THE MARRIAGE COLLEGE

The Field Guide for Wives

ALSO FROM THE FACULTY

The Field Guide for Husbands
The companion volume. Thirty lectures for him, from the first date to the fortieth anniversary, including the celebrated MC 112 on the dishwasher.

The Marriage College online courses
Short, funny courses in the domestic arts and the difficult sciences.

themarriagecollege.com



THE MARRIAGE COLLEGE

The Field Guide for Wives

A Hilarious, Genuinely Useful Course in Love, Marriage and Saying What You Actually Mean

FIRST EDITION

The Marriage College
themarriagecollege.com

The Field Guide for Wives
A Hilarious, Genuinely Useful Course in Love, Marriage and Saying What You Actually Mean

First edition, 2026.

Copyright © 2026 The Marriage College. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in reviews.

This is a work of humour. The case studies and characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, living, married or recently found re-loading a dishwasher in the dark, is coincidental. The book offers general, light-hearted guidance. It is not a substitute for professional counselling, medical, legal or financial advice. The Marriage College is not an accredited institution, and its degrees, though heartfelt, are not recognised by any government.

Published by The Marriage College, part of The Love Campus.
themarriagecollege.com · thelovecampus.com

Questions and feedback: hello@themarriagecollege.com

Typeset in Lora and Source Sans 3.

For the subtle.

To the wives whose hints were works of art, whose "Fine" has carried through two closed doors, and who have, at least once, re-loaded a dishwasher in the dark.

Your fieldwork was not in vain.

Your Course of Study

Orientation: A Word from the Registrar — 8

The Entrance Examination — 12

PART ONE ADMISSIONS

201 He Is Not a Fixer-Upper — 16

202 The Checklist, the Spark and the Man Actually in Front of You — 22

203 The Proposal You Are Secretly Directing — 28

204 The Wedding Is One Day. He Is the Rest. — 33

205 The First Year and the File You Are Quietly Keeping — 38

PART TWO THE FACULTY OF WORDS

206 The Hint Is Not a Communication Strategy — 45

207 "Fine" and Other Words That Mean the Opposite — 51

208 How to Start a Difficult Conversation Without Starting a War — 56

209 Listening to a Man Who Says "Nothing" — 61

210 The Eye-Roll, the Sigh and the Correction in Public — 66

PART THREE EVERYDAY PARTNERSHIP

211 The Household Is Not Your Solo Project — 72

212 There Is More Than One Way to Load a Dishwasher — 78

213 The Scoreboard Only You Can See — 84

214 Money Talks. Try Not to Hide the Receipts. — 89

215 Your Friends, His Friends and the Group Chat — 94

PART FOUR THE FACULTY OF AFFECTION

216 Appreciation: He Cannot Hear What You Only Think — 100

217 Date Night Is Not a Performance Review — 106

218 Desire, Tiredness and the Conversation About Both — 111

219 His Hobbies and Other Rival Institutions — 116

220 "Come and Look at This" — 121

PART FIVE LIFE GETS COMPLICATED

221 Your Mother, His Mother and the Border Between — 127

222 Do We Want Children? The Honest Version — 133

223 New Parents: He Is Not the Babysitter — 139
224 Your Work, His Work and Whose Turn It Is — 145
225 When Life Is Heavy — 151

PART SIX THE LONG GAME

226 You Are Still a Person — 158
227 He Will Change. So Will You. — 163
228 The Empty Nest and the Man Still in It — 168
229 Repair, Renewal and Asking for Help — 173
230 Forty Years of the Same Man, and Why That Is the Good News — 178

THE COMMON ROOM

Graduation: The Final Examination — 184
Your Next Four Weeks — 185
The Wife-to-English Dictionary — 186
The Thirty Rulings — 188
Your Degree Certificate — 190
Further Reading and Real Help — 191
About the Marriage College — 192

Orientation: A Word from the Registrar

Welcome to the Marriage College.

Becoming a wife is one of the larger jobs a person can take on. The training consists of choosing a dress and being told by eleven different people that marriage is all about communication. Nobody says what to communicate, or to whom, or whether a sigh counts. There is no module on what to do when he loads the dishwasher like a man packing a getaway car. Nobody examines your ability to say "I'd like you to stay in tonight" when what comes out is "It's fine."

This book fills the gap. It is a complete course in thirty short lectures, running from the man you are thinking of marrying to the man you have been married to for forty years, who is, with luck, the same one. Along the way there are case studies, cautionary tales, scripts you can borrow and small examinations you can pass in the bath. It is meant to make you laugh. It is also meant to make being married to him easier, and the Faculty sees no contradiction between the two. Most of us will take advice far more readily from a joke than from a lecture. The Faculty has simply put the advice inside the joke.

There is a companion volume, *The Field Guide for Husbands*, in which the same Faculty explains to him about listening, apologies and the five stages of a dishwasher. You do not need to have read it. It may comfort you to know that it exists, and that his course is exactly as long as yours.

HOW THE COURSE WORKS

Each chapter is one lecture, coded like a real university module (MC 201, MC 202 and so on; the 100s belong to the husbands' course, and the Registrar wishes it noted that the numbering implies no seniority in either direction). Every lecture has the same parts:

- **A case study**, featuring one of our alumnae. All of them are fictional. Any resemblance to you is a coincidence that the Faculty finds very funny.
- **The lecture itself**, in short sections you can read between other commitments, of which you have several.
- **A ruling from the Registrar**, one line worth remembering or, in extreme cases, writing on the fridge.
- **Boxes**: scripts to try, errors to avoid and kit to assemble.
- **A cheat sheet** of three things to remember if you remember nothing else.
- **The examination**: three questions, each with one right answer, one tempting wrong one and one that no woman has ever chosen out loud. The Registrar's notes give the answers and the reasoning.
- **A field assignment**: one small, practical thing to do this week. This is the part that actually changes anything.

You can read the book in order, as a complete degree, or open it at the chapter that matches this week's difficulty. Both methods are recognised by the Examinations Board. The degree, for reasons of tradition, is a Bachelor's. The Registrar is aware of the irony and has heard the remarks.

THREE RULES OF THE INSTITUTION

First, the jokes are on us. The comic target of this book is the wife: her hints, her "Fine", her private scoreboard and her settled belief that there is one correct way to hang a towel. It is never her husband. He appears throughout as what he almost certainly is: decent, funny, trying his best and entitled to a partner who tells him what she means.

Second, this course will not ask you to do more. You are very probably doing plenty. A good half of these lectures ask you to do less: less hinting, less managing, less re-doing his work once he has gone upstairs, less carrying things in silence and calling it fine. Where the honest problem is that he is not doing his share, the Faculty does not suggest you be nicer about it. It suggests you say so, and MC 211 explains how.

Third, the advice is real, and you only need one idea at a time. Underneath the silliness sit ideas that any good couples counsellor would recognise: ask for what you want, begin a hard conversation gently, hand over the whole job, say thank you out loud, look up when he speaks and mend a row before bedtime. None of it is complicated. All of it is harder than it looks on a Tuesday. Please do not attempt thirty improvements by Friday. Pick one idea. Do it for a week. Then come back for another.

One serious note before we begin. This book assumes a husband who is on your side. If you are afraid of yours, or he controls your money, your phone or who you see, no amount of clearer communication is the answer and none of this is your fault. Turn to Further Reading and Real Help at the back, where the Faculty has put some telephone numbers.

IF THIS BOOK WAS A GIFT

If a friend gave you this book, she has either recognised herself in it or recognised you. Ask her which over a drink. If your husband

gave it to you, he is a brave man or has not thought it through. If he gave it to you along with his own copy of the companion volume, keep him.

One last thing. This course is for you. He has not been enrolled, and must not be marked.

With academic affection,

The Registrar
The Marriage College

The Entrance Examination

Before enrolment, the Faculty asks every new student to complete a short diagnostic test. There is no pass mark. There is, however, a result, and you may not enjoy it. Circle the answer closest to what you would actually do, not what you would say you would do if he were reading over your shoulder.

1. Your birthday is three weeks away and you know what you want. You:

a. Send him the link, a deadline and a second choice, and check on Thursday that he has ordered it.
b. Leave a magazine open at the right page and mention a friend whose husband "just knew".
c. Say nothing and see what he comes up with. You will remember the result.

2. He has hung out the washing in a way you would not. You:

a. Re-peg it while he is in the shower.
b. Say, "No, no, it's fine," and look at the line for some time.
c. Leave it, and add it to a list you keep in your head.

3. He asks, "Is everything all right?" It is not. You:

a. Give him a full briefing with seven action points, five of which are his.
b. Say, "Fine."
c. Say, "Fine," and text your sister.

4. He offers to cook on Saturday. You:

a. Accept, then write out the recipe, find the pans and stand by the hob in case.

b. Say, "Only if you want to," four times.

c. Accept, and count how often he asks where things are kept.

5. You are exhausted and would like him to do bedtime tonight. You:

a. Do it yourself, because it is quicker, while explaining through the door how it is done.

b. Yawn in the doorway until he notices.

c. Do it yourself, say nothing and award yourself the points.

RESULTS

Mostly a: The Project Manager. You are capable, quick and tired. You run the marriage as a well-organised department in which he is a promising junior. The Faculty admires your efficiency and prescribes MC 211 (The Household Is Not Your Solo Project) and MC 212 (There Is More Than One Way to Load a Dishwasher), to be read sitting down, in a different room from the dishwasher.

Mostly b: The Hinter. You are considerate, subtle and frequently disappointed. For years you have been broadcasting on a frequency he does not receive. Begin with MC 206 (The Hint Is Not a Communication Strategy) and MC 207 ("Fine" and Other Words That Mean the Opposite).

Mostly c: The Silent Auditor. You are patient and observant, and your records are excellent. He believes everything is going well.

Report to MC 205 (The File You Are Quietly Keeping) and MC 213 (The Scoreboard Only You Can See) before the next annual review.

A mixture: The Normal Wife. Congratulations. You display the full range in rotation, sometimes within a single Sunday. You are exactly who this book was written for. Proceed to Lecture One.

PART ONE

Admissions

Choosing him, marrying him and the first year of finding out.



MC 201 He Is Not a Fixer-Upper

MC 202 The Checklist, the Spark and the Man Actually in Front of You

MC 203 The Proposal You Are Secretly Directing

MC 204 The Wedding Is One Day. He Is the Rest.

MC 205 The First Year and the File You Are Quietly Keeping

"Entry requirements: a short list, an open mind and the ability to say what you want in one sentence."

LECTURE ONE · MC 201

He Is Not a Fixer-Upper

Marry the man, not the renovation plan

CASE STUDY

Harriet kept a document. It was called “Dom: Small Improvements”, it ran to four pages and it had headings. Under Wardrobe: the trainers, the fleece, the shorts he wore in February. Under Kitchen: salting food before tasting it. Under Social: the anecdote about the ferry to Santander, to be cut by half.

Three weeks before they were due to move into a flat in Walthamstow, Dom borrowed her laptop to look up van hire and found it open at page three. He read one heading, closed the lid and said nothing for two days, though he hummed a good deal.

On the third day he cracked. “I’ve seen Phase Two,” he said. “I know I wasn’t meant to. Linen, proper shoes, June. I’ve booked the week off, and I’m leaving the rucksack at home, as instructed.”

Phase Two was the second stage of his wardrobe. Dom had read it as an itinerary.

Harriet looked at the man she loved, standing in the hall in his fleece, holding a Portuguese phrase book with the receipt still in it, and found that the document had no heading for this.

A man is not a property with potential

Estate agents have a phrase for a house you are meant to love for what it might become: “in need of modernisation”. It is a fair description of a bungalow in Rhyl. It is a poor description of a man

who is sitting next to you eating toast and believes things are going well.

Choose the person who exists. He is the one who will be there on a wet Wednesday in November, in those trainers, telling the ferry story to your aunt. If you like a later edition of him, due out after some work, you should know that the work has not been commissioned and the author has not been told.

Nor will a ring do it for you. The Faculty has examined a great many rings and found no corrective properties. A man who is forty minutes late for your third date will be forty minutes late for the wedding, the christening and his own retirement do. Marriage will change his next of kin. It has no recorded effect on his timekeeping.

Sort the list into two piles

Some of what is on your list is preference. The trainers are a preference. So are the fleece, the salt and the ferry anecdote, which his friends ask for by name. You may mention them. But nobody's marriage has ended over a fleece, whatever it felt like at your cousin's engagement drinks.

A few things are essential, and there are usually two or three of them. Whether he wants children. Whether he would ever leave London. What he thinks money is for. Whether he is kind when he is tired. These cannot be altered later. They are the building.

Harriet had four pages on Dom's clothes and not one line on whether he wanted children. The clothes were easier to type. Most private lists work this way: the small things get headings, and the large thing sits underneath them, unasked, because asking it might produce an answer.

So ask, and be honest with yourself about the reply. If the answer to an essential is no, that is supposed to bother you. Do not

talk yourself out of it because he is lovely and the deposit has been paid.

THE REGISTRAR RULES

If you would only marry him after the alterations, you are engaged to a plan. A plan has never once brought anyone a cup of tea.

Ask for it or let it go

Every item on the list has two honest destinations. You can say it to him, as a request, or you can delete it. "I'd love it if you didn't wear the fleece to the wedding" is a perfectly good sentence. He may say yes. He may say the fleece has been with him since Aberystwyth and is coming. Either way, two adults have had a conversation about a garment.

The third destination is the one to close: management by stealth. The shoes bought for him "as a treat". The fleece that goes missing in the move. The gym membership presented as a gift, with a card. He will notice, because he is no fool, and what he will notice is that he is being quietly marked.

A request can be refused, which is what makes it respectful. A campaign cannot, which is what makes it tiring, mostly for you. Four pages take a lot of upkeep.

Common Exam Errors

- Giving him a coat for his birthday, a coat for Christmas and a coat "just because".
- Describing him to friends as "a work in progress", as though he were a loft conversion.
- Assuming he will want children once he has met your nephew. He has met your nephew.
- Telling him you love him exactly as he is, from behind a laptop with the document open.

He has not written a document about you

You are not a project either, and he has been living near somebody's habits too. Dom could have told you that Harriet leaves a glass of water in every room, like a woman marking a trail. She reads road signs aloud. When she says "two minutes" she means a period of between two minutes and the rest of the afternoon.

He had not written any of it down. He had assumed, as people in love generally do, that this was simply what Harriet was like, and that Harriet was the point.

Here is your practical task. Take the list, whether it lives in a file or only in your head, and give every item one of three marks: essential, request or preference. Raise the essentials this week. Make each request once, nicely, and accept the answer. Delete the preferences. The third pile is usually the largest, and deleting it feels like putting down a heavy bag.

Harriet deleted three and a half pages. What was left was two questions, which she asked over a curry on a Thursday. Dom wants two children and has no objection to leaving London,

provided it is not for Swindon. They went to Portugal in June. He took the rucksack.

CHEAT SHEET

- ☑ Choose the man who exists on a wet Wednesday, not the one in the plan.
- ☑ Know your two or three essentials and say them to him.
- ☑ Ask for it or let it go. Do not manage it in secret.

MC 201

The Examination

1. **Dom has found the document and is looking forward to Portugal. What should Harriet do?**
   a. Book Lisbon that night and never mention the document again.
   b. Tell him what Phase Two was, say sorry and ask him the two questions that actually matter.
   c. Add a fifth heading, “Reading Comprehension”.

2. **Which of these belongs on the essentials pile?**
   a. His trainers, which are grey and were once white.
   b. His pronunciation of “espresso”, which has an x in it.
   c. Whether he wants children.

3. **He is forty minutes late for most things. After the wedding he will be:**
   a. Forty minutes late, in a better suit.
   b. On time, because marriage settles a person.
   c. Early, out of gratitude.