

DINING ETIQUETTE 101

What is etiquette? It's a system of rules and conventions that regulate social and professional behavior. The whole point of the rules of etiquette is to make you feel comfortable, not uncomfortable. When there are standards that people abide by, then you can have the confidence and assurance that you are acting accordingly. It takes the guesswork out of your behavior in public. There is no penalty for bad etiquette, but the result of bad etiquette lies in the disapproval of one's peers.

General Banquet Etiquette:

1. Please turn off your cell phone. If you absolutely have to have your cell phone turned on, put it on vibrate mode. Under NO circumstance should you place, or receive, a call while dining. The same goes for text messaging. You never want to give anyone the idea that the person on the phone is more important than the person sitting in front of you. If there is no way to avoid making or receiving a call, excuse yourself from the table and take your call outside of the dining room.
2. If you arrive at the table before anyone else does, do not begin eating the bread, crudites or any pre-set food, such as appetizers, until everyone else has arrived and is seated.
3. Greet your co-diners with a smile and possibly a hand shake. Once everyone is seated at the table, the first thing you will do is place your napkin on your lap. Unfold the napkin with as little fanfare as possible. Fold it in half and place it on your lap.
4. Please, no smoking at the table.
5. Practice good posture. If you are not eating, place your hands in your lap, or you may also rest your wrists on the edge of the table. Never put your elbows on the table.
6. Never blow your nose at the table, especially into your napkin. If a sneeze is unavoidable, try to grab a tissue, or remove yourself from the room. Remember to wash your hands. It is proper etiquette to avoid sharing germs.
7. If you cough, cover your mouth with your napkin to stop the spread of germs and to muffle the noise. If you need to, excuse yourself to the restroom, and always wash your hands.
8. Ladies purses should not be placed on the table. If they're small enough, you can place them on your lap. If they're large, set them on the floor under to your chair. Try to avoid having them out in the aisle where they can possibly trip someone.
9. Briefcases and meeting materials should also be placed on the floor under your chair.
10. You may begin to eat when everyone has been served in a fine dining situation. You may begin to eat when the host/hostess picks up their fork to eat. Do not start before this unless the host/hostess insists that you start eating.

11. You should not ask to taste someone else's food, nor should you offer a taste of your food to someone else. If you absolutely cannot resist this rule, you can request a small plate from your server and place a small amount of food to share.
12. In a fine dining restaurant is impolite to ask for a doggy bag. It is more acceptable if this is an informal dining situation.
13. Never chew gum at the table. If you need to remove the gum from your mouth, excuse yourself to the restroom where you can dispose of it.
14. Combing or brushing your hair at the table is unacceptable. As is putting on lipstick or make-up. Excuse yourself to the restroom to take care of this.
15. Is it proper to pull the chair out for a lady? For a business meeting or meal, no. For a social occasion, i.e., wedding or date, yes.
16. When you have finished eating your meal, do not push your plate aside or stack them on top of each other. It is proper to leave the plate sitting where they are currently. Let the service personnel do their job.

Place Settings:

You will probably notice an array of flatware sitting in front of you, along with plates, and stem ware, i.e., water glass and possibly wine glasses. A rule of thumb is that solids are on your left, and liquids are on your right.

Place settings can be confusing, but the general rule is to work from the outside in as the meal progresses. If there are three forks to the left of the plate, they are usually salad, fish and meat (or entrée) forks. An oyster or appetizer fork is the only fork that is placed on the right side next to the soup spoon.

If there is a butter knife on your bread plate, use it for spreading butter on your bread. Here is a cautionary tale. "One of our students thought he'd pick up his whole piece of bread at once. He took too big of a bite, started laughing, and then started to choke. He needed the Heimlich maneuver. The bread hit another child in the face ... and his knife flew out to the side and hit his partner."

So eat your bread piece by piece. That way, you won't bite off more than you can chew. And you'll likely eat less of it, which means you'll have plenty of appetite left for your entrée.

You may see a fork and/or a teaspoon set above the plate. These are used during dessert service.

General Dining Etiquette

1. A service person will serve your food on your left side and they will remove your dish on your right side.
2. When passing the roll basket or crudites, pass food to the right.
3. If asked for the salt and pepper, pass them both together and set them on the table.
4. Taste your food before seasoning it. In a fine dining restaurant it is an insult to the chef to ask for condiments. The food should be seasoned appropriately when you receive it.
7. Butter, spreads or dips should be transferred from the serving dish to your plate before spreading or eating.
8. It is impolite to shove a large piece of bread into your mouth. Instead, break off a small piece, butter it then eat it.
5. Chew with your mouth closed, and never talk with your mouth full. Cut only enough food for the next mouthful.
6. If your food is too hot to eat, allow it to cool down before putting it in your mouth. Do not blow on it. If the food is too hot, discretely drink something to counteract the heat.
7. If you need to excuse yourself from the table, place your napkin to the left side of your plate. Do not wad your napkin; re-fold it, or place it on your plate. This will give the waiter the impression that you have completed your meal and will remove the setting. Also, never place the napkin on the seat of your chair. This is a very unsanitary place.
8. In the case that you don't care for the food, just don't eat it. It is not necessary to make a scene.
9. For soup, you should dip the spoon into the soup and move the spoon away from you. If you need to get the last of the soup, you can tip the bowl slightly. Never blow on your soup if it is hot, and never slurp.
10. If the table has been set with wine glasses, and you are not having wine, just let the wait person know and they will remove it. Don't turn the wine glass upside down.
11. During coffee service you may want tea instead. You can lay the cup on it's side on the saucer to alert your wait staff. If you choose not to have coffee, you can let your wait person know to remove the cup and saucer.
12. Don't combine food items on the plate. It's insulting to the chef and it looks terrible. It is also distracting to other members of your dining party.
13. When eating a steak or large piece of meat, cut and eat one piece at a time. Do not cut all the meat first. This technique should be done only for young children under 8.
14. At the end of the meal, place your napkin on the table to the left of the dinner plate. Do not refold your napkin, nor should you wad it up.

How to Dress

1. Unless you are attending a red carpet event it is better to dress a little more conservatively, especially if it is a work related banquet. Dressing appropriately for the occasion will help you, and everyone around you, feel more comfortable.
2. Clean and pressed clothing is appreciated by all.
3. Worn or torn clothing should be reserved for a more casual event.
4. Clean your shoes and/or boots. This can be distracting to the rest of your outfit.
5. Perfume, cologne or after shave lotion can be overwhelming if used too liberally. Keep in mind that if even 20% of the room has applied perfume or cologne, it can be overwhelming. Also, it can be very distracting when trying to eat a meal and everyone's perfume is competing for space.

What To Talk About

Generally speaking, we all love to talk about ourselves and what we're interested in, and, if given half a chance, have no problem conversing if someone is willing to listen. If you are dining with people you are familiar with, you're already comfortable talking to each other. What if you're at a table of complete strangers? What do you talk about now? Here are a few examples.

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| 1. Hobbies | 6. School |
| 2. Travel | 7. Degree Programs |
| 3. Food | 8. Music |
| 4. Movies | 9. Your place of birth |
| 5. Theater | |

RSVP and Thank You Notes

RSVP is short for, "Repondez, s'il vous plait," which, in English, simply means "Please respond." That means you should respond either way, whether you're able to make it or not. This is proper etiquette. If you've ever been in a position of planning a large party or wedding, it is critical to know how many people are going to attend. If you don't respond, the host must call to verify your attendance.

Thank you notes are not necessary, nor are they required. They're just a common courtesy. It's a simple concept; a simple thank you written on a piece of stationery. For some people this is very intimidating, but just remember that an imperfect note that comes from the heart is better than a perfect note that never gets written. Send your thank you notes as quickly as possible, and make specific reference to the gift or occasion that is the subject of the note.

The Hand Shake

The deeper key to handshakes (as with many things in life) is intention. Keep your focus on the other person, and you will naturally do many of the things on the list. You will make the handshake a natural part of your connection process.

1. **Start with eye contact and a smile.** A great handshake isn't just about a physical gesture, it is about connecting with the other person. It is a physical greeting and you want to convey your pleasure in greeting the other person. The best way to do that is with your face and your eyes.
2. **Web to Web**
Keep your hand open and make sure your handshake will be a hand shake, not a finger or palm shake. This means getting the joint of your thumb (the lower joint - the tissue between your thumb to your forefinger) nestled into the joint of their thumb. This allows you to truly have a full handshake.
3. **Firm, not strong.** A good handshake is firm but not overpowering. It isn't the precursor to a wrestling match, and it doesn't feel like a dead fish. Do you want to be greeted with a dead fish? I doubt it! Always make your grip firm, but make adjustments based on the firmness of the other person's grip.
4. **Up and down, not back and forth.** A good handshake has a nice up and down motion, not a back and forth one, as if you were jointly trying to saw some wood.
5. **Adjust duration.** Some people prefer a long handshake, others prefer them much shorter. Observe the other person and adjust the duration to the situation, how well you know the person, and what seems comfortable to them.
6. **Consider your left hand.** While it may not be appropriate in some cultures, I often use my other hand to grasp the other side of the person's hand or to touch their arm. This gesture makes the handshake warmer and more personal.
7. **Close with eye contact and a smile.** If the smile and eye contact hasn't continued throughout the handshake, finish it out that way.