

Table Etiquette

The world was my oyster but I used the wrong fork.—Oscar Wilde

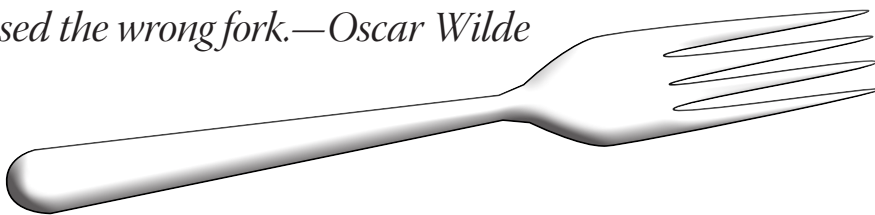
Etiquette is simply a set of rules to add enjoyment to any meal or social occasion. Table manners play a vital role in making a favorable impression on those around you. Being familiar with table etiquette will help you be polite and respectful of the feelings, culture, and values of others and will help you avoid behavior that might be considered rude. A knowledge of table etiquette will help you feel comfortable at special occasions such as family celebrations, awards banquets and weddings, or when a potential employer invites you to lunch or dinner.

Before the Meal

Follow the dress code suggested by your host. If dress is not suggested, ask your host, if possible. If not, business casual is usually best. Before the event, check out the restaurant on the internet and become familiar with the location and menu. Arrive ten to fifteen minutes early. Turn off your cell phone. When you meet the host, shake hands firmly and introduce yourself, if necessary. If you are given a name tag, place it on your right shoulder where it is visible even if you are shaking hands. Try your best to remain relaxed and confident, and always keep a respectful manner. From there, take cues from your host.

Napkins

Once seated at a table, remove your napkin from the place setting, unfold it and place it on your lap. If you are attending a private dinner party, wait until the host unfolds his or her napkin before you unfold yours. Your napkin should rest in your lap until the meal is over, unless you need to wipe your mouth. Never use your napkin to blow your nose or mop up spills. If you must leave the table during the meal, leave your napkin on your chair. When the meal is finished, loosely fold the napkin and place it to the left or right of your plate. Napkins should never be wadded up, refolded, or placed in your plate.



Service

Beverages and bread may be served before the meal. If the bread is in a basket, take one piece and pass the basket to your right. Place your piece of bread on the bread plate, located to your left. If butter is passed around the table, use the serving knife that comes with the butter to place a pat on your bread plate. If there is a butter knife on your bread plate, use it to spread butter on your bread. Leave the butter knife on your bread plate throughout the meal. If there is not a butter knife, use your dinner knife to spread butter on your bread.

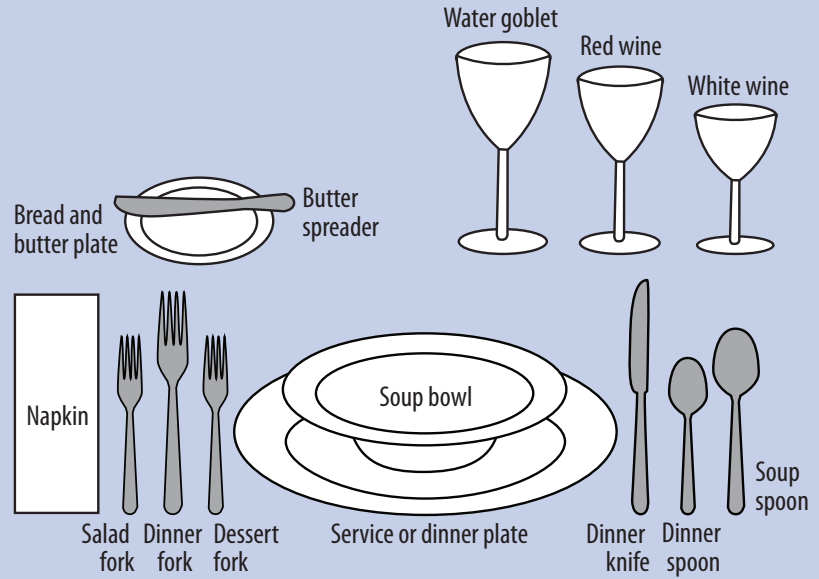
If there is not a fixed menu, order food that is easy to eat. If you are in doubt about what to order, follow the lead of your host. If you have dietary restrictions, now is not the time to discuss them with your host, but when it is your turn to order, discuss your concerns with your wait staff. It is best not to complain about your food. If you drop a utensil, leave it on the floor and quietly get the wait staff's attention to bring you a replacement. To get their attention, simply say, "Excuse me." Do not snap your fingers or yell across the room.

The wait staff will usually serve your plate from the left and remove it from the right. However, each restaurant may have its own way to serve the meal. Always say please and thank you every time you receive anything from the staff. When your host picks up his or her utensils to eat or when everyone has been served, begin to eat. If someone asks you to pass the salt, always pass the salt and pepper together.

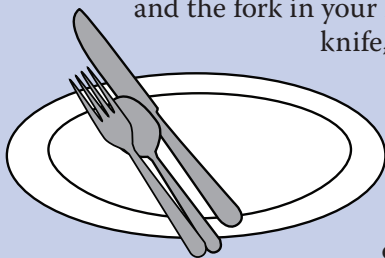
Being familiar with proper table etiquette can set your course for a good experience and make a positive impression about you and your manners.

The Place Setting

The place setting is often your road-map of the meal. You travel from the outside of the setting to the inside. For the first course, choose the outside fork, unless soup is served, in which case choose the outside spoon. A salad fork has smaller tines than the dinner fork that is used for the main dish. The soup spoon is always larger than the spoon used for coffee. A spoon for iced tea has a long handle. Continue eating the next course with the new outside fork. If a course requires a knife, use the knife farthest to the right. The dessert spoon or fork may rest above the plate or may be served with the dessert itself. The bread and butter plate is located on your left, and beverage glasses are located on your right. Any dinnerware to your left is yours and any glass to the right is yours.



Learning the correct use of a knife to cut food may take practice. Hold the knife in your right hand and the fork in your left. Use the fork to hold the food item. Using the serrated (sharp) side of the knife, saw the food, pressing gently as you cut a few bite-sized pieces. Place the knife on edge of your plate with the blade facing in. Eat by switching the fork to your right hand (unless you are left handed).



Unused silverware may be left on the table, but used silverware should never touch the table. When you finish the meal, place your used silverware on your plate with the handles resting at 5 o'clock and the ends resting at 10 o'clock. This is the universal sign that you are finished with your meal.

Table Manners

While you are dining, speak at a normal volume and pay as much attention to your dining partners as you do to your food. Use etiquette to make others feel comfortable with you. *Do not:*

- Speak with your mouth full
- Chew with your mouth open
- Crunch ice
- Rest your elbows on the table
- Refresh your lipstick
- Wear your hat, if you are male
- Use a toothpick
- Stack your plates

Conversation

Conversation is an important element of making your dining partners feel comfortable with you. Even if you are nervous, try to employ the keys to good conversation:

- Pause and think before you speak.
- Respond to the body language and expressions of the person you are talking to.
- Listen to what is said.
- Maintain eye contact and pay attention to the person with whom you are talking.

Even if you do not know the people you are with, small talk can fill the voids in conversation and set others at ease. If you are familiar with current events, you will be able to discuss topics such as news events, famous

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Always follow up with a timely handwritten thank you note.*

people, current best-selling books or movies, travel, or sports. You can also ask people about themselves or their family, work, or hobbies. If you find a common interest, the conversation will become easier. Avoid talking about touchy or personal topics such as religious beliefs, financial situations, politics, illness, divorce, or someone's weight, height, or shoe size. Do not tell racial, ethnic, or sexually oriented jokes. If you are uncomfortable with a topic, change the subject or simply indicate you are not comfortable with the topic. If you are unsure what to talk about, smile and act like you are enjoying your meal and the company of those around you.

After the Meal

Be sure to thank your host for the meal and the good company before you leave. Always follow up with a timely handwritten thank you note.

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References

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Prepared by

Sandra Bastin, PhD, RD, LD, Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist
Debbie Clouthier, BS, Extension Associate

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