

guide to

DINING ETIQUETTE



BASICS

An occasion will arise when you will be asked to attend a formal dinner. Whether it is a job interview, meeting with colleagues, entertaining others at a restaurant for a work-related function, or even a date with someone you really like, you will be expected to know the basics of proper dining etiquette.

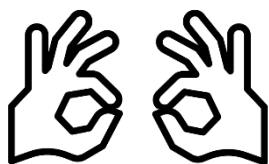
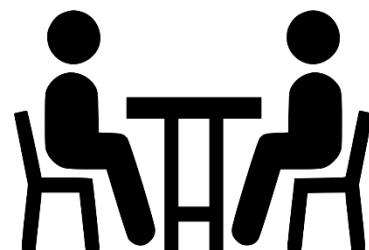
In order to relax, just try to be yourself, focus on the event, use your best judgment, and follow the lead of your host (i.e. how they order, what utensil they use, etc.)

BEFORE THE MEAL

Preparation: Think of some conversation topics and questions to ask at dinner. If you are aware of the guests coming to dinner, make sure to do some research and have some questions and talking points prepared. It is best to stay away from controversial topics such as religion or politics. Plan ahead to make sure you arrive 15 minutes early.

Table Posture. Be comfortable; do not sit rigidly or slouch. Keep your hands in your lap when not in use; no arms or elbows on the table.

Napkin. Once the host is seated and they unfold their napkin, it is your signal to do the same. Place it folded in your lap, where it stays during the meal. Fold your napkin neatly to the right or left of your plate when everyone at your table is through with dessert. If you must excuse yourself, the napkin should be left on the arm, seat of your chair, or to the left of the plate.



Drinks. Remember “b and d”: bread on the left, drink on the right (you can make a b and d with your thumb and forefinger on your left and right hands to remind yourself. Don’t stir drinks (e.g. iced tea) loudly, and *never* chew ice cubes. Stay away from alcoholic drinks. However, if you are over 21 and your host chooses to have one, feel free to join, but only have one. At a cocktail hour, you might be shaking hands so keep your drink in your left hand to keep your right hand dry.

Ordering. If you are ordering food from a menu, select a medium-priced item or as ask the host for recommendations. Stay away from messy or potentially smelly foods like pasta or garlic-laden dishes.



Number One Rule of Etiquette: Follow the lead of your host.



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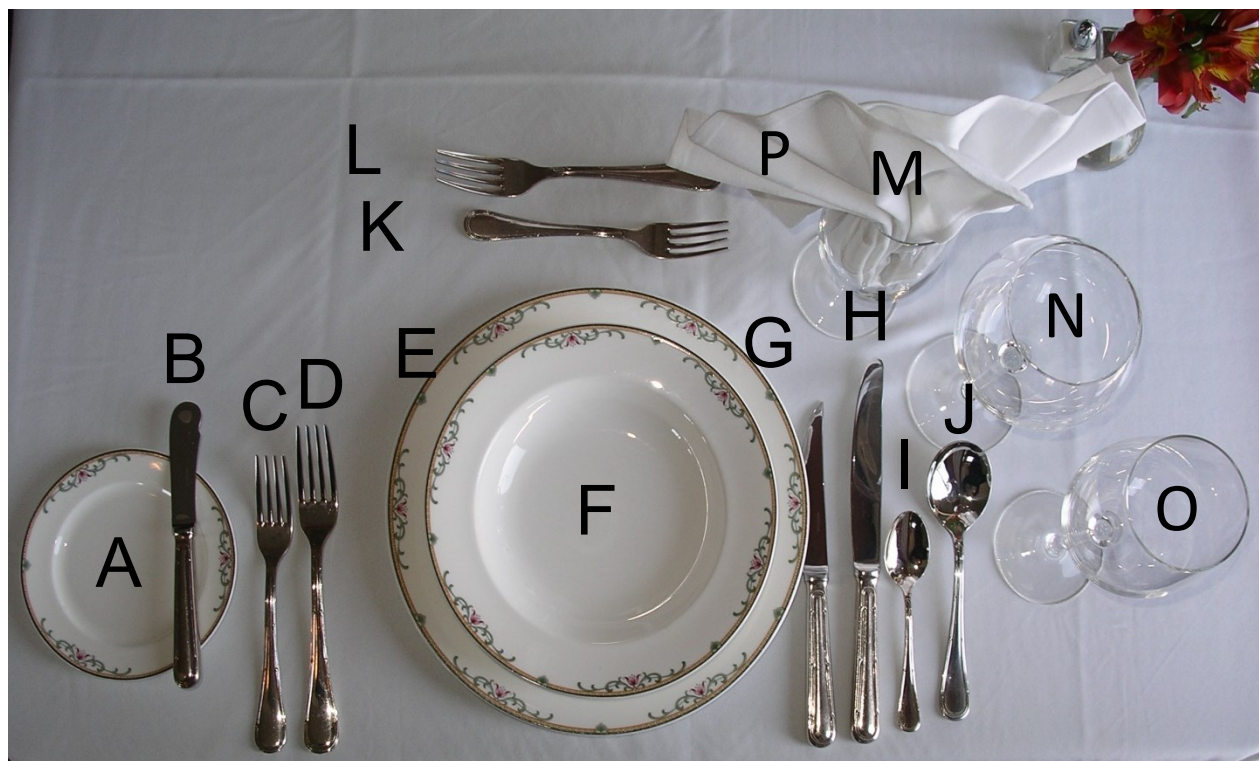
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TABLE SETTING

Each dinner you attend could involve a variation of this formal table setting below; some may be more elaborate or some more simple. However, you can expect to see something like this:



ETIQUETTE DINNER PLACE SETTING

- | | | | | | |
|----|--------------|----|---------------|----|------------------|
| A. | Bread Plate | G. | Dinner Knife | M. | Water Glass |
| B. | Butter Knife | H. | Salad Knife | N. | Red Wine Glass |
| C. | Salad Fork | I. | Spoon | O. | White Wine Glass |
| D. | Dinner Fork | J. | Soup Spoon | P. | Napkin |
| E. | Dinner Plate | K. | Dessert Fork | | |
| F. | Soup Bowl | L. | Cocktail Fork | | |

DURING THE MEAL

Silverware. A formal table set with every imaginable piece of silverware can look daunting, but just remember: **start from the outside and work your way inward.** After the course, the server will remove whatever silverware is no longer needed. You can also watch what your host is using. Never leave your spoon in your cup, bowl, or glass—place it to the side on a saucer or plate. Never place a used utensil on clean linen. Should you accidentally drop your utensil, inform your server, and politely ask for a clean one. Place your silverware at a 4:00-10:00 angle with the knife blade facing you.

Courses. Do not begin eating until everyone at your table has been served. During a banquet, wait for your entire table to be served. Salt and pepper or salad dressing should be offered to others before taking some for yourself. When passing items on the table from person to person, pass in a clockwise fashion or to your left.

Bread. Offer to others first before taking some for yourself. Never butter bread directly from the butter plate; instead, simply place some butter on your bread plate. Also, don't butter your roll all at once; break off pieces and butter each piece one at a time.

Soup. Always spoon *away from you*. Don't crumble your crackers into your bowl. If there are noodles in your soup, you may cut them with the side of your spoon.

Salad. Cut your salad, if needed, and then place your knife across your butter plate with the blade facing you. Cherry tomatoes may be cut by piercing with the sharpest point of your knife, though you may want to avoid them altogether.

Entrée. Cut three or four small pieces of your main course at a time, not all at once. When cutting meat, fork prongs should be pointed down. Take small bites. Never speak with food in your mouth and avoid saying you are "full" or "stuffed."

Dessert. As soon as your dinner plate is removed, slide your dessert spoon or fork down to the left side of your place setting.

The Check. It is usually assumed that whoever initiates the dinner will pay for it. Therefore, the host will take care of paying for the bill. If you are interviewing for a job, the employer should pay for the meal. If you are entertaining others, you will pay the bill. If you have asked someone out to dinner, such as a close friend, you should assume that the bill is yours.

The Gratuity. Gratuities are meant to be given for excellent service. The normal gratuity rate is 15%, with 20% given when dining in fine restaurants or when the service is exceptional.

Thank You. This is VERY, VERY IMPORTANT. Send a short, sincere thank you note either by mail or email within 48 hours of the meal. It is also necessary to extend a brief, but gracious, thank you to your host at the end of the meal as you are leaving the restaurant and saying your goodbyes.

DO'S AND DON'TS

Remember to:

- Focus on the event, not the food.
- Remember in an interview situation, the meal is part of the interview.
- Make eye contact continuously throughout the meal.
- Think about what you are saying before you say it.
- Utilize active listening when others are speaking at the table.
- Ask questions.
- Demonstrate your ability to converse effectively.
- Be confident and be yourself.

Try to Avoid:

- Using a cell phone with you unless you are expecting an extremely important call and apologize if it rings. In this case, prepare everyone that you are expecting an urgent message.
- Interrupting, complaining, or gossiping. Everything you say reflects your personality.
- Talking with your mouth full.
- Applying makeup or pick at your teeth at the table. Excuse yourself to the restroom.
- Reaching across someone to get something; instead, ask for food to be passed.
- Pushing your plate away from you when you are finished with the meal.

Did You Know...



Many times a meal might be a part of an interview process, especially if you are a finalist for a position. In addition to answering interview questions, the employer will be looking to see how you treat staff and if you have good manners. Impress them with your dining etiquette knowledge!

Check out our **Guide to Interviewing** for more information.

FAQ'S

Q: What should I do if I need to leave the table during dinner?

A: If you need to leave the table during the dinner, say “excuse me”, lay your napkin on the chair (arm or seat), and leave.

Q: What should I do if some food falls from my plate?

A: Just leave it there. The server will take care of it. Don't try to hide it under your plate...it will be revealed in time when the plate is removed.

Q: What should I do with my knife when I am not using it?

A: Place your knife across the top of your plate with the blade facing you when you are not using it.

Q: What should I do if I am finished before everyone else?

A: Try to keep pace with the table. But if you do finish early, wait patiently until everyone has finished.

Q: What should I do if I bite into something that is completely awful?

A: Simply bring the food to the front of your mouth and put it back on the utensil used to take that bite. Place it on your plate discreetly, preferably under the garnish.

Q: What if the server gives me the wrong order?

A: Kitchen errors happen whether it is the wrong order or improperly prepared food (undercooked, burned, etc.). Politely inform the server of the problem and suggest a solution. You don't want to ignore the problem or respond too aggressively.

Q: Can I take my leftover food home with me?

A: It is usually not appropriate to ask for a doggy bag. However, if the host does and in turn asks you, you may follow his or her lead.

Whether it is a prospective employer, your boss, your co-workers, or just an evening with a friend, you want to show you are knowledgeable and polite. Keep in the back of your mind the essential elements given here and you will appear well rounded and professional. Additional resources can be found at: <http://emilypost.com>

next steps:

Talk with a Career Specialist for one-on-one assistance: <https://career.missouri.edu/connect>
Check out more resources at <https://career.missouri.edu> > Resources tab