

Dining Etiquette

Etiquette Series

Dining etiquette and general manners are like rules in a game. Think about a game you play; what would happen if there were no rules? The rules of a game are valuable because they help everyone to have fun and keep people from feeling that they are being treated unfairly. Manners rules serve the same function: they help people get along.

Here are the basic rules of dining etiquette. These tips specifically address how to eat during a job interview but can be used in any situation where you are dining with others; including your family!

Sitting Down

- Wait until invited to be seated
- Sit down only after host sits down

Napkins

- Place your napkin in your lap as soon as everyone is seated (within 30 seconds of sitting down). Pick it up and place it in your lap, unfolding as you approach your lap.
- Place the napkin folded in half with the crease toward you.
- It is appropriate to use your napkin either before taking a drink, after taking a drink, whichever is necessary.
- Place your napkin on your chair when excusing yourself for a moment during the meal (only if necessary and only between courses). If you must excuse yourself from the table, do not explain the reason why.
- Leave your napkin on your lap until everyone has finished eating.
- Place the napkin to the right of your plate when leaving your table at the end of the meal.
- Use your napkin often. Blot your mouth often and avoid wiping your face with your napkin. The napkin is not for blowing your nose, excuse yourself and leave the table.

Salads

- Salad forks are often smaller than a traditional dinner fork and will be located to the far left of the place setting.
- You may use your knife to cut portions of the salad. If you use your knife, do not return it to the table top; instead place it at the top edge of the plate with the cutting edge facing you.

Bread and Butter

- Bread and butter may be served with your meal.
- Place one roll on the plate provided (the one just above your forks).
- Do not cut the roll open, slather butter on it, and “dig in.”
- Instead, break the roll apart, tear off a small, bite-sized portion, butter it, and eat it. Do this for the entire roll.

Accidents at the Table

- Even the most careful eater occasionally has an accident at the table.
- If you spill food, even a bit of jelly or sauce, you may quietly retrieve it with any convenient utensil—knife, fork, spoon—and place it at the side of your plate.
- If a little food or liquid is dripped onto your clothing, you might dip a small corner of the napkin into your water glass and lightly rub the spot.
- Try to be as inconspicuous as possible, and do not fret. Everyone does this from time to time.
- If you drop a serving utensil, do not pick it up. Leave it on the floor and ask for a new utensil.
- Then, after the meal is over, retrieve it gracefully if at all possible.

Seasoning your Food

- Seasoning of food items is best done by the kitchen staff.
- Do not shake salt and pepper indiscriminately over the food you have not first tasted.
- If you must use salt or pepper, do so in an unobtrusive manner.

Ordering

- Take the lead from your host when ordering.
- Order food items in the same progression as your host so that no one will be eating alone. If they order an appetizer, do so also.
- Do not take an excessive amount of time trying to decide what to have. If you are indecisive, your host may wonder about your decision-making skills on the job.
- Do not order the most expensive item(s) on the menu, unless the host insists that you try something in particular.
- Be guided by what your host is having.
- Handle any dietary restrictions quietly. Do not take medication in front of others; instead excuse yourself from the event or wait until you are alone.

Posture

- When sitting at the table, sit up straight and do not cross your legs, except at the ankle.
- You should not make yourself comfortable and sit back in a chair, or slouch around.
- Elbows do not belong on the table.
- One hand, for the most part, should remain in your lap, except when you are cutting meat, breaking bread, or somehow stabilizing a dish or serving platter.

Place Setting

- You may see anything from quite simple, to quite formal. It all depends on the establishment.
- Keep in mind that silverware is used from the outside of the setting towards the plate.
- Dessert forks or spoons are sometimes set above the place setting, other times they are brought with the menu item.

The Main Course

- When being served by the wait-staff, do not begin eating until everyone at your table has been served.
- For this course you use the dinner fork and the dinner knife, or the steak knife if appropriate.
- Try to “cut” your meat, not “saw” it.
 - Hold the fork as though you were holding a pencil. Do not raise your elbow to get a good grip on any food item.
 - When someone approaches you, stand up to greet them by shaking hands
- Drink and eat quietly without slurping or clinking utensils.
- Your utensils are for eating, not waving in the air while you’re talking

Beverages

- Beverages may be offered before the meal.
- Follow the lead of your host. It is recommended that you NEVER order alcohol of any kind.
- You may order sparkling water, tea, soda, juice, or other items from the menu.

Something in your mouth?

- Take something out of your mouth with the utensil used to put it in. Gristle taken out with fork.
- Hide it on your plate, not in napkin or under plate.

Reaching Across the Table

- There are various degrees of reaching for something across a table that are perfectly permissible, but one should not make an enormous stretch or rise from one’s seat to reach for something.
- If you have easy access to the salt and pepper and your neighbor on either side does not, it is polite to offer it first to both of them before using it yourself.

- When passing the salt and pepper, pass them as a pair.
- If something is really too far from your grasp, address the person closest to it at the table and ask politely, “After you have used it yourself, would you please pass me the Hollandaise?”

Dessert

- You may use whatever utensils are provided to eat dessert.
- When you are finished with your main course and your dessert is already set, you may go ahead and eat it, but do not push away your dinner plate.
- Do not pick up your dessert plate and place it on your dinner plate, simply reach across your dinner plate and eat your dessert.
- If your dinner plate is removed by the server, you may move your dessert dish in front of you.
- No swapping desserts with your neighbor.

Meal Over

- When your meal is over, and your host has signified this by placing his or her napkin to the left of the place setting, you too may follow suit.
- Place your silverware at the four o’clock position to signal to your server that you are through.

Swallowing the wrong way and choking

- All of us swallow the wrong way at times and suffer a minor choking fit.
- When someone chokes, it is the time for the other people at the table not to look at the person but to talk among themselves, so that he will be able to regain his composure in peace.
- However, sometimes the choking is serious. A piece of food can become stuck in such a way as to cause death.
- The person who is actually choking to death can say nothing. Since this could happen in your own family as well as to a guest in your home, it is your responsibility to know what to do at once. Every kitchen should have posted on the wall the “Heimlich Maneuver.”

Foreign matter in food

- A foreign body taken into the mouth accidentally with food—gravel or bird shot, for example—should be removed from the mouth by rolling it forward with the tongue onto your spoon or fork held to your lips, and then it should be placed on the plate, hidden under a bit of food.
- If a gnat lands in your iced tea glass, fish it out, but if a bug crawls out of your salad, you should ignore its presence and simply leave your salad unfinished.
- Calling attention to it will embarrass your host, even if the dinner party takes place in a fancy restaurant.
- If you are paying the bill, call over the waiter and have him bring a fresh plate of whatever food it was.

Do Not...

- Help the help.
- Blow your nose at the table.
- Primp at the table.
- Speak loudly.
- Eat your partner’s salad or butter his/her bread.
- Eat too fast nor too slowly.
- Use a toothpick in public.
- Argue about the bill.
- Engage the wait staff in lengthy conversation.