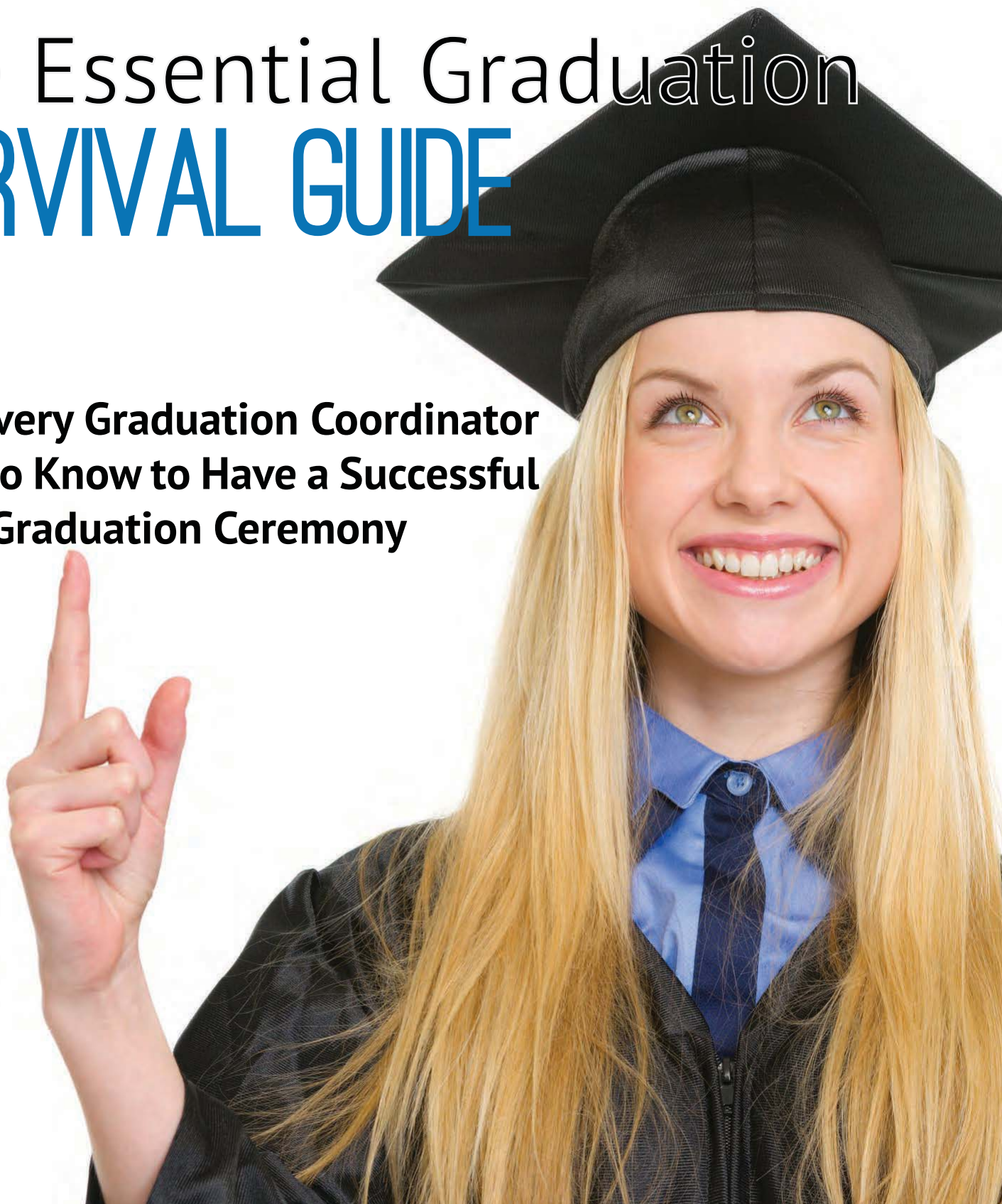


The Essential Graduation **SURVIVAL GUIDE**

**What Every Graduation Coordinator
Needs to Know to Have a Successful
Graduation Ceremony**



Written & Published By:

GraduationSource
Achieving Made Simple



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Don't Miss These Significant Dates!

A. Graduation Ceremony Date

Every educator and administrator knows that it is absolutely critical that a specific date be set for your graduation ceremony. But did you know that this date must also be announced to your parents, students, teachers and other school staff – months before the actual event so that they and your graduation committee can make proper preparations?

The graduation ceremony date is typically set a couple of weeks after the end of the school year, this prevents senior students from mentally “checking-out” before their classes have officially ended. This will also help your graduation coordinator have ample time to plan everything and to make certain there are allotted timeframes for every important task.

Our best tip: Take the time to coordinate with fellow educators when choosing the best graduation date. Also take into consideration any national or local holidays that may conflict with your date(s), as well as any popular local events which families may choose to attend during this time.

The best date for our school's graduation would be:

The next best date would be:

Our third choice is:

B. Invitations

Once a graduation date has been chosen, you can now plan backwards from there. It is a time honored tradition to send out invitations to the students and their parents to invite them to attend graduation. But remember – you'll need to get price quotes for the invitations, order them and then also distribute them among your parents and students. This process all takes time, we recommend that you order your announcements at least 12 weeks prior to graduation. That way there will be ample time to order, print and mail them. Be certain to send out invitations a minimum of 6 weeks prior to the graduation day, so families can make their special plans. They may wish to invite extended family or friends who are out of town or who need to make special arrangements to be there.

Our best tip: Get at least 3 quotes from vendors on invitations that you like. Remember to consider not only price, but also quality and delivery time as well.

Quote from Vendor 1:

Quote from Vendor 2:

Quote from Vendor 3:

C. Measuring the Students

You can expect that as the days inch closer to graduation that the students will be more and more excited about graduation day. One of those terrific milestone events is the time when students are measured for graduation gowns, as they realize that soon they will be “really” wearing those graduation outfits and crossing the stage for their diplomas. But the graduation coordinator is responsible for this important task – and we know that you want each and every student to look their very best on this momentous day.

Take the time to plan a Measuring Day that is at least 16 weeks before the graduation ceremony. This is in your school’s best interest. If you have a large graduating class and measuring cannot be completed in a single day – set aside two days or several days that fall within that prior to 16 week time frame as it can only help you and your school.

Remember that measuring students will take time. This is a task where you as graduation coordinator and others who are assisting you will be managing many details that matter – if a student’s measurements are “off” then their robe will not fit them properly.

Some schools worry about whether or not a few students will graduate and then put off measuring them – until they have their final list of students. Doing this causes much unneeded stress and results in placing a last minute order. A good graduation company will allow you to return unused gowns free of charge, or with a minimal fee, so we recommend that you measure every senior student so that no one risks being left out – and then return the extras if the need arises.

Our best tip: Remember the old fashioned saying “A stitch in time saves nine?” Try measuring each student and then double-check their measurements for accuracy. It is easy and quick – and will help every student look their best on graduation day!

D. Strike a Pose: Photography

If your school wants to have your students appear in the yearbook dressed in graduation gowns, then coordinating photography is an important step. There are two suggestions when considering this for your school’s yearbook and senior class. The first is to consider ordering a variety of graduation gowns in a range of sizes that can be shared among the senior class and used for the class photos. The second option would be to place your school’s entire order before graduation photos are taken, so that every student will have their own individual gown to wear.

Some schools may have the concern about a few seniors who might not graduate and would prefer to avoid having to return an unused gown. This is one of the top reasons schools could consider ordering a smaller selection just for their graduation photos and then place the school order as it is needed.

Remember that the graduation coordinator must provide a date for the photography session(s) and then inform the students and teachers about when the photos will be taken so everyone can look their best.

Try to take note of the overall timeframe and then take into consideration also the printing of the yearbook and then the actual date of the graduation ceremony. Most schools will use the gymnasium as a place to have the photographer set up their station.

Our best tip: Concerned about those few students who may not graduate with the senior class who would appear in their graduation gowns in the yearbook? Remember that their friends would appreciate seeing their smiling, proud faces in the yearbook right next to their friends so they can sign friendly messages to each other and share memories of the school year.

E. Ordering the Graduation Gowns

As mentioned earlier, the order for the graduation gowns should take place months before the graduation ceremony. A coordinator will want to keep in mind the exact number of students that are graduating, the photography, the cost and how fast the gowns can be delivered – as all of these details matter in your planning for a successful graduation day. It is important to note that a select few graduation companies do charge significantly less for the gowns if you choose to order early. With many schools paying such close attention to every line item in their budgets, this is a very easy and simple way to find a needed school item at significant savings. So the more organized you are as graduation coordinator and the earlier you can place your order, the more you can anticipate saving on your overall graduation gown budget.

One benefit of this savings is not only reducing cost, but knowing that you can put those graduation funds into another much-needed graduation expense. Every student, parent, educator and administrator knows how important graduation day is and this is a day that will be remembered for a lifetime. Students deserve to have their “moment in the spotlight” and schools can do many things to make graduation day a special time.

Our best tip: Time management is the key in handling the preparation of a graduation ceremony. Set a firm date to order graduation gowns and know that it will save you money, time and effort.

What is the best date to order graduation gowns for your school?

F. Delivery

Take out your favorite marker or pen, and be sure to circle that delivery day on your calendar! Then, announce it to everyone – the students, teachers and the staff.

So, how do you choose a delivery date for your graduation gowns? It's easier than you might think. Just keep your overall timeline in mind. Your ideal delivery date should be at least a month before the graduation ceremony.

This is the perfect time for your delivery date because students can come pick up their gowns and be ready for the big day and you can be confident that everyone will look their best. If there are only a few students who are graduating, you may choose to have the gowns delivered just a few days before the event (but keep in mind that ordering earlier can offer a school terrific savings for their graduation day's bottom line). You don't want to scramble to place a last minute order if some of the children were measured incorrectly or happened to grow in between the measuring and delivery dates.

Our best tip: Choose your delivery date for graduation gowns and let everyone know so gowns can easily be distributed. Remember to choose a date that is at least a month before the graduation so everyone has time to prepare and plan properly.

What is the best delivery date for graduation gowns for your school?:

G. Pass The Gowns Out! Distribution to the Students

We know that passing the gowns out is not quite as easy as passing a note in class. But with our helpful tips, hopefully it will be easier than you might think it could be. The first thing you'll want to do is to set a date to distribute the gowns to the students.

This date should be officially announced to faculty and the graduating class. Remember that the gowns have to be passed out keeping two deadlines in mind, depending on your school's individual needs:

- Are you having the students wear them for the yearbook photos? Then pass them out a few days before photos are taken.
- Will students be wearing the gowns just for the graduation ceremony? Give out gowns a couple of weeks ahead of time.

You'll want to set this date firm on the calendar and then be sure everyone is notified. Students need to try on the gowns so that the fit of the gown can be properly checked and a replacement can be ordered if it is needed. If you have a large graduating class or school, remember that the gowns will also need to be labeled with the students' names. Did you know that good graduation companies offer a service called alpha packing? Alpha packing enables the speedy distribution of dozens of gowns to a large graduating class. Otherwise, you run the risk of students taking gowns that aren't their size and were intended for someone else.

Our best tip: Set your graduation gown distribution date (and time) and inform everyone involved. Don't forget to ask your graduation company if they offer the helpful alpha packing option too!

What is your graduation gown distribution date?

Who is helping to distribute the graduation gowns?

Did you ask your graduation company if they offer alpha packing?



II. Choosing Graduation Partners

A. “Speech! Speech!” Finding a Commencement Speaker

One of the most important tasks you’ll undertake in planning a graduation ceremony is choosing the best commencement speaker. Schools want to select someone to speak at their graduation that will impart a great lesson to their students and also serve as an inspiration and an example for how they will mold their future lives; professionally and personally.

Don’t know how or where to find a commencement speaker? Your terrific commencement speaker is out there and will be honored that you’ve invited them to your school for this important day. Consider community leaders, athletes, CEOs or CFOs or a local hero who has done something amazing.

When asking speakers you’ll want to keep in mind that speeches should fit within a specific time frame. Typically your Commencement Speaker speaks for about 7 minutes, but this can vary depending on your school’s specific needs for the graduation ceremony. If you are uncertain, ask school administration or previous graduation coordinators for further information – before you invite speakers. One of the first questions they will ask is, “How long should my speech be?”

Remember that anyone you choose will need some time to prepare a great speech to deliver to your students. Just as we have advised you to plan ahead with other logistics for graduation day – we’re going to encourage you to start brainstorming now about who to invite to be your commencement speaker.

Some inspirational commencement speeches we admire:

1. University of Texas – Admiral William H. McRaven - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxBQLFLei70>
2. Harvard– J.K. Rowling - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHGqp8Iz36c>
3. MUM 2014 – Jim Carrey - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V80-gPkpH6M>
4. Stanford University - Steve Jobs - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1R-jKKp3NA>

Our best tip: Don’t delay – plan today! Make a list of 10 people you’d like to invite as a speaker at your graduation ceremony. Make a call, send a letter and formally invite them. We think you’ll be pleasantly surprised.

Potential List of Speakers:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

B. Pick The Top Hits! Selecting a Graduation Song

While admittedly, the coordinator could work alone in the selection process to make this go more quickly – we advise you to actively involve your senior class and the school music teachers when selecting graduation songs. The graduation song should be agreed upon by everyone. Involving the students and school in the choice of the song will help keep everyone excited about graduation – and make the song truly feel like “our song” for the senior class.

You can choose traditional music, such as “pomp and circumstance” as many schools do. Or you can get creative and use modern, inspirational music.

The graduation song is often about camaraderie, friendship, success and hope. It has to be a special song that everyone can connect with. But it should especially speak to the students most of all, as this is their moment. If students have trouble keeping from bursting into song, then you’ve made the perfect choice!

If the graduation song is going to be composed by one of the students or the music teacher, then they should be notified early on in the school year so they will have plenty of time to create the best composition for the event.

Most graduation programs include multiple songs. We recommend three:

- An opening song
- A song to walk across the stage to
- Another song to close out graduation

The best graduation ceremonies are highly coordinated and well thought out. Take the time to choose terrific songs.

Our best tip: We recommend you create 2 different programs for the event. One that is distributed to the students and their families and a second which is used internally to cue all of your event logistics to keep things running smoothly, including the music cues. **Check out our article on “Top Ten Graduation Songs” for some great ideas on which songs to choose for your ceremony.**

Did you meet with students and the school music teacher to discuss the graduation song? Will you have multiple songs?

Off the top of your head, jot down 6 Potential Songs:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

C. Strike a Pose! Finding a Photographer/Videographer

The photographer/videographer is a critical graduation partner for the graduation coordinator to choose. Not only will the students enjoy these photos but so will their families, friends and future generations as they look upon this milestone that has been accomplished. We highly recommend you seek out a professional photographer that specializes in graduations.

There are many reasons you want a photographer with this type of specific experience. Try to find a photographer who has worked for schools that are similar to yours in size and age. If your graduating classes are for young children, it is very helpful to know the photographer will capture terrific shots of the graduates because they've worked with this age group and know exactly those perfect graduation not-to-be-missed moments everyone will want to remember.

Quite often you can contract with the same photographer who manages the photography for the school yearbook. Chances are, the more service you contract with one photographer, the more you can reduce the overall budget for photography.

Want to stretch your school graduation budget just a bit further, and think photography is an area where you can do this? If the school has its own official photographer or has students who are aspiring photographers (i.e. part of a photography club), then you may already have photography equipment they can use and can plan for graduation ceremony photographs done by them.

If you choose to have the schools official photographer or student photographers take the graduation photographs, do take the time to pick out a small thank you gift or send them a thank you note for their participation in the graduation ceremony. Also meet with them prior to the event to describe specifically which parts of the event you would especially like them to take photographs, as you are dealing with enthusiastic but amateur photographers and they may need to be guided a bit more than a professional photographer would be for a successful day.

We highly recommend you create a program for the photography for your photographers to help plan the day from. Whether you have professional or amateur photographers, this program is an extremely helpful guide. It's important to know what photos will be taken and where they should be taken from. The photographer should scope out the venue before the event to create and provide recommendations for what shots they will take at what stages of the event. Without planning ahead you run the risk of missing out on great photo opportunities with teachers, administrators, and students. In the modern age it may be a good idea to take video as well as photos. You can capture the great speeches, the inspiring moments, and all the students taking their walk across the stage, and create a video highlight DVD to offer to the students and their families as a keepsake. You may also choose to put some of your graduation moments on your school website or videos linked through YouTube.com, so students can share and enjoy them way past graduation day. **Keep a look out for our new eBook, "Capturing Memories on the Stage" to read more about how to coordinate the best photos and videos for both the students and the event.**

Our best tip: Think of who you would like to ask to be your graduation ceremony photographer and plan to invite them. Next, take a look at last year's graduation ceremony photos and think, "How this year's graduation ceremony photos & videos could be improved?"

Did you decide if you will use a professional or student/school photographer?

Have you located photography & video equipment?

D. Finding a Venue

Usually, the venue for the graduation ceremony is within the school grounds, such as the auditorium, football field, or gym. However, if there is no available space in the school, the coordinator will have to find a spacious venue elsewhere.

We recommend considering having your ceremonies indoors, as the weather can often add an unpredictable element (rain or a storm) which could ruin a ceremony.

Next the coordinator should obtain quotations from prospective venues. Remember to not only check pricing that will make your administration smile, but also to look at quality, top-notch customer service, lighting, sound systems available and available parking. Each of these factors will help to contribute for smooth sailing on graduation day.

There are a few “make or break” factors we recommend you look for when checking out venues for your graduation ceremony. One right at the top of the list is that the venue should comfortably accommodate all of your students, parents, teachers and guests – with no need for standing. Everyone should be able to sit down as they wish to. No graduation coordinator wants to hear about a student who has a family member travel a far distance to attend graduation, arrive late. Sometimes that person has a real need for a seat like a sprained ankle or they are elderly. Or perhaps they'd like to run a video camera while their loved one walks across the stage. But do be certain that everyone can sit for the ceremony.

The coordinator has to avoid getting a venue that is far from the school, difficult to get to, or has limited availability for public transportation. The venue should have ample parking, as each student could possibly have family and friends that travel in excess of three cars each. Remember if you have a graduating class with 300 students graduating, you'll need to take into account how many guests they will have. Some students have large and extended families who all want to come. Because of this, you may have to make the hard decision and distribute tickets with your graduation invitations that limit the number of guests each student can invite. Planning ahead will help you know exactly how many people you will need to accommodate.

Another suggestion for graduation day can be to limit them to only two cars and then distribute tickets to park at the venue to prevent each guest from taking their own vehicle. If the graduation ceremony will be done within the school grounds, all the same precautions should be taken in regards to distributing tickets for the event and for parking permissions.

Our best tip: Think about the size of your graduating class and then the size of the crowd, how will you best accommodate them? Now think about 3 places nearby you could choose as venues, if your school is not the ideal location for graduation.

What venues would be best for your school's graduation?

Location 1:

Location 2:

Location 3:

What challenges concern you most about graduation? (Parking, room for everyone, convenience of location, etc.). How can you best meet these challenges?

E. Best Dressed Students: Finding a Cap & Gown Vendor

The coordinator can easily find a cap and gown vendor by browsing the internet. You can look at caps & gowns and pick and choose from a variety of styles and colors easily and conveniently.

It's just as important to make sure that you're getting the best product and the best service you can for the lowest price. Graduation ceremonies can get very expensive if you're not watching the budget closely. Every school today from large to small, private to public is watching the bottom line closely – and you still want to have a terrific graduation day that everyone remembers. Don't let the cap and gown order you have to place break the bank for your event.

Keep in mind that just because you've been using the same provider(s) for a few years, it doesn't mean that they have your school's budget as a concern. You'll want to make sure the company you select to work with has a good mission statement and a real desire to help schools save money.

Some schools consider renting graduation gowns, but this comes with its own set of problems that a graduation coordinator should be aware of. If you rent gowns, it is critical that you monitor all of the gown sets and ensure that not only are they distributed properly but also collected perfectly at the end – or you face additional charges. Remember that happy, graduating students will be running out the door, throwing their caps in the air to celebrate and this can be an organizational nightmare. While there are upfront savings on renting, you need to walk into this with open eyes and keep in mind the time spent collecting, folding, sorting, reboxing – and then mailing back all of those gowns. Even if you have a small graduating class this can be a hectic task to undertake for several school staff members plus the graduation coordinator.

It is best to look for gowns that are high quality but inexpensive so that the students can be allowed to keep the gowns as a token of their achievements, rather than return them. Some companies even sell keepsake boxes so that students can save the gown and cap along with all their other great high school memories all in one place. That way the students can look back on the times they spent in their youth fondly and even share those memories and items with their own children one day.

We highly suggest the graduation coordinator begin to look early in the school year when selecting a provider of these products. As mentioned earlier, some vendors charge less when you order early. The graduation is itself is a large undertaking for you, but just imagine a business that specializes in graduates. Remember that graduation season will be a busy time of year, as many other schools are contacting them too. As a result, many vendors will increase prices if you wait to order too late in the year. Order early to make sure that everything is in stock and available for you, to enjoy savings and the convenience of having your school's graduation gowns ready for the ceremony.

There are terrific graduation gown vendors to work with that can make your graduation day run smoothly. One majorly important factor in selecting the provider is definitely whether or not they accept unused packages for a full refund and not a store credit, and not with ever so popular "restocking fees". This way if you order for all the students and then some don't actually graduate, you can just return the items with no hassle and at no cost to your school. Always be sure to look at the total price, as some companies add in extras even though they bill some services for free. For example, some providers may offer additional services such as measuring the students and distributing the gowns for you. This is a service they may say is "free" but actually you are paying for it – often in a big way.

The selected vendor should be reliable, have a great website that's easy to navigate, and be able to deliver the gowns within the provided timeframe. We also recommend you choose to work with a chosen vendor that has been in this line of business for many years, one with experience and knowledge. This often offers great benefits for you. Businesses that have been around for at least 5 to 15 years are typically the most competitive and also the most organized. Older companies generally have very large organizations that cost a large amount to operate. As a result, your school is paying for the size of their organization and how it operates internally built into the price. Likewise, if the company is too new, they probably haven't worked out all the kinks yet, so be prepared to have some problems with your order that may not be resolved as fast as you'd like.

Do note, that low prices do not necessarily mean low quality. If you think that the price is "too good to be true", always request a sample of the product. If you can't request a sample, be hesitant about giving this vendor your school's business. Likewise, if the sample you request takes weeks to get to you, you shouldn't give the company your business, as this may be an indicator of how they are organized to manage any type of order. **For a more in-depth analysis of how to select a cap and gown provider, check out the free report "Stacking up the Competition: A Graduation Provider's Essential Checklist".**

Our best tip: Get on the web today and look for a graduation gown vendor. We recommend you look for a website that is easy to navigate and is well-organized so you can find products for convenient shopping. They should also offer early order savings and give a free sample so you can take a look at their product before placing an order. Look also for a vendor that accepts returns without forcing fees on you – and one that provides great service at a budget-friendly price.

Graduation Gown Provider Notes:

The vendor we prefer:

- **Did you order a sample?**
- **Do they accept returns with no fees?**
- **Do they have excellent customer service (Check Out their BBB Rating)?**

F. Finding a Diploma and Cover Provider

Diplomas and Covers are typically custom items. Most schools will have the diplomas and covers both emblazoned with their school logo and/or name in gold foil on these items. As a result of this customization, ordering early isn't as much a suggestion as it is a necessity.

Keep in mind that these items take time to produce. You want to work with vendors who produce a level of quality that is considered better than average and it won't be an instant process to create them. We recommend you look for a company that takes 8 weeks or longer to make diplomas and covers.

While taking a long time may seem like a bad idea at first, trust us when we say that it is not. Orders that are handled to quickly by a company for this type of product typically mean that corners will be cut, leaving a school with a cheap and inferior product. Remember that this is something you will be unable to return – as it is custom made.

The great thing about covers is that order too many is not a challenge – because you can always use them for next year's graduation. It can be very convenient if you can find a one-stop shop type of vendor for your graduation needs, where you can buy your graduation gowns as well as your diplomas and covers, but ordering from two different places isn't always a bad thing. It could save you money and it also helps with overall graduation planning as the different products require different amounts of time to make and be delivered.

Depending upon your school's budget and needs, it may be best to order stock diplomas and covers from a provider. These will arrive blank and can be ordered fast and delivered just as quickly without having to worry about quality. Stock covers and diplomas can suit your school's needs and save your school time and money.

So whether you want them customized or plain, we recommend that it is best to get multiple options and price quotes to ensure you've done your due diligence and made the best decision for your school that you could. **For a more in-depth analysis of how to select a cap and gown provider, check out the free report "Stacking Up the Competition: A Graduation Provider's Essential Checklist".**

Our best tip: Decide first if you will choose custom or stock diplomas and covers. Then contact 3 vendors for price quotes and information:

- **Vendor 1:**
- **Vendor 2:**
- **Vendor 3:**

G. Finding Other Essential Product Vendors

Sometimes a school will want to honor children in other ways, such as the distribution of honor medals, cords, and stoles that signify that the student is in fact on the honor roll or graduating with some other level of distinguished honors. These products are readily available online as well and can be found relatively inexpensively.

We recommend you do your research with vendors, as some graduation providers may even provide them for free with the purchase of a cap, gown, and tassel set. A good rule of thumb, is that if you can't see a price list, the company is keeping it hidden for a reason! **For a more in-depth analysis of how to select a cap and gown provider check out the free report “Stacking Up the Competition: A Graduation Provider’s Essential Checklist”.**

Our best tip: Will your school be honoring children in a special way this graduation season? If so, how? Research 3 vendors for these supplies. Remember to see if they have special package offers, some don't!

- **Vendor 1:**
- **Vendor 2:**
- **Vendor 3:**



III. It Takes a Great Team: Delegating the Tasks

A. Create a School Committee for Graduation

Your tasks as graduation coordinator will be a lot easier if there is a school graduation committee by your side. This committee will have different roles and responsibilities to fulfill in the preparation of the ceremony. The graduation coordinator can appoint key people who will oversee tasks, such as the venue decorations, security, the music, lights and other technical aspects, the ushers and other important details that will help graduation day run smoothly for everyone to enjoy.

Start creating your committee today especially if your senior graduating class is large, if this is your first year as graduation coordinator or you are starting to feel that there are just too many tasks for you as graduation coordinator to manage to get ready for the graduation ceremony.

There are many benefits to working with a team, starting with the access to other's skills and talents. There are things that you may not have thought of that others will, simply because they have a different perspective or experience. We highly recommend that you work with others rather than working on creating a graduation ceremony all by yourself.

Our best tip: Start creating your graduation committee today. Who should you invite and what tasks do you need help with?

Schedule an informal meeting with your new committee to talk about the graduation. Ask them to bring their ideas.

The date of our first meeting is:

B. Choose Who Will be in Charge of the Sound System

During the graduation ceremony, the sound system is a very important aspect of the event. Sound will have a lot of people's attention, between hearing student's names as they walk up to receive their diplomas, the music and the inspirational speeches during the ceremony. You'll want to choose a person who is highly knowledgeable about setting up microphones, speakers and the different musical instruments that may be used during the ceremony.

The person should always report back to the coordinator, giving them status updates on the sound system and should be given a strict timetable on when to have everything up and running and when each segment starts and begins.

We recommend having sound tests take place both days and hours prior to the ceremony, as sometimes sound systems are working great one minute and then not-so great the next.

Our sound system person will be:

C. Choose Who Will Decorate the Venue

The graduation coordinator can appoint a person or group of people who can help in the decoration and arrangement of the venue. This is a fun job and you'll have many to choose from – consider students in the Art Club or teachers and staff with a talent for decorating or arranging, as they may have previous experience decorating for graduation or other big school events.

We recommend involving as many students as possible in the arrangement of their graduation celebration if you can. This can range from picking out the decorations to putting them up to even helping to clean up once graduation ceremony has been completed. Many students have high school spirit and creativity and will be happy to help out, especially realizing this will be one of the final projects they do at their school it will be very special to them.

Decorators can be in charge of ordering flowers, streamers, balloons or other decorations to make your venue come to life and fill the space with high school spirit. The appointment for decorators ideally should be a month or several weeks before the actual event, giving them ample time to plan out the layout at the venue. They will need to visit the actual location – inside or outside – to help determine what will work best for this space.

Our best tip: Plan how you will invite students to participate (school announcement, sign-up sheet) and then set a meeting for the decorating committee.

1. **Our decorating committee is:**
2. **Our first meeting is:**

D. Select an Opening Speaker for the Ceremony

Usually, this role is assigned to the principal of the school. In this speech, they will welcome the students and parents to this very special event.

But there are other choices for a speaker to consider to. A teacher who has served as a guide to the senior class can be a good choice. The opening speaker can also be the person who is emceeing or the master of ceremony, who announces all of the speakers at the event prior to their speaking.

No matter who you choose, you want someone who is engaging who will give a rousing opening speech for students, parents and guests. The graduation coordinator should select an opening speaker a few weeks before the graduation ceremony. This will let the speaker properly prepare for the event.

Sometimes this speaker is referred to as a keynote speaker, or you can have both an opener and a keynote. The keynote is typically someone outside of the school who is an inspiration in some way to the students, and will leave them and their parents feeling that the world is an amazing place ripe with opportunities for success and happiness in life.

Our opening speaker is:

E. Select a Student Speaker

It is important for a school to have a Student Speaker, as many students and parents will especially look forward to and look back at this moment as a highlight in the graduation. You want to choose a student who will give a speech that is the voice for the senior class, saying something that reflects upon how they feel about the future, achievement and hope. Many schools choose as Student Speaker the student who is the class Valedictorian and Salutatorian. The graduation coordinator can also choose students who have done charitable acts or served as an inspiration for other students.

It is very important to let the students prepare in advance, as this may be the first time they have ever given a public speech and may find themselves nervous in front of crowds, even if they are an accomplished student. It's important to set up a small group of students or teachers that the students can stand up and practice their speech in front of to help make the final event an easier and less stressful moment. Be encouraging, positive and remember to photograph and videotape this student's speech. This could end up being the speech of a future leader in the world, and this student will remember this accomplishment as a milestone in their lifetime, not just graduation.

Our student speaker is:

F. Choose a Master of Ceremonies or Emcee

The Master of Ceremonies or Emcee can be appointed to anyone who is experienced in hosting an event. This can be a faculty member or even the graduation coordinator. It is ideal if you choose someone who is enthusiastic, good with names and faces and who has experience speaking in front of a large group of people. You want to choose someone who can “pump up a crowd.” Often successful choices are ones who students are familiar with and people who are funny and may make the crowd laugh and will encourage school spirit. Your emcee needs to be very familiar with the flow of the graduation ceremony as they will be “the face” of the event to the public.

If the coordinator needs to oversee everything during the event behind the scenes, the role of emcee should be given to another person. A graduation ceremony takes a lot of effort to put together and you may not be able to manage both roles, even though being the Emcee can be great fun.

Keep in mind that your school's graduation can run a few hours. So does the Oscars! Having a terrific Emcee is critical in creating a terrific graduation event experience for everyone. You do not want guests wriggling in their chairs, tapping their feet while waiting for their child's name to be called and thinking about how long this is taking. Graduation day is a very happy and momentous occasion, and the Emcee that you pick should embody that attitude to a level where it simply can't help but be contagious for everyone in attendance!

Our Master of Ceremonies/Emcee is:

G. Appoint Ushers

The graduation coordinator should appoint ushers who will be in charge of assisting the parents and guests of the graduation ceremony. These ushers can be younger students who are responsible enough to do their duties during the event. It is recommended that you bring the ushers to the venue before the actual event, to familiarize them with the seating arrangement and the layout. Each should be provided with individual duties, such as directing traffic or directing students, teachers and parents to their seats.

Our best tip: choose how you will appoint ushers and decide upon their duties and then invite them to participate.

Our ushers will be:

IV. Graduation Ceremony Program

We highly recommend that you have 2 versions of your Graduation Ceremony Program. One that will be passed out for students and parents to enjoy and save as a keepsake for the occasion. The other that you will use as a “behind the scenes” master to ensure that your event runs as smooth as silk.

As graduation coordinator, you have probably started thinking about your programs already. Find a volunteer to help you with the programs, a school secretary or someone who is very good with details is an excellent choice.

In the Master Ceremony Program, you will have every detail – from soup to nuts – that involves your graduation. Yes, this program will be quite long but it will hold details such as the choice of music, speakers, the names of all graduating students and the order in which they receive their diplomas. It will also hold behind the scenes information such as lighting and music cues.

You will want to distribute copies of this Master Ceremony Diploma to everyone who is involved with the graduation committee. You may even consider showing it to some of your vendors, depending on your needs.

The Graduation Ceremony Program that is for students and parents will contain the names of all of the graduates, the student speaker and the graduation speakers. It will also serve as a guide to how the event will unfold for guests and students. Some schools choose to sell advertisements to parents and families, to offer good wishes to their new graduates. Some teachers and staff will also place good wishes ads to the new graduates as well. This can be a terrific way to motivate school spirit as the senior class year has come to an end and everyone is getting ready for the next chapter of their life.

As you can see, there are some differences between the 2 different programs. But there are also some similarities. Here are details and factors you will want to keep in mind when planning both programs.

A. Plan the Handing Out of Diplomas

Most likely, the biggest highlight of graduation for students and all in attendance is the handing out of the diplomas. Everyone remembers that moment when they walk across the stage or when they see their child proudly holding a diploma, achieving that milestone. The graduation coordinator has to plan the best way for the diplomas to be handed out, in a very well-organized way.

The key to success is to know the seating arrangements of all of the students (for handing out of the diplomas), understand the order of the events and always keep the master schedule on hand.

Our best tip: Decide how this will be done (most schools do this alphabetically, by student's last name). Confirm that students are graduating and then list them in both programs. Note if students have received school honors or awards in addition to their diploma that should be recognized in the programs.

B. Plan the Allotted Time for the Speakers

You know there will be several speakers who will speak for the students and attending guests. It is critical that the graduation coordinator provides a specific, allotted time frame for each speaker at the podium.

Each speaker should be encouraged not to be either too long or too short. This is one of the top reasons you invite speakers in advance, so they can practice their speeches and one of the things they will do is time their speeches as they practice. The best talks are under 7 minutes and leave people wanting more (not falling asleep in their chairs).

Probably the longest to speak should be the VIP Keynote Speaker. The coordinator has to confirm earlier with the speakers the length of their speech and the number of minutes they can talk. Manage the time carefully so that the entire graduation ceremony program can fit into the given schedule. Students and parents are excited to attend graduation, but no one enjoys a speaker who rambles on – or even one who rushes through a speech.

Our best tip: Confirm the proper spelling and title for each of your speakers that will appear in the program. If there is a bio (biography) for your speaker, be certain to receive well in advance for your program for the students and parents to enjoy.

C. Plan the Opening and Closing Musical Numbers

Every eye will be on the graduates as they make their processional walk. This is a momentous moment and the graduation coordinator, along with the music committee, should choose a very inspiring opening and closing musical number. You'll also want to select great music to play during the student's announcements and individual trips across the stage.

Usually, there are songs and music that are associated with graduation. Choose a music or song that embodies your specific school's graduation spirit. It can be lively or a classical song that should be played by the school band or from a sound system.

The closing song is also important because it marks the end of the ceremony as well as the start of a new and exciting venture for the graduates. Closing songs can be emotional, lively, and *most importantly* happy.

Our best tip: Check with the music teacher or student committee about which songs have been selected and/or if the band will be playing.

D. Create the Graduation Ceremony Program

Once you have these details, your ceremony programs can be created. Remember that the Master Ceremony Program should include the order of events, names of the speakers, graduating students and faculty members.

Now is the time to contact the printer for program that will be handed out to students and parents on graduation day. We recommend you order approximately 5% additional copies than you need, to ensure that everyone gets a copy. Every student will want a copy and so will the parents, consider this when placing your order. Some students and parents like to send a copy to loved ones and you will likely want to keep a few copies of the program for your files/archives.

You can easily run off copies of the Master program in the school administration office for all members of the graduation committee. As we suggested you order extra copies of the student and parent program, we also recommend that you create extra copies of this Master program as well.

Our best tip: Once the programs have been printed, keep them in a cool, dry place where they will be undisturbed.

E. Distribute the Graduation Ceremony Program to the Students

Your Master program should be distributed to the graduation committee as soon as possible, to help everyone stay well-organized and on track.

The student and parent version of the program can be given out a few days prior to graduation to inform everyone of the details of the graduation ceremony. The Ushers may be assigned to giving out the program at the event. Give copies also to the teachers and advisors of the graduating class prior to the event. Additional copies should be available at the entrance, or neatly placed on seats.

Our best tip: Ask the graduating committee for the best tactics for distributing the student and parent version of the program. Consider your event location. Have each committee member confirm they have received a copy of the Master program.

F. Practice Makes Perfect – Meet With Your Event Committee to Go Over the Program

What's that old saying? "Practice makes perfect" and yes it does! Your event committee needs to be prepared for graduation day and your Master program is one of the helpful ways they will be ready. Once you've given them a copy of the program, schedule a meeting to go over the order of the events that will be announced at the graduation ceremony so that everyone understands the schedule of the day and what their specific duties are.

It is important to have at least meeting – perhaps a few if needed – with the different committees or appointed people to discuss the details of the ceremony and program. Less mistakes will happen if everyone is aware of the order of events. During rehearsals, the order of events should also be discussed briefly with students so that they are prepared for this exciting day too. It is the job of the coordinator to make sure that everyone has an idea about the details of the graduation ceremony and what role they will play.

Our best tip: Plan your event committee meeting and rehearsal as soon as you've got your programs!



V. Graduation Venue Arrangement

Every graduation coordinator wants the graduation venue to look terrific. Here are some helpful tips you'll want to keep on hand as you run through the location.

A. Display the School Logo and Symbol

Just about every school has its own logo or symbol. This school logo should be proudly displayed during the graduation ceremony, to encourage school spirit. The graduation coordinator and decorators should place the school logo and/or mascot image around the venue where everyone can easily see it.

Try placing the school logo and symbol (or mascot) at:

- The podium
- On a banner behind the graduates as they walk to receive their diplomas
- As parents/families enter the venue for the graduation ceremony – in the parking lot and at the entrance of the venue itself
- Remember to add the school logo and banner to the invitations and program for the event as well

Our best tip: Walk through the venue, taking some photographs. See the venue as a guest would see it. This will give you a good sense of where to place the school logo and symbol.

B. Arrange the Podium

Arranging the podium or the stage area is also a highly important task for the coordinator and the decorators. The stage area is where the speakers will give their speeches, and it is also where the students will receive their diplomas. The podium can be placed at the center of the stage for the speaker so that everyone can see him or her.

Usually, the decoration for the stage is kept simple during a graduation ceremony. Too many decorations, or overly done banners will take guests attention away from the graduates, and may ruin the focus of their very important photos and videos!

If the graduation coordinator will rent a venue outside the school, the place should have a stage area. The major focus of the stage should only be the speaker and the students that walk across it.

Our best tip: Be certain that you have a specific podium and stage area, no matter what type of venue you have chosen. Select carefully the decorations that will accent this area.

C. Check the Speaker System

We've recommended that the sound system should always be checked because it plays an extremely crucial part of the graduation ceremony. The graduation coordinator should also check where the speakers and the sound systems are located in the venue. The speakers shouldn't be too near the students and the guests. The entire sound setup should be confirmed "good to go" a few hours before the actual event.

The speakers and the sound systems can also be used during rehearsals so that they can be tested for any defects or problems. It is ideal to have technicians who can be present, especially during the ceremony, to troubleshoot any problems in the sound system.

Our best tip: Check and double check the speaker and sound system. Try to arrange for technicians to be on hand, to avoid any momentary mishaps with the system.

D. Arrange the Seating

The graduation coordinator should confidently know the seating arrangements of all the graduating students, the parents, teachers and guests. Overseeing the entire graduation ceremony can be easier if the coordinator knows where people are supposed to be seated. You'll also want to share this information with other members on the graduation committee, who may have to assist guests and students prior to and at the event – and it is extremely helpful for them to be knowledgeable about the seating arrangements, not to fumble about.

When there are proper seating arrangements for the students, it is much easier for the coordinator to plan the processional walk and the distribution of diplomas. The layout of the venue is also more organized when there are seats assigned for different groups attending the graduation ceremony. In case there are emergencies during the actual ceremony, the coordinator can easily locate the exact person needed to fix the problem.

We recommend that there should be at least two sets of equal rows with at least eight feet walking room on either side. There should be a row of space split down the middle at least eight feet wide as well to enable ease of access and prevent traffic jams. In a larger area, you can have three sets of equal rows with the same level of spacing. **An illustration of these potential layouts can be found in our upcoming article "Graduation Guide: Laying out the Venue".**

No matter how many sets of rows you have arranged, the ideal layout involves the immediate front rows to the right of center stage being reserved for speakers, the graduation committee that isn't otherwise busy, and other VIP's.

The closest front rows to the left of center stage should seat the students arranged in alphabetical order by last name row by row from leftmost seat towards the center. That way each row of students can file out to the side and onto the stage easily when it comes time for their names to be called.

From where the students and speakers' rows end and back to the entrance is where all family and guests should sit separated by a roped off area that clearly shows that the other seating is for students and speakers to sit, as to not interfere with the procession. **Keep a look out for our new eBook, "Setting the Stage for Celebrating Achievement" to read more in depth about how to arrange the venue.**

Our best tip: Decide on a seating arrangement for the students and share this information with other members of the graduation ceremony committee.

E. Arrange the Area for Processional Walk

The entrance of the graduates and their processional walk is probably one of the biggest highlights of the event. The graduation coordinator has to arrange the area and provide enough space for the students.

The decorators and the coordinator can place a long red carpet along the processional walk area for added emphasis and decoration. This area was explained previously as being at least eight feet wide to give enough room for the students to walk through the rows of people.

It also allows for a photographer or videographer to weave past the walking students to get great shots or get some great clips for a graduation video that the students, families and school can all enjoy.

Our best tip: Don't neglect taking the time to plan enough space for everyone to walk properly. No one wants graduates to stumble or trip as they walk to get their diplomas.

F. Finalize the Layout of the Venue

The graduation coordinator should present a finalized layout of the venue to everyone involved – from the school administration, to the ushers and all members of the graduation ceremony committee.

The school band should be informed where they are going to be positioned during the ceremony. The technicians, photographers and videographers should also know the different areas where they can position themselves.

Before the start of the graduation ceremony, the coordinator has to inspect the place to check if the seats, decorations, stage and everything is organized according to the finalized venue layout.

Our best tip: Check and double check everything once you get to this step in your plans. At final layout, you want everything to be perfect and planned properly!

VI. Setting-up the Graduation Music

Music has the ability to keep a graduation crowd enthusiastic and to raise school spirit. It's important to organize and plan the graduation music properly. Here are some tips to prepare music for this eventful and momentous day!

A. Choose a DJ or the School Band

The graduation coordinator and the committee handling the songs and music should decide whether they would rent an event DJ or have the school band play at the ceremony. Some schools might have both, depending on your song selection and what you are looking to do.

Both the DJ and the school band can do a fantastic job playing the songs that are picked up by the students and the graduation coordinator.

The most obvious advantage of the school band is that not only does it encourage school spirit, but it is free – making this a very budget friendly decision. If you select a DJ, the school will need to pay a fee for a DJ (unless they are a parent, student or teacher who has donated their time to the school).

If you decide to have the school band play at the graduation, it is critical to notify them and the music teacher as early as you can. They will need to practice the songs, often weeks in advance to ensure that they are well prepared.

Our best tip: Decide if you will have the school band, a DJ or both at your school's graduation. Then give them the songs you would like played so they can prepare for the event.

B. Choose the Music at the Beginning of the Ceremony

The music you choose will set the mood for this momentous occasion. The graduating students can walk proudly down the processional aisle when they hear the opening graduation song. The parents can beam proudly and really feel the spirit of the occasion when the opening song blasts from the speaker or resonates from the instruments of the school's band. It is recommended that you work with students on song selection so they feel involved in their graduation as much as possible.

The graduation coordinator, school band and the technical staff should work hand in hand to prepare opening music that would really mark the beginning of the graduation ceremony. The opening music is usually performed as the graduating students make their processional walk to their assigned seats.

Our best tip: Don't neglect the opportunity to work with students to select a great opening song.

C. Choose the Music for Receiving Diplomas

Receiving the diploma is the highlight of this momentous event for every graduating student. In order to make it more special for everyone in the ceremony, this handing out of diplomas should be accompanied by wonderful background music. Usually, this background music is only instrumental so that it would not mix up with the voice of the emcee or master of the ceremony.

It has to be played as a soft and low-key background music while the master of the ceremony announces the names of the graduates. Sometimes, the opening music is also used for the handing out of diplomas. But to make the graduation unique and memorable, we recommend switching up the song choices.

Our best tip: What song have you chosen for students to receive diplomas to?

D. Choose the Music at the End of the Ceremony

The closing music symbolizes the end of one chapter and the start of another in the life of the students. As the graduates proceed out of the venue, and meet their parents and loved ones, the band or DJ should keep on playing the ending music.

During the band rehearsals, the graduation coordinator should also be present in order to check that there are no problems with how the music is being played.

It is better if the ending music for the ceremony is also a bit lively to symbolize the joy and celebration of the day.

Our best tip: Choose upbeat, lively music to close out your graduation. A memorable song is best.

E. Finalize the Order of the Music

Once the graduation coordinator has chosen the different music or songs that are going to be played in the ceremony, it has to be finalized and listed in the program. The order of the music should be finalized weeks before the actual event in order to give the school band time to practice the songs.

If a DJ will be hired for the ceremony, the list of the music should also be handed to the DJ as soon as possible. Everything has to be organized, especially the music, band, DJ and the sound system, to avoid any kind of issues and problems during the graduation ceremonial rites.

Everyone who is in charge of the graduation music has to remember that this is for the graduating students, parents and families and the music can only enhance this joyful day. **Check out our article on “Top Ten Graduation Songs” for some great ideas on which songs to choose for your ceremony.**

Our best tip: Songs picked out & ready to go? Put them in the program & let your graduation ceremony committee know!



VII. Graduation Rehearsals

You've probably heard of the old saying, "practice makes perfect." We highly recommend that you hold a graduation rehearsal, not only for the students but for the graduation committee, administration, teachers, and staff as well. This will help let everyone be aware of what is expected of them for graduation day.

Students are likely to be a combination of excited, nervous and even a bit emotional about graduating. Holding a rehearsal is also quite useful in calming some of these feelings, as they can see what will happen on this milestone occasion. Some students – like the high achievers – have been thinking about this day for years. Other students who may have had to study hard to graduate, this moment is very emotional because they were uncertain that the diploma was within their reach. It is best for everyone to hold a graduation rehearsal. Here are some helpful tips about what you'll want to do and how to do it.

A. Get Ready for the "Big Walk" to the Podium: Rehearse the Procession

If the graduation is for small kids, it will need a couple of rehearsal sessions to get it right. For high school students, it would only take one or two graduation rehearsals. The procession walk during the beginning of the ceremony is important, and it needs to be practiced or rehearsed.

The graduation coordinator has to notify the principal and teachers about the rehearsals. Usually, the rehearsal is done at the actual venue to familiarize the students with the place.

It is very helpful to let the students be familiarized with the layout, and they will know where to walk during the entrance music. Rehearsing the processional walk will keep the students organized during the actual graduation ceremony.

Our best tip: Try to play the opening music so graduates have the experience of walking "as if" they are graduating, it will help them practice best.

B. Student Seating Order

The seating order of the students also has to be rehearsed. But keep in mind that everyone will walk up in the order that they will be seated, so you should practice their procession in seating order for best results.

The graduation coordinator has to work hand in hand with the teachers during the rehearsal of the graduation ceremony. As recommended earlier, they should be seated alphabetically. For this to really work, they must also process in alphabetical order as well.

The graduation coordinator should know that everyone has to be informed about where each student should be seated during the graduation ceremony. By rehearsing the graduation, the students will know their own seats, and this will avoid any problems during the actual ceremony.

Usually, the names of the students are announced one by one by the emcee when they're getting the diplomas. This means that their seating should really be organized and it should coincide with the graduation list.

Our best tip: Confirm the final list of graduates and compile your student alphabetical list.

C. Getting the Diplomas

Receiving the diplomas is the biggest moment of graduation, should be rehearsed by the students. There is a proper procedure when getting the diploma from the principal of the school.

The graduation coordinator has to teach the students which hand should take the diploma and the proper way to shake hands with the principal and/or the person handing out the diploma. The principal/person will hand them their diploma, and the student shakes hands with the other hand.

The students will also need to know what to do after receiving their diplomas, particularly the route they will take going back to their seats. The students will have to be familiarized with the process to avoid a lot of confusion during the actual ceremony. When the students are well rehearsed, the handing out of diplomas can proceed smoothly.

Our best tip: Students will be very excited about this part of the rehearsal, be certain to answer any question. Also be sure they know the route back to their seats, that it is both specific and simple to follow.



D. Graduation Song

Some schools actually have a graduation song. Not just a song that is played during the procession in and out or the one played while collecting the diplomas. Some schools actually have a school song, like their own personal anthem.

These schools will typically have the choir or the entire student body itself learn the song and sing it at the opportune moment in the program. The graduation rehearsal is not complete without practicing and singing the graduation song (should the school actually have one). The singing of the graduation song is very special for the students and also for the parents.

When the students hear this song being played, they will always remember the day of their graduation. The graduation coordinator can work with the music teachers during the rehearsal. If the students are just small kids, the coordinator should be patient and teach the students on how to sing the graduation song. If the graduation song is not familiar to the students, it will take a couple of practices before the entire graduating class can sing it perfectly.

Our best tip: If your school has a school song, share the song with music teachers and other teachers to students can be made aware of it before graduation rehearsal.

E. Giving Out Awards

The handing out the medallions and awards should also be rehearsed. The graduation coordinator has to teach the students the proper way of receiving their medals or honor certificates. It's the same as receiving the diploma: one hand receives the award and the other hand is offered to shake the hands of the person. Or if they are being hung or draped over the students' heads, they need to be prepared to stand on the designated spot to slightly bend over to receive the award.

The students also have to be familiarized with the stage and the route they will take when they proceed back to their seats, assuming the award stage of your graduation is mapped out as an individual part of your ceremony and not given at the same time as the diploma.

The awarding rehearsals are very important so that the actual event will come out perfectly organized and the parents can proudly watch and photograph/video this special moment.



VIII. Inspections

Well, you're almost ready for graduation. Are you excited! We know you are! So are the students, parents, teachers and staff. This is a big day and everyone thanks you for all of your hard work. Just a few more details and soon you'll be seeing those proud students receive their diplomas. It's time for inspections, to be sure everything is "just right."

A. Cleaning of Venue

The graduation coordinator can hire a cleaning crew to polish and clean the entire venue. It can be done a day before the graduation or a few hours before the actual event. The coordinator can personally oversee the cleanup, or an appointed person can oversee the cleaning of the venue. Remember if you choose an appointed person, to give them a list or key points to go over to confirm that the venue is "good to go" for the big day.

If the school wants to save some money, the graduation coordinator can just instruct the school maintenance crew or the janitors to assist in the cleaning of the venue. If this event is in fact at the school, they will need to coordinate with the janitorial staff.

When the event is at a rented venue, they should ensure that everything is cleaned and set up, and likewise cleaned and dissembled at the end. This is one of the conveniences of choosing an outside venue. After finishing the cleanup process, we recommend that the coordinator can make the final inspection to see if everything is perfect for the graduation ceremony.

Our best tip: Trust your cleaning crew but we do recommend that you check in both before and after to be certain that everything is ready for graduation day as you expect it to be.

B. Sound Systems

The sound systems such as the speakers and the microphones have to be inspected thoroughly. These are critical, and every parent will be listening for their child's name to be called as they walk across that stage. To have the sound system not work for speeches, diploma presenting or to play music would be a disaster!

Check the wirings and sound cables to see if they are properly hidden so that they will not cause any accidents or mishaps. The last thing a graduation coordinator wants to see is a student or a guest tripping over a cable during the ceremony.

During the last minute inspections, the microphone stands and the speakers have to be placed in their designated areas.

Our best tip: Try to have your technician on hand for checking the sound system, so any “tweaks” can be fixed.

C. Lighting

If the venue for the graduation ceremony is in an open outdoor area within the school grounds, the lighting will not be a real issue. However, if it is done indoors, the lightings have to be thoroughly inspected.

The graduation coordinator can work with a technical lighting staff to make sure that all the lights are working perfectly to avoid any future problems. Small graduation ceremonies would not require too much lighting. However, a large school with a big graduating class with probably have a more detailed lighting system. No matter your lighting system, confirm it is working to your satisfaction and ready for graduation.

Our best tip: Prepare your lighting system and inspect in. Consider having extra light bulbs on hand (or ask the venue) if you can.

D. Chairs & Tables

It is best to inspect the chairs and tables. First you want to be sure that you have plenty to accommodate your guests, the parents and families who will come to graduation. The other concern is looking for any broken or tippy chairs and tables that could cause injury is sat on (or something put on the table).

These inspections are also crucial so that the coordinator can rent or call for additional chairs or tables if needed. Before the ceremony starts, the chairs and tables should already be in their proper arrangements and designated areas.

Our best tip: Ask for help from your graduation committee with this inspection if you have many chairs and tables to look at.

E. Decorations

The graduation coordinator has to inspect all the decorations that are going to be placed in the venue. You'll want to confirm that they follow the approved layout and also that they are securely attached or hang properly. No coordinator wants decorations that could fall down or cause an accident or simply an embarrassing situation (like ruining a photograph or video).

Remember that you as the coordinator have the authority to make last minute decisions about the decorations. If you feel there are too many of them or that if some of them could fall and cause an injury then it is your call to remove them. Students often have fun decorating for graduation but they may not be thinking of these things when they hang them. Try to move decorations when you can, but remove if necessary.

Our best tip: Bring scissors, tape and thumbtacks with you to the venue to be prepared if you may need to move/remove any decorations.



IX. Security

It is critical that a graduation coordinator make a security plan for graduation. No one likes to think about any type of security issue happening – whether big or small – but it is best to be prepared. Consider your school's specific needs when creating a security plan. Here are some key elements that most security plans for graduation include.

A. Emergency First-Aid

When preparing for a graduation ceremony, the coordinator has to cover all possible scenarios and emergency first aid is one of them. Accidents can happen even in a very organized graduation ceremony. The coordinator has to appoint a person who will handle any emergencies that would require first aid.

Every school has a clinic that has first aid kits. The coordinator has to work with the school doctor or nurse regarding any emergencies that can occur during the graduation ceremony. If the graduation is done in an open school ground, one challenge you may face is the heat of a sunny day which the young, elderly and chronically ill are especially vulnerable to. The coordinator has to be prepared with anything when making preparations for the graduation ceremony.

Our best tip: Make First Aid kits available at several stations. Put at least one, if not several people in charge of First Aid (depending on the size of your graduation).

B. Traffic Control

If the graduation ceremony is going to be held in a venue outside the school, the graduation coordinator can appoint people who will handle the traffic control. It would be very convenient for the parents and guests to have people guiding them from the parking lot towards the venue itself. Big crowds on their own can become a security problem and should be managed proactively to prevent any possible problems. You may be required to have an off-duty police officer to help manage traffic, depending on where you live and the size of your crowd.

The traffic control group can also help in guiding vehicles to find available parking spaces. The traffic control is a necessary part of the security team in order to avoid any crowding. The graduation coordinator should oversee the traffic control group and instruct them on the proper ways of meeting their guests.

Our best tip: Confirm the number of graduates and attendees to understand how large a crowd to expect. This will help you plan for traffic control.

C. Lost and Found Items

There's just something about a large crowd of people that makes things go missing or has people finding them – whether it is a cell phone or even a student's recently received diploma. The graduation coordinator can designate an area for lost and found items. This is especially critical for larger graduation ceremonies, for smaller graduation ceremonies students and parents may simply turn items in to the school office.

The coordinator will appoint someone who will oversee the lost and found booth. The table for the lost and found items can be placed near the entrance of the venue. After the graduation ceremony, if an item is still not being claimed, the coordinator or the person in charge of the lost and found can announce the lost items that are still in the booth. Consider mentioning them briefly on your social media pages if no one claims them, so students and parents have a chance of claiming them.

Our best tip: Even a simple plan for Lost and Found Items is very helpful and may prevent a great deal of frustration on graduation day.

D. Coordinate Overall Security

The graduation coordinator has to be informed and updated about any issues or problems that are going on before, during and after the graduation. You should be one of the first points of contact for security issues, and then can determine who else needs to be notified depending on the severity of the concern.

The security team has to be given detailed instructions and they have to be reminded of their responsibilities. The coordinator should always take into consideration the different factors that might go wrong during the ceremony and how it can be prevented by the security team.

Our best tip: Make your security team aware they are to contact you first with any security concerns.

E. Backup Plan in Case of Emergency

A good coordinator should always have a backup plan in case the original plan does not work. Be proactive and think of a Plan B for every logistic during graduation. While you may not need to use them, it will be helpful to have them in case you need even just one of them. An example of this is having two extra speakers instead of just one. In case there are problems with the sound system and the new speaker does not work, the security team can quickly get another extra speaker.

Work with your graduation committee team to create backup plans, as their input will be very helpful.

Our best tip: Look for areas that your specific school's graduation might be vulnerable. You might be especially concerned about parking and it is critical that you have a Plan B. Having a Plan C too could be a good ideal as well.



Directing Cars can be a difficult process, so be prepared!

X. VIP Guests

While every guest is special, some are considered VIP. They may be donors to the school, high profile members of the community, local political leaders or successful alumni who have come back to show school spirit. You want every VIP guest to feel very welcomed, at ease and most importantly – encouraged to come to another school function.

A. Identify Mailing List for VIPs

When it comes to the VIP guests, the first step for the graduation coordinator is identifying the mailing list for the VIPs. The coordinator has to identify each VIP, get their email addresses and write them a message inviting them as a guest in the graduation ceremony. The coordinator can also personally give the VIPs the graduation invitations.

Our best tip: Sometimes the VIP has had a closer relationship with a teacher at the school or the school principal. It is best to include a personalized note or even a phone call from that specific contact, inviting them to graduation.

B. Refreshments

It is a great idea to provide your VIP guests with refreshments before and after the ceremony if you can. There should be a table just for the food and refreshments set to the side for them.

The coordinator has to designate someone who will oversee the refreshments table and replenish them when the drinks and food become empty. Having a student do this is a terrific idea, as the VIP can converse with the student and it gives the VIP a sense of what students are like at the school.

After the graduation ceremony, the coordinator can bring the VIP guests to the refreshments table and offer cold drinks, pastries or cake.

Our best tip: Be selective when choosing students to serve refreshments to VIPs. You want polite, poised and well-mannered students interacting with VIPs.

C. Seating Arrangements for Guests

The coordinator has to be in charge of designating where the VIP guests will be seated. If a VIP guest is a speaker, he or she has to be seated at the front near the stage. Usually, the VIP guests are seated where the principal and the coordinator are also seated.

Our best tip: Offer the VIPs comfortable seats, with a good view of graduation.

D. Identify the VIP Section

The graduation coordinator has to instruct the ushers, security team and the other graduation committee about the VIP section. During the designation of the seating arrangements, the coordinator should also prioritize where the VIP section should be placed. If there are two or more VIP guests, they have to be grouped together in one area where they can directly see the stage along with the principals and teachers. This section should have the best seats in the venue.

Our best tip: Identifying the VIP section is also important in order to make all the graduation coordinators aware that this section should have a special treatment.

E. VIP Ushers

Since VIP guests require special treatments, the coordinator has to appoint ushers who will assist them to their seats. As coordinator you will likely be too busy overseeing graduation, and it is best to put ushers in charge of seeing them to their appointed seats.

The coordinator has to ensure that the VIP ushers know these important people when they arrive at the venue. The VIP ushers also have to be instructed on being courteous with these guests. The coordinator can designate these VIP ushers to wait for the VIP guests by the front door or even at the parking lot.

Our best tip: Tell the ushers (students) a bit about the VIPs and that they are important to the school as they undertake this task.

F. Welcoming the VIP

The VIP guests are usually invited to share their knowledge, serve as an inspiration and provide the students with a story on how they were able to achieve success. Since these guests play a huge part in the graduation ceremony, they have to be welcomed warmly.

The principal of the school and the graduation coordinator usually welcomes the VIP guests as soon as they arrive at the venue. They should have a host at the school, someone they can turn to if they need something. Assign a student or an usher to this task.

Sometimes, they are welcomed by the whole graduating class as they enter the venue, especially if they are famous people. The coordinator should plan on how to properly welcome a VIP guest and make them feel at ease as soon as they arrive at the place.

Our best tip: It is very important to plan how to properly welcome your VIP guests. Their time is valuable and they are spending it with you on this day.



XI. Organizing the Ceremony

The graduation ceremony will occur soon. Now is the time to organize final details that will make this day so special.

A. Student Graduate List and Diploma Order

When preparing your list of future graduates, it is important to organize each vocational shop or area of study in alphabetical order. When this is done, you then want to list the students in alphabetical order per class.

After this is done, you want to make sure you have listed the students receiving awards such as Valedictorian, Salutatorian, etc. in alphabetical order to announce at the beginning of the ceremony.

High awards are to be given at the beginning before the rest of the students' names are announced. This will allow all students that receive pins, sashes and other regalia, to graduate while wearing them.

Our best tip: Diplomas are traditionally given out in alphabetical order. Confirm the method your school will be giving out diplomas if you are doing something different.

B. Identify Honor Students

As mentioned, acknowledging the high honor students will allow them to receive their regalia for when they move their tassel, if this is how your facility operates. Many allow the students to receive their medallions upon checking in, while receiving a certificate at the podium.

These honors include Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude, and Summa Cum Laude, and these will follow after the honors of Valedictorian and Salutatorian have been given.

The order in which the students are awarded will generally go by alphabetical order; despite the level of award they are given. Typically, honor students who have earned a GPA of 3.90 and above will receive Summa, students with a GPA between 3.70 and 3.89 will receive Magna, and students who have earned a GPA of 3.50 to 3.69 will receive Cum Laude, but some schools may sort them differently.

Our best tip: Prepare the honor student awards so they receive their regalia.

C. Prepare Medallions

All students who have received an honor of Summa, Magna or Cum Laude, should be made aware beforehand so they can be given ahead of time, or presented with on stage, the correct medallion for graduation. These are typically distributed to students upon arrival to the graduation when they check in. Honor cords are also grouped into the section of medallions and should be distributed upon check-in as well, or to make it a larger focus can be given to students on stage when they get their diplomas.

Sorority and fraternity students with honors should also have tassels, cords and sashes distributed upon prior to arrival as well, but can be distributed last minute prior to the celebration or on stage during the event.

Our best tip: Organize the medallions so they are easy to distribute.

D. Identify Graduates with Disabilities

It is extremely important to organize staff, helpers and a stage plan for those with disabilities who may need help upon getting their diploma. Disabled students should not be set apart from their fellow classmates during ceremony. Visit your venue to confirm it accommodates disabled students and guests properly.

First and foremost, the stage must be wheelchair accessible. Secondly, it is important to leave space at the end of each row for students with wheelchairs and a corresponding chair for their helper to assist them when it's time to greet the stage.

Our best tip: Make all graduates feel comfortable and welcome on this very special day. Check with disabled students to see if they have any specific needs for the graduation ceremony.

E. Set-Up Information Table

Information tables upon check in should be set up according to alphabetical order. This allows check in to be quick and efficient.

Check-in tables should be in alphabetical order or the order of honor. This will make retrieving medallions, sashes and more easily, so there will be no delay in the ceremony.

Information table should also include alumni sign-up information, ceremony programs and general information on the events that will be going on around campus including beverages, food, diploma retrieval and much more.

Our best tip: Be sure to have enough information tables to meet the needs of your students. A ratio of 1 to every 50 students is likely to be ideal. So a graduation of 300 students would want 6 information tables.



XII. Hours before Graduation Ceremony

You're at the starting gate and graduation will soon begin. Are you excited? We know we are! This is an important day for students, families and also for your school. Your school thanks you for all of your hard work. Here are some helpful tips for what you'll want to do just hours before the graduation ceremony.

A. Get All The Ushers in Place

It is important to have all ushers at the campus in a meeting area at least an hour before the ceremony starts. This will allow staff to go over the game plan throughout the day including which ushers will stand in which area of the facility, emergency protocols in case of accidents, fires as well as campus directions for lost family, students and more.

Ushers should also be made aware of disabled seating, reserved seating and other strict seating plans. They will also direct graduates to the stage. Sometimes, these ushers are lower classmen that are top ranked within their grade. This can be an exciting moment for lower classman as well, thinking about their own graduation.

Our best tip: Remember to ask your Ushers to dress in a similar way (white shirt, black pants and black shoes) so that people can find them easily.

B. Double Check The Final Master Schedule

Obtaining a copy of the master schedule before the commencement ceremony is extremely important. This is so that you can review all details of the ceremony including times, students, misprints and other information so anything can be changed and printed correctly before the ceremony.

You've already given out copies that graduation ceremony committee members have reviewed – but now is the time to know if any changes or updates to it are needed. If so, make copies and get them distributed quickly.

Our best tip: Change the color of the cover, so that people know right away that this new master schedule is the final, updated one!

C. Hand Out Master Schedule & Parent/Student Program

When staff arrives before the check-in and the ceremony start, it is important to hand out the master schedule to all participating staff. This is so everyone can be in the right place at the right time.

If you are handing out schedules to students and families upon arrival, do so when the families enter the graduation facility before being seated or you have the option to place one on each seat upon preparation so no one is left out.

Extras should also be made available at information tables just in case. These may be distributed to ushers as well.

Our best tip: It is a wise idea to have a few extras of both schedules. You never know who will lose their master schedule. Students and parents will also want extra copies of the program for keepsakes.

D. Set Up Diplomas, Certificates & Awards

On stage, it is important to organize diplomas, and awards accordingly. No graduation coordinator wants a student to go home with another student's diploma or award – as it may take weeks to straighten it out!

Make sure to set up a table including staffers to help hand them out when the time is ready. The placement of the awards on the tables should reflect the alphabetized list of future graduates as well as the order of awards.

Having an organized area will make the commencement ceremony go as smoothly as possible without staffers scrambling for the correct diploma, award or certificate. This should be done well in advance before the ceremony and it should finish being set up as friends and families take their seats.

Our best tip: Organize the diplomas and awards and then have someone double-check the set up.

E. Those Last Minute Inspections

The final preparations are the most important part before the ceremony. Now is the time when you'll make sure that every seat has a program, every award is on the table check-marked off a list, and most importantly, making sure every speaker and guest is ready.

Writing down speeches as well as a list of guest speakers will allow the ceremony to start off in good spirits and in orderly form. Have all certificates in order reflecting the list of future graduates and their areas of study.

Make sure ushers, security and other staffs are in place as well as future graduates in their respective areas. Are all the details in place? Well, we think you're about ready to start!

Our best tip: Take a deep breath when you start last minute inspections. Double check those details and smile – you're ready for a great graduation ceremony!



XIII. During the Graduation Rites

You've done a lot of work to get to this moment – graduation day. There are some details you'll want to be sure to stay on top of to ensure that all is successful.

Graduation day is a time when “all hands are on deck” and your committee helps you with these details as well. But the graduation coordinator is the first point of contact for it all, so you need to be in the know about every element.

Depending on how large your school is, you may be able to handle all of these details solo or you may ask some of your committee for help.

A. Oversee the Ceremony

At the beginning of the ceremony, it is best to acknowledge who will be overseeing the ceremony and guests of honor. Don't get stage fright or jitters, this is just a short introduction and people mostly expect the graduation coordinator to do it. This is also a time when the principal and administration will thank you for your hard work.

This should be a small introduction of each person, and each guest should take place in a certain seated section on stage. These guests may or may not speak during this ceremony.

Our best tip: Wear clothing that is professional, presentable but also comfortable. You may need to kneel, climb and bend to help with behind the scenes details – as well as speak on the stage.

B. Check the Photographer

Photography and capturing the special moment for each new graduate is so important. Some schools may decide to have a photographer at the end of the stage, capturing the moment where the students are being handed their diploma.

Others may catch candid photos around the facility while the ceremony is happening. It is best to plan out where these photographers should stand, and you should plan what they need to capture.

Before the ceremony, make sure that these photographers are standing in their specific and assigned places. Most importantly, it is important to oversee the photographer capturing the moment of the diploma being handed to the student.

Our best tip: Check in with the photographer and confirm the style and type of photographs you would like for the event.

C. Check the Videographer

At some schools, there may be multiple videographers in the vicinity while the graduation is taking place. It is important to also have a checklist of angles and areas where these videographers should be set up.

Before the ceremony starts and during final preparations, it is important to make rounds and see where each videographer is and if their equipment is working properly.

It is also important to check and see if they may need anything fixed or changed in the area that may be troublesome. Making these rounds will make sure your video footage will be nothing short of excellent and a great representation of the day.

Our best tip: Encourage videographers to check their equipment before the day of the event.

D. Assist the VIPs

Before the ceremony, it is crucial for excellent and well-behaved ushers to assist the VIP's to their areas. This may be a section on stage, off to the side of the stage, or an area of importance in the crowd. These very important people should have their needs catered during the ceremony to make everything go well. As graduation coordinator you may not be able to attend to them at all times, but you should check in with them from time to time.

VIP guests could include guests of honor who may be speaking, or guests of honor that are overseeing and watching the ceremony from afar. Making sure there is an usher alongside them at most or all times is important, so they can be assisted accordingly is an ideal plan.

Our best tip: Have plenty of ushers and handpick the ones who are assigned to VIPs.

E. Assist with Distribution of Diplomas

When the diploma distribution begins, you may need one or more persons handing the correct diploma groups to the distributor at the podium.

Since real diplomas are mailed out a few weeks after the ceremony, it is important that all students return to an area after the ceremony to hand back the diploma covers.

Our best tip: Select one or two people to hand out diplomas and arrange for a drop off area for diploma covers after the event.

F. Troubleshoot Any Problems

Be proactive and try to have planned solutions for any troubles that could come up during graduation day. If any problems arise, there should be head staff in charge of every area of the ceremony that can gather a resolution. This includes security, ushers, technical staff including photographers and videographers as well as catering staff.

The persons in charge should be made aware of any plans in case something happens, as well as issues that may occur before, during or after the ceremony and who they can contact in case of an emergency.

Each plan should include keeping the graduation coordinator and others “in the loop” of any problem, as one problem can easily affect other areas of graduation. This can help ensure for smooth sailing on graduation day.

Our best tip: Meet with your graduation ceremony committee to proactively troubleshoot potential problems – before they happen. Then you’ll be prepared for many of the challenges that might occur.



XIV. After the Graduation Rites

Their Congratulations! Your school's graduation ceremony has been a success. There are some details you'll want to complete.

A. Refreshments After Ceremony

All ushers should assist friends and families in the right direction for refreshments while students give back their diploma covers and gowns. The best place is large enough to accommodate everyone while they can sit down and socialize and will also adhere to fire safety rules.

There should be multiple tables and areas for families and friends to obtain refreshments to avoid crowds and long lines. All catering staff should be made aware of the ceremony start and end times so they can best get everything into place as it is needed.

Another thing to consider is food allergies. Most schools do not serve foods made with nuts, as many students have peanut allergies.

Remember to include seating arrangements for disabled attendees for your after ceremony.

Our best tip: Provide plenty of refreshments and servers at your after ceremony to let attendees celebrate graduation.

B. Congratulate Students and Parents

Staff should stand at the entrance of the refreshment area as well as where students, families and friends exit in order to congratulate the recent graduates. It is important to leave on a high note and wish all graduates luck in their future endeavors.

This will close the day's events in a positive way as well as allow you to have a final word with some of your favorite students before they take the next big step in their lives. Students and families may wish to have photos taken with you, so be prepared to smile and be part of the photo!

Our best tip: Have teachers and staff congratulate students as they have graduated. Remember to be sure to include those who have especially interacted with the senior class this year.

C. Attend to Guests and VIPs

After congratulating students and obtaining refreshments, it is also very important to take a moment and speak to your honorable guests and VIPs. These are often very busy time and their time is valuable – they chose to spend it with you and your school today.

Thank them for coming to the ceremony and make certain that they felt welcome during the day.

Our best tip: Consider giving your VIPs and honored guests a small gift from the school that will remind them of your school. It could be a t-shirt with the school mascot on it or even a framed photo of the school.

D. Oversee the Cleanup Crew

Overseeing the cleanup crew is crucial. If you are renting an area for graduation that may not be at the college campus, making sure the appropriate cleanup procedures are taking place is important.

Make sure extra programs, cups, plates and food are cleaned up and thrown away as you do not want to leave a bad impression on the facility you have rented. More importantly, some venues charge a fee if you leave it untidy as they will be trying to prepare for the next event. You should confirm what cleanup plans are needed when making your venue reservations, this is critical.

Your cleanup should include trash removal at many places as well. Sweeping, mopping and cleaning off tables to leave the place as you found it. Your school will want to leave the venue in spotless condition for the next group who will use that area.

Our best tip: Always leave a venue as clean (or in better condition) than you found it in. Check with your cleaning crew that this has been completed.

E. Check Rented Chairs, Tables, Sound Systems etc.

Finally, before sending back all of the rental equipment and materials, make sure everything is still in working condition. During your sound check you will have been able to note if anything was wrong with equipment – and to notify the rental company. You do this to ensure that your school does not need to pay for any damages to the equipment that may have been done by another who rented the equipment before you.

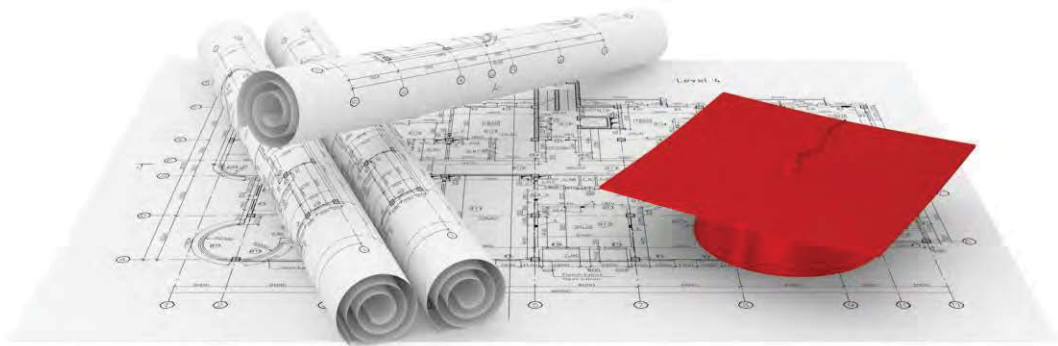
It is also smart to employ ushers to keep an eye on all of the equipment and materials during the ceremony as well as when friends and families are receiving refreshments. Now is the time when you can pack things up and prepare them to be returned to the rental companies, if they are not arriving to pick them up momentarily.

Our best tip: Confirm when rented equipment will be picked up and that it is the same condition that you received it in.

And there you have it!

A Complete Graduation Blueprint

Get ready for celebration and success!



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