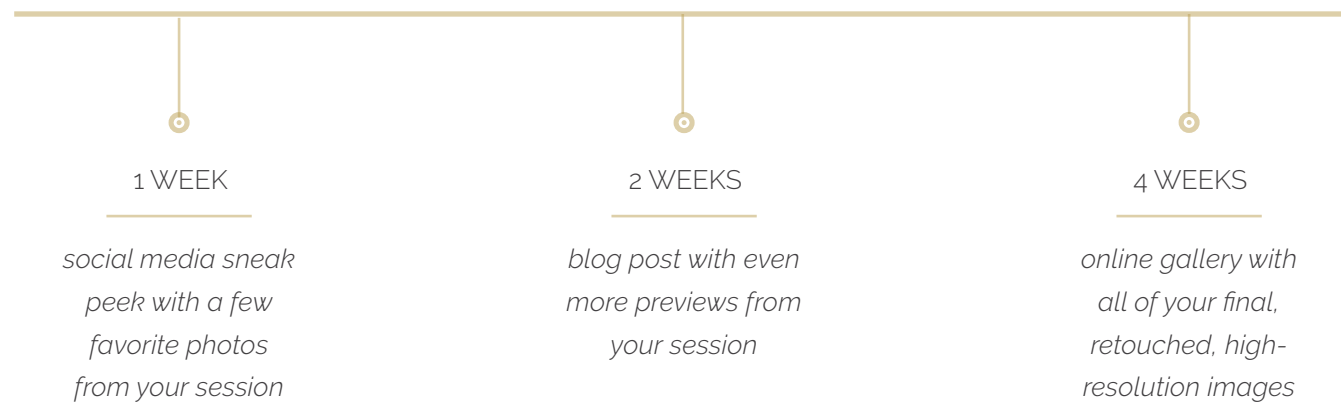


## AFTER THE SESSION

Last but not least, I want to encourage you to make a day (or at least an evening) of your engagement session! Take off work, enjoy a spa day, or simply relax and enjoy the day together. After your session, schedule a dinner reservation. You're already dressed up, so why not go out?! The wedding planning process can feel all-consuming, so use this day (or at least the evening) to relax and have fun together. You deserve it!



## PHOTO DELIVERY TIMELINE



## ONE FINAL NOTE

I know I just gave you a lot to think about. This guide was created to simply help make your engagement session experience something you'll look back fondly on for years and years to come. At the end of the day, though, the location you choose and the outfits you select won't matter nearly as much as the memories you make together. Your future marriage is the most important thing, and your engagement session should be time for just to be yourselves and enjoy being together. Just focus on having fun together, laughing a lot, and I'll take care of the rest!



## ENGAGEMENT SESSION

# Checklist

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- ☐ SET DATE, TIME, & LOCATION WITH VICTORIA
- ☐ REVIEW ENGAGEMENT SESSION GUIDE FOR STYLE TIPS
- ☐ SCHEDULE HAIR & MAKEUP APPOINTMENTS
- ☐ CHOOSE YOUR OUTFITS
- ☐ GET YOUR NAILS DONE
- ☐ CLEAN YOUR RING
- ☐ PACK A BAG WITH:
  - ☐ Flats or flip-flops for walking between photo spots
  - ☐ Outfit two & accessories (If you don't mind arriving in your first outfit, that would be great!)
  - ☐ Touch-up makeup
  - ☐ Water bottle (for warmer sessions)
  - ☐ Coat or cover-up (for colder sessions)
- ☐ PICK A FUN POST-SESSION DATE NIGHT SPOT
- ☐ ENJOY YOUR ENGAGEMENT SESSION & DAY TOGETHER!



*Can't wait to see you soon!*

*Victoria*



