

Plan a birthday party with no crabbiness



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Crabby Office Lady

Feeling overwhelmed while planning a birthday party? Relax; think of Crabby and Office as your party event planners, here to help you from start to finish.

So you're planning a birthday party...well, let me tell you, there are many things to think about beyond what kind of cake to make (or buy and pretend you made). In this column, I've picked out what I think are the critical steps to making sure your party is a success, for the birthday boy or girl and for their guests. (And hey, making sure you look good, too, can't hurt.)

Ready? Ladies and gentlemen...start your planning!

Step 1: Consider your audience and pick a theme

Princess or Batman? Luau or just low-key? Of course, it all depends on who the party recipient is. Is it your child or your boss? Your second husband or your umpteenth best friend? Maybe it's for someone very shy who might completely fall apart at a surprise party and turn into a "runaway birthday boy," faking his abduction by aliens and disappearing. Or maybe it's for someone really gregarious and outgoing who wouldn't mind doing the limbo at a Caribbean-themed party. So spend some time thinking about whom the party is for and how he or she might like to spend his or her birthday celebration.

Step 2: Make a guest list

After you have the list of people you're going to invite, I suggest putting their information into an Excel spreadsheet. It's a great way to keep track of who has RSVP'd, who hasn't, and who needs a brush-up etiquette lesson. And by golly, we just happen to have a template of just what I'm talking about, so you, in all your busy-ness, don't have to start from scratch.

- [Party guest list](#)

Step 3: Plan your budget

Sure, it's fun to go overboard...until you get the credit card bill. And while you may think that nothing says "I love you and cherish the day you were born" like a \$10,000 birthday bash, it's best to consider your budget before going into debt.

- [Event budget](#)

Step 4: Send out invitations

Sure, you can go out and buy invitations, but personalization really makes the occasion more special. And it also provides you with scrapbook memories that you can show your kid when she's a teenager and hates you. ("See, sweetie? I really did, I mean DO love you.")

- [Use clip art to make your own greeting cards](#)
- [Party invitation](#)
- [Birthday party invitation \(mailer; needs no envelope\)](#)
- [Birthday party invitation](#)

- [Children's birthday party invitation](#)
- [Party invitation flyer](#)
- [Birthday party invitation \(works with Avery 3266\)](#)

Step 5: Plan the menu, activities, and decorations

Here's where you get to have some fun and really shine. Picking the decorations, planning the menu, and figuring out what kind of fun everyone might want to have is your specialty, right? (That's why you're planning the party, in case you lost sight of the fact.)

Create your own banners using our templates and clip art. You can be as subtle or crazy as you like. And if you're planning a full-blown dinner party, make sure you know for certain who can eat what and who just **WILL NOT** sit next to whom.

- [Happy birthday banner](#)
- [Happy birthday, \(name\) banner](#)
- [Dinner party journal](#)

Step 6: Create a gift tracker

Don't know what a gift tracker is? Think about this: You know when it's your birthday party and you receive all those fabulous gifts, one right after another? The morning after, do you remember who gave you what? Sure, a card may have been attached, but now all the cards and nametags are strewn all over the floor, stuck in spilled, confetti-sprinkled wine cooler. In other words, even if you think of yourself as the most well-mannered and polite birthday honoree, it's going to be hard figuring out whom to send thank-you cards and for what you should thank them.

Now, if you're the one throwing the party, you want to think of everything, right? (Of course you do.) Plan ahead and print out a gift tracker, a record that you or someone else will keep while the gifts are being opened. That way, if a certain you-know-who party girl is feeling less than fresh the next morning, at least she'll know who to send her personalized thank-you cards to when she's convalescing in bed later that day.

- [Record of gifts received](#)
- [Thank-you note checklist](#)

NOTE This particular template is geared toward Christmas gifts, but you can apply it to any situation.

The Über template

This one has it all: planning space for guests, RSVP status, music, decorations, and food and drink, as well as a budget column for everything.

- [Party planner](#)

"She's afraid that if she leaves, she'll become the life of the party." — Groucho Marx

About the author

[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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