



Patricia Rossi's

EVERYDAY ETIQUETTE
MADE EASY



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INTRODUCTION

For more than 20 years, I have helped people feel more confident and at ease in their everyday lives by teaching them about etiquette and protocol. Whether I'm doing one-on-one coaching, group classes, or my nationally syndicated "Manners Minute" TV segments, I always focus on the same core principles: kindness as opposed to formality, and relationships as opposed to rules.

My goal for this e-book is to give you an overview of basic etiquette so that you feel more confident, more competent, more comfortable in everyday social situations, and less self-conscious.

As you read through the book, I hope you'll keep the following things in mind:

- **Kindness is the great equalizer.** If you step out into the world every day and strive to treat others kindly, you will find that things go more smoothly for you.
- **Being considerate is somewhat of a lost art.** When you choose consideration, you truly shine.
- **The rules of social engagement are mostly unspoken.** Small, incremental changes such as the ones suggested in this book can make a big difference.
- **Don't get so fixated on rules that you forget about relationships.** Relationships are what really matter. If following a particular rule feels wrong to you (because of the nature of your relationship with the person or people around you), trust your instincts. Rules of etiquette are guidelines, not laws.
- **When teaching your kids about etiquette, don't lecture them.** Teach in tiny sound bites, and remind your children of applicable rules just before situations arise. For example, as you head into the grocery store you might say, "We're going into the grocery store now. Remember to say hello to the person behind the deli counter when we get there." As soon as your kids follow through with good manners, be generous with your praise: "That was amazing. I'm so proud of you!"
- **The 3 most important things you can do when it comes to your social interactions are:** (1) have a strong handshake (this includes good posture); (2) remember people's names; and (3) write thank you notes.

Finally, I would like to remind you that etiquette isn't about being "fancy shmancy." **It's about putting other people at ease.** It's not about you – it's about how you make other people feel. Your actions can push people away or attract people to you.

In most cases, good etiquette is a matter of choosing to behave in a way that makes other people feel comfortable with you. Choose wisely!

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING YOURSELF

Have you ever been introduced to someone who wouldn't look you in the eye? Or someone who shook your hand as if you had some sort of contagious disease? When you walked away from those encounters, how did you feel?

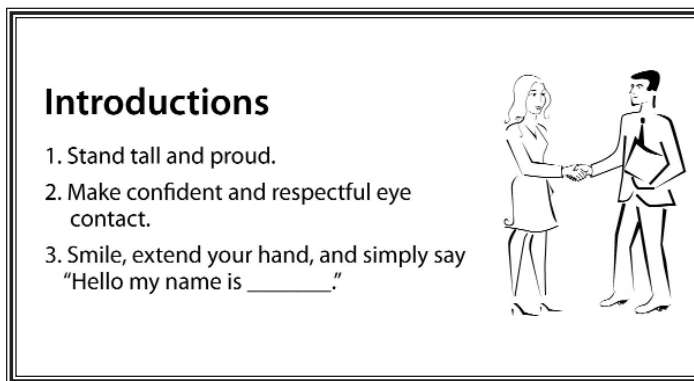
If you didn't feel very good, you're not alone.

People want to feel like they matter; they want to be known, respected and remembered. The better you are at making people feel that way, the more likely you are to make a good first impression.

The good news is that this is not an innate "gift" that you have to be born with – it's a skill that can be learned. You don't have to be an extrovert, or even a "people person," to make a great first impression. Just review the simple techniques described in this chapter, and then practice using them as much as possible. Eventually they will become second nature and will be easily incorporated into your everyday life and interactions.

You'll be amazed to see how just a few small changes can make such a big difference.

The Approach

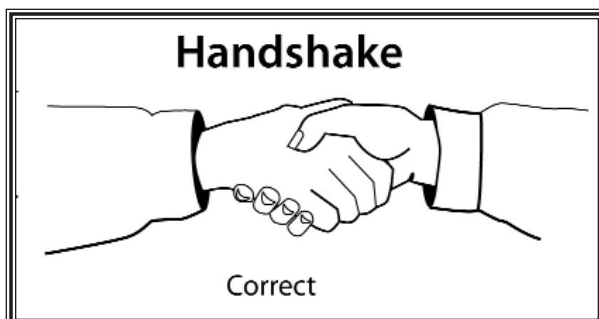


When you're approaching someone to introduce yourself, walk up, extend your hand, look the person in the eye, and say, "Hello, I'm _____." It's that simple.

Extending your hand first demonstrates self-confidence and openness, traits that make you seem both likeable and

competent. Technically, when it comes to workplace introductions, the "higher-up" should be the first to extend his or her hand. As a practical matter, however, you shouldn't wait too long. If the other person (even the company CEO!) doesn't take the lead, just get your hand out there to avoid an awkward pause. It may be that the CEO needs a lesson in etiquette!

The Handshake



A handshake is the only physical contact you're likely to have with someone you've just met, so it's important to get it right. Fortunately, a good handshake isn't complicated.

The correct way to initiate a handshake is to extend your right arm towards the other person with your right thumb pointing up.

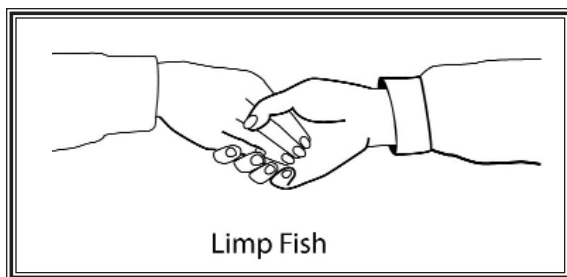
Your hands should connect “web to web” (the “web” is the portion of your hand between your thumb and forefinger).

The connection should be snug, but not uncomfortable, and should be followed by 3 up and down pumps. If the handshake goes beyond 3 pumps, let the other person end the shake when he wants to. As long as the other person is still pumping, it's important not to yank your hand away (even if the other person's hand is sweaty, which it will be occasionally). Pulling your hand away before the other person is ready may come across as a rejection, and nobody likes to feel rejected.

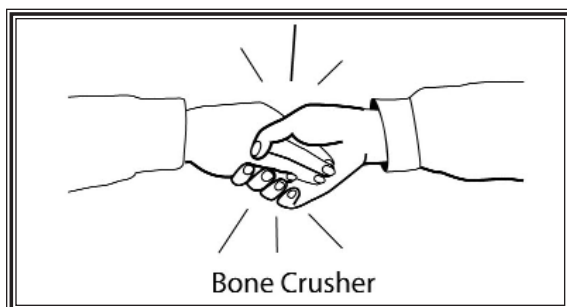
If you try to initiate a handshake but the other person doesn't respond, don't worry about it. Stay relaxed, lower your hand, and move on.

Never shake hands while in a seated or subservient position; stand up first and then shake hands. If there is a barrier between you and the other person (such as a desk or a table), come around from behind the barrier for the handshake.

Although a good handshake is simple in theory, in practice it can be easy to make a small mistake that conveys a bad impression. Here are a few types of handshakes you should avoid at all costs:



- The “Limp Fish” – This is when your hand is limp and feels to the other person like there are no bones in your hand (not a good feeling). Rather than grasping the other person's hand, you're making him or her do all the work. This type of handshake says to the other person, “I'm weak; I don't believe in myself; I'm not a winner.” To avoid a “limp fish” handshake, remember to grasp the other person's hand firmly and maintain a snug connection. If someone gives you a “limp fish,” try to push your hand in a little closer to get a better connection.



- The “Bone Crusher” – The “bone crusher” is the opposite of the “limp fish” handshake; it's when you squeeze the other person's hand so firmly that it causes pain or discomfort. This type of handshake tells people that you're anxious and need to dominate others in order to feel powerful.

- The “Queen’s Shake” – This is when you hold onto someone’s fingertips, instead of making palm-to-palm contact. This type of handshake makes other people feel like you don’t want to touch them, and conveys an “I’m better than you” attitude.
- The “Wrestler” – The “wrestler” handshake is when you turn the other person’s hand over so that your hand is on top. It is very aggressive and a show of power. If someone uses a “wrestler” shake with you, correct it by taking a 2 inch step to the left while gradually returning your hand to a vertical position. This will help restore the balance of power.
- The “Clasp” – This is when you use two hands. Your right hand is grasping the other person’s as in a correct handshake, but your left hand is placed on top. This type of handshake should really only be used in intimate situations, such as to convey condolences. It tells the other person that you’re thinking of them, but if used in the wrong situation it feels insincere and inappropriate.
- The “Fist Bump” – This is technically a handshake substitute rather than a type of handshake, but President Barack Obama’s use of the “fist bump” has made it acceptable in certain situations. It is most appropriate when used by close friends as a celebratory or congratulatory gesture, so don’t try it at your next board meeting.

Some germophobes have begun using the “fist bump” to avoid handshakes; they believe it to be more sanitary. Since you never know if this is what’s going on, if someone initiates a fist bump with you, just go along with it. At the same time, since it is still not generally accepted as an appropriate substitute for a handshake, I recommend against initiating a fist bump in most situations.

One last little tip: if you tend to have sweaty hands, spray anti-perspirant on your hands before social events. This will help keep your hands dry so you can shake hands with confidence.

Body Language

When it comes to in-person communication, your body language is actually much more important than your words. The way you walk, stand, and move tells people a lot about you (whether you’re aware of it or not). In fact, every thought or feeling that you have about yourself is disclosed in your body language.

Think about the last party or networking event you attended. How did you decide whom to approach? What helped you figure out whether a particular person was someone you wanted to meet?

Chances are, you observed people’s movements, their gestures, and their posture – all of those non-verbal cues that we rely on to help us make quick decisions in social situations. At the same time, they were making similar observations about you. What do you think your body language was telling them?

Here are six simple things you can do (without saying a word) to convey both self-confidence and respect for others. These two things are tied together because having respect for others is a silent code for how we value ourselves.

- **Stand up straight.** When introducing yourself, stand up straight with your shoulders facing the other person. Standing tall and proud sends the message that you are confident, trustworthy, and vibrant (whereas slouching indicates that you're unsure of yourself and uncomfortable with your surroundings).
- **Don't lean on anything.** When you lean, you lose 90% of your credibility.
- **Place your feet about 6 to 8 inches apart,** with one foot slightly in front of the other. This will help your posture and make you feel steadier on your feet. Your toes should be facing the other person (to avoid sending a silent signal that you want to get away).
- **Stand approximately 3 feet away from whomever you're speaking with.** If you stand too close, you're invading the other person's personal space (remember the "Close Talker" on Seinfeld?). On the other hand, if you stand too far away, you may make the other person feel as though you don't really want to be near them.
- **Make eye contact** – it shows that you respect yourself and the other person, and that you're giving your full attention to the person in front of you. If you're shy, or have trouble making eye contact, try to focus on the color of the other person's eyes. Pretend that it's your job to find out their eye color (if that helps you). You can also try looking at the person's forehead, right between their eyes.
- **Smile!** A smile is contagious and will immediately put the other person at ease. Be careful not to overdo this in a professional setting, however, since you don't want to be perceived as frivolous or unintelligent.

What To Say

When introducing yourself, keep it simple: "Hello, I'm _____. " If you can, try to get the other person talking and focus on what they're saying.

In the next chapter, we'll go into further detail about making conversation, including tips for responding to gossip, handling inappropriate revelations (i.e., "I have Irritable Bowel Syndrome and it's really acting up lately"), and escaping the conversational Rambler.

CHAPTER 2: COMMUNICATING WITH CONFIDENCE

Confidence is fueled by knowledge – when you know how to do something correctly, you feel much more confident doing it. When you feel confident, people feel more comfortable around you, and communication becomes a lot easier. That's why this chapter is so important, especially if you often feel awkward in social situations.

Although there may seem to be a lot of “rules” to follow, don't get discouraged if you find it hard to remember every one. As long as you are kind, considerate, and respectful of others, you can't go wrong.

Making Conversation

The main thing to keep in mind about conversation is that it's meant to be a back-and-forth exchange between two people. It's not a lecture, a speech, or an interview. Here are a few tips you can use to keep the conversation flowing:

- **Try to get the other person talking as much as possible.** Asking open-ended questions (such as “What are your travel plans this summer?”) instead of yes/no questions (such as “Are you going on vacation?”) is a great start.
- **When the other person is talking, pay attention!** This may sound simple, but it's easy to forget when your cell phone is ringing (or your Blackberry is buzzing).
- **Never ask someone, “What do you do?”** Especially during these difficult economic times – with layoffs, restructuring, downsizing, etc. – it could turn out to be a very awkward conversation stopper. Instead, ask something like, “How do you like to spend your free time?”
- **If someone asks you what you do for a living, don't give a one-word answer.** If you're a consultant, for example, you might say, “I help small business owners learn how to increase their revenue while decreasing their working hours.”
- **Demonstrate that you're paying attention to what the other person is saying.** Maintain eye contact, nod when appropriate, and occasionally repeat back what they say (a technique called “mirroring”). It means a lot to people when they know you're really focused on them.
- **Listen.** When someone asks you a question, make sure to listen to the entire question before answering. Otherwise you may end up giving an unresponsive answer. If someone asks you a question you don't want to answer, try answering the question with another question. You can also try using humor and changing the subject.
- **Say the other person's name.** It's simple to do but very meaningful. People love hearing their own name because they want to feel known and be remembered.

Every once in a while, you'll run into people who want to tell you things you really don't want to know. They might give you all the details of their latest medical problem, specific information about what they found last night in their baby's diaper, or the latest update on their ex-spouse's financial situation.

When this happens to you, do not ask any follow-up questions, even if it seems like the only possible response. As soon as you ask even a single question, you're inviting the other person to

continue – ad nauseum – with the inappropriate revelations. Instead, offer a short response and then steer the conversation in a new direction.

In the case of the parent with diaper details, for example, you could try something like, “Sounds like you could use a vacation! When was the last time you were able to get away?” Hopefully the conversation will turn to their latest trip, and you won’t have to hear anything more about baby’s bottom.

The Name Game

What if you can’t remember the name of the person you’re speaking with?

Whatever you do, never say “I forgot your name” or “I can’t remember your name.” Those kinds of statements will just make the other person feel bad, and they’re unnecessary. Instead, say something like, “Your name is right on the tip of my tongue,” or “It’s been such a long day, could you tell me your name again?”

Of course, you’ll make an even better impression if you can remember the person’s name in the first place. If you have trouble remembering names, here are a few techniques to try:

- Listen. Really listen when someone is telling you his or her name. Sometimes instead of listening, we’re thinking about what to say next. Don’t do this. Listen to the person’s name, and repeat it back as soon as possible: “It’s so nice to meet you, *Timothy*.”
- Repeat. After meeting someone new, say the person’s name a few times to imprint it in your memory. Use it while speaking to the person, but not so frequently that it seems strange.
- Nickname. Give the person a nickname that helps you remember them – “Tall Timothy,” for example. If you use this technique, make sure you don’t say the nickname out loud – keep it to yourself!
- Write it down. Write down names and identifying information (or enter them in your Blackberry, iPhone, etc.). After you meet someone and go your separate ways, write down the person’s name, where you met them, and something that will remind you of what you discussed. This is especially helpful at networking events.

The “Conversational Rambler”

From time to time you will encounter a “conversational rambler” – someone has you in their clutches and won’t stop talking. To get away without being rude, start by saying something positive, such as “I’m so happy I got to talk to you.” Follow up with a brief explanation of why you have to go: “I see someone else I have to speak to” or “I really should go say hello to the host before she disowns me!” Then simply smile and excuse yourself.

You could also try excusing yourself to the restroom, but be careful using this strategy if you’re a woman speaking to another woman – she may very well come with you!

Responding to Gossip

I believe that etiquette is really about relationships, not rules. But there’s one rule I firmly believe

in: *Never engage in gossip*. We've all done it, but that doesn't make it right. If you can kick the habit you'll feel much better about yourself. Try to form a new habit – spreading good news or information about other people.

It can be difficult to refrain from gossiping, especially when you have a juicy bit of news about someone that would be of interest to others. You should still do your best to resist the urge. Remember, gossiping may get you attention, but that attention is fleeting. What lasts is your reputation as someone who cannot be trusted with confidential or personal information.

Of course, even if you don't initiate gossip yourself, you will inevitably encounter someone who does. When that happens, you have a couple of options:

- You can try to change the subject by saying something positive: "What a beautiful sweater! Where did you get it?"
- You could tell the other person that you're not comfortable talking about someone when they're not there to defend themselves.
- You are also welcome to use my favorite response to gossip: "Oh Lord, I have way too much to fix in myself than to use my time and energy talking about other people."

Cell Phones

Cell phones are wonderful and can be very useful. At the same time, when used inappropriately, they can be a source of embarrassment or annoyance. They have a way of distracting you from what's going on in front of you, and when you're distracted it can be perceived as a lack of consideration for others.

It's important to be fully present when you're speaking to someone. When you're involved in a conversation with someone in-person or you're in a meeting, people know when you're trying to sneak a peek at your phone. You're not a secret agent. There's only one 007 – and I'm afraid it's not you or me. If you're in a meeting, keep your cell phone out of sight and out of mind. Let calls go to voicemail and check your messages later.

If you're going into a meeting and there's a chance you're going to get an urgent phone call that must be answered, let the other attendees know in advance: "I may have to leave the meeting to take an urgent call I'm expecting." Don't make a habit of this, however – these types of urgent calls should be few and far between.

Here are a few other tips for respectful cell phone use:

- **Stay calm.** Overly emotional cell phone conversations are awkward for the people around you. If you find yourself getting angry or upset, try to end the conversation and call the person back when you're alone.
- **Don't "cell yell."** Why is it that as soon as we're on the cell phone we think the person we're talking to is stone deaf? Use your normal speaking voice.
- **Never put your cell phone on the table.** Whether at a restaurant, board meeting, or at home, cell phones should never be part of your place setting
- **Keep your phone quiet at public events.** When you go to the movies, a play, or any other event, turn your ringer off or use the vibrate function on your phone.

- **Choose a ringtone that won't embarrass you if it goes off in the workplace.** Even better, keep your phone off or in "vibrate" mode whenever possible. Phones have voice-mail for a reason.
- **Follow the face-to-face rule.** This applies to regular telephones as well as cell phones: always act as if you're speaking to the person face-to-face. That means no eating, chewing gum, blowing your nose, or picking your teeth mid-conversation.
- **No small talk in small places.** Don't use your cell phone in small, enclosed spaces such as elevators, subway cars, and restrooms. It's not fair to others since they can't simply get up and walk away.

Speaking of using your cell phone in enclosed spaces, here's a cautionary tale for you. Just a few months ago, a partner at a large and prestigious law firm was using his cell phone on an Amtrak train. He was talking to a colleague about impending layoffs at the firm (including the names of associates who were going to be laid off), and apparently forgot that he was in public.

A law student who happened to be on the same train overheard the partner and notified a website that posts law firm news and gossip. As a result, the world knew about that law firm's layoffs before the people who were actually being laid off.

Don't make the same mistake. Although you can and should move at least 10 feet away from other people when you're using your phone, doing so will only help to keep from annoying the people around you. It's not a guarantee that no one will hear you.

Remember – when you're speaking on the phone in public, there's really no such thing as a private conversation. Don't say anything you wouldn't want the world to hear.

E-mail

The first thing you should keep in mind about e-mail is that once you hit "*send*," there's no going back. If you're stressed or upset as you're typing the e-mail, wait 24 hours and then re-read the message before you send it.

Everything you send out in digital form – e-mail, blog posts, Tweets, Facebook status updates, photographs, videos – is part of your "digital footprint." Keep your digital footprint clean, since you never know who will see it. When it comes to the internet and digital media, there are no "do-overs." What's done is done, and what's out there is out there forever. Never forget that. Here are a few more e-mail etiquette tips:

- **E-mail is best for brief messages.** Keep e-mail messages short and sweet. How's your inbox looking these days? Full, right? So is everyone else's. Don't make them read a dissertation in an e-mail message.
- **Use proper spelling and grammar.** Just because it's an e-mail doesn't mean you should throw good English out the window. Read your message carefully before hitting "*send*" to catch any errors.
- **Don't write in all CAPS.** It's like shouting at the person who opens your e-mail.
- **Make sure you don't hit "Reply All" when you mean to hit "Reply."** This is one of the biggest blunders people make with e-mail and can lead to serious consequences, especially in the workplace.

- **Don't put anything too personal in an e-mail.** Remember that e-mail messages are easily forwarded, printed, and shared.
- **Use bcc:** When you're sending a message to a group of people, use the bcc: ("blind carbon copy") function so that the recipients can't see one another's e-mail addresses.
- **Use a subject line that tells the recipient what your e-mail is about.** If your entire message is contained in the subject line, use "eom" (which stands for "end of message") so the recipient knows she doesn't have to open the e-mail. For example: "Subject: see you at lunch today! (eom)"

Remember, e-mail is only one means of communication. Don't use it as a tool to avoid in-person or telephone conversations.

Text Messaging

Texting is great for sending short messages, especially when you're in a quiet environment and can't use your phone. Unfortunately, some of us have gotten so used to texting that we have forgotten it's not our only option!

Remember that text messaging is not a replacement for in-person or even telephone conversations, and that relationships are not built on text messages. It's also important to follow these texting rules:

- Never text while driving. It's extremely dangerous.
- Never text (this includes reading text messages) while you are in a meeting or talking to someone in-person. It tells people that you don't really care about what they have to say.
- Never text in all CAPS – it's like shouting at someone.
- Think about how the recipient will "hear" your message. In some cases, because the recipient can't hear the tone of your voice, your words may be received quite differently than you intended.
- Never use text messaging to deliver important or upsetting news. There are some things that require a face-to-face conversation.

Finally, don't assume that everyone can receive text messages, or knows how to access them. There are many people who simply don't use text messaging. If something is urgent, pick up the phone.

Social Media in Modern Times

Social media websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter allow us to quickly share information about our lives with anyone and everyone. This can be a great way to keep in touch, but you have to remember that there is no such thing as privacy when it comes to social media. You should assume that everything you put on the internet (including social media sites) is permanent, searchable, and easily accessible.

Before you post anything to a social media site (including photos, messages, links, etc.), ask yourself whether you would mind seeing it on the front page of your newspaper. If you wouldn't want to see it in the newspaper, don't post it online.

There's no way to control what happens to your social media posts once they're made public – they're out there forever. Potential employers, future loved ones and their parents, college admissions officers, and everyone else will be able to find and view everything. So be very careful about what you put out there.

As with any kind of communication, consideration and kindness are most important when it comes to social media. The following rules all flow from that one basic premise:

- When using social media for business, remember that you have to build relationships before you try to sell your stuff. How would you feel if you were at a party, having a nice conversation, and someone just walked up and launched into a sales pitch? That's what it's like when you jump into social media and immediately start selling.
- On Facebook, don't tag other people in unflattering or off-the-wall photos. Those tags are searchable and you never know who will find them. If someone requests to be untagged, remove the tag as soon as possible.
- On Twitter, keep it real: use a photo of yourself as your avatar (an avatar is an image that shows up next to your social media posts and Tweets) and fill out the "bio" section. Don't use your Twitter stream exclusively to promote yourself – you will quickly become boring and others will unfollow you. The same thing goes for using direct messages to spam other users; it's not nice and it will cost you followers. Twitter is about engaging other people, not pushing your sales message on anyone who will listen. Give and share interesting and useful information as frequently as possible.

CHAPTER 3: TABLE MANNERS

When it comes to table manners, the most important thing is to behave graciously. The goal is for everyone at the table to enjoy both the meal and the company, not to evaluate and judge each diner's familiarity with the rules of etiquette.

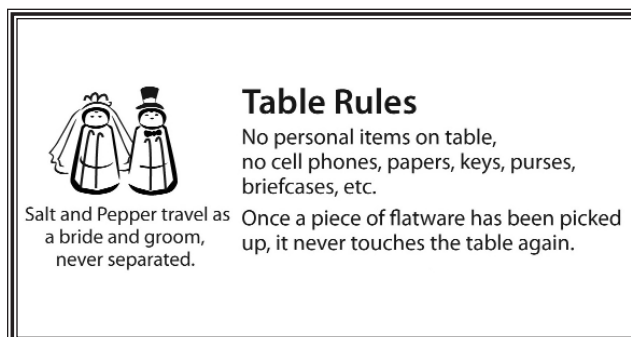
At the same time, understanding a few basic rules will make you feel more comfortable at the table – whether you're at a dinner party, a work function, or a nice restaurant. When you feel more comfortable, your companions will feel more comfortable and the meal is likely to be a more pleasant experience for everyone.

By the end of this chapter, you'll have a solid understanding of dining etiquette so that you can feel comfortable no matter how formal or casual the occasion.

General Rules for Dining

We'll start with a few general rules relating to table manners:

- Don't place any personal items (such as your cell phone, purse, etc.) on the table.
- Food is served from the left, and dishes are removed from the right.
- Wait for the host or for everyone to be served before you start eating. If there are more than 6 to 8 people at the table and hot food arrives, pause. Look around the table. If no one says "Go ahead and eat," you can ask your dining companions, "Do you mind if I start?"
- Don't ask to taste someone else's food, or offer everyone a taste of your food.
- Don't use your fingers to scoop food onto your fork.
- Don't talk with food in your mouth (your mother was right about this one!)
- Take small bites and keep your mouth closed while chewing.
- Never say anything negative about the food or bring attention to something you dislike. Everything you say should be gracious and positive.
- Pace yourself while eating so that you finish at approximately the same time as your host or the majority of diners.
- Never smoke at the table.
- Flatware is placed on the table in order of use, from the outside in towards your plate. If there are two forks on the table and you're not sure which to use first, use the one that is farthest from your plate.



- The salt and pepper travel together (like bride and groom). If someone asks for one of them, pass both together. The same rule applies to cream and sugar – they travel together.
- Once flatware is picked up, it should never touch the table again. Place flatware on the outer rim of your plate when you

need to put it down, but make sure the handles aren't hanging off the plate like oars (they should be placed safely on the plate).

"Taboo" Table Topics

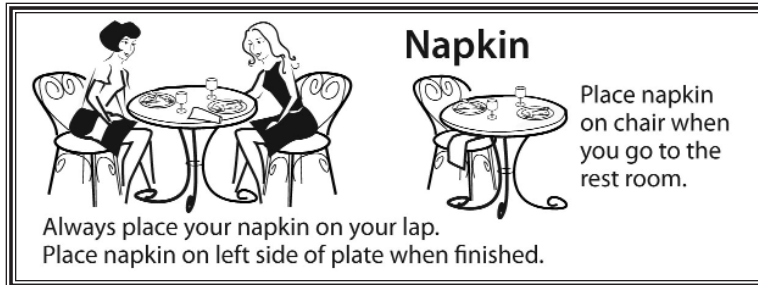
To keep the atmosphere light and enjoyable, there are certain "taboo topics" that you should never discuss while dining – surgery, divorce, finances, religion, and any other topic that's too personal or too negative. The dinner table is not a good place to push your political views on others or to complain endlessly about your boss.

Meals should be pleasant affairs, so try to keep the conversation positive and upbeat. Talk about your recent travels and other exciting things going on in your life. Read the newspaper before going out so that you can speak intelligently about current events. If you make interesting, useful, and/or positive contributions to the conversation, you are more likely to be invited to the next social event.

Sitting Down, Using Napkins, & Leaving the Table

When you sit down at the table, place your purse behind you (if it's small enough), or on the floor at your feet. If you have a briefcase, put it on the floor by your seat.

Once seated, sit up straight (remember that good posture demonstrates self-confidence) and keep your elbows off of the table.



Wait until your host picks up his napkin before placing your napkin on your lap. This should happen soon after sitting down, but not immediately upon being seated. If your host doesn't pick up his or her napkin, wait a minute or two and then place your napkin on your lap.

During the meal, try to remember that your napkin is not a washcloth or a tissue. It should not be used to wipe your whole face or to blow your nose. If you need to do either of those two things, just excuse yourself to the restroom. Napkins are also not bibs. They should never be tucked into your shirt.

If you have to leave the table, place your napkin on your chair as discreetly as possible. When you leave the table to use the restroom, don't announce where you're going (e.g., "I gotta go to the bathroom"). No one needs the image of you in the restroom running through their head while trying to enjoy a meal. Just say, "Excuse me" and leave the table.

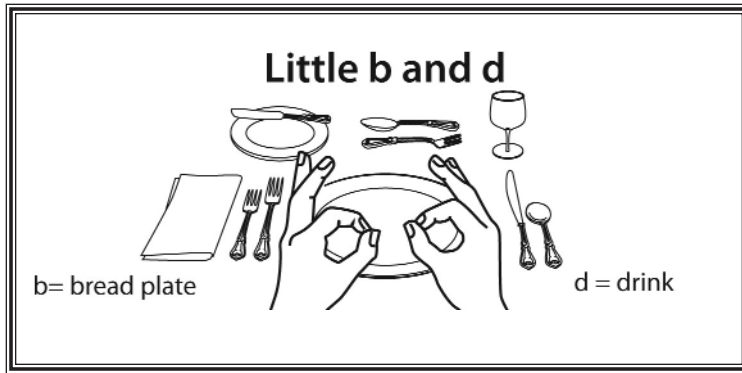
Sometimes when you leave the table, the waiter will fold your napkin and put it back on the table. That's okay; just unfold it and place it back on your lap after sitting down.

When you're finished eating, place the napkin on the table to the left of your plate. Never place the napkin on the middle of your plate.

Bread Plate & Drinks

Your bread plate will be to your left, and your drink will be to your right.

An easy way to remember this is to hold your hands in front of you with your palms facing in. Make the universal “ok” sign with both hands. Looking down at your hands, you should see that your left hand has formed a “b” and your right hand has formed a “d.”



You could also use the acronym “BMW,” which stands for bread, meal, water (the order in which those items are placed, from left to right).

When taking a drink, try to look down into your glass. It looks funny when you’re drinking and looking around at the same time. If your glass has a stem,

hold it by the stem. If you need to practice this at home to make sure you don’t spill, go ahead and practice! It’s better to spill at home than at a formal dinner.

Toasts

The host should always be the first to offer a toast. If you’re giving a toast, remember to prepare your words ahead of time, stand up, keep it short, and make it clear when you’re finished. A simple “Cheers!” will do the trick. Here’s a good example:

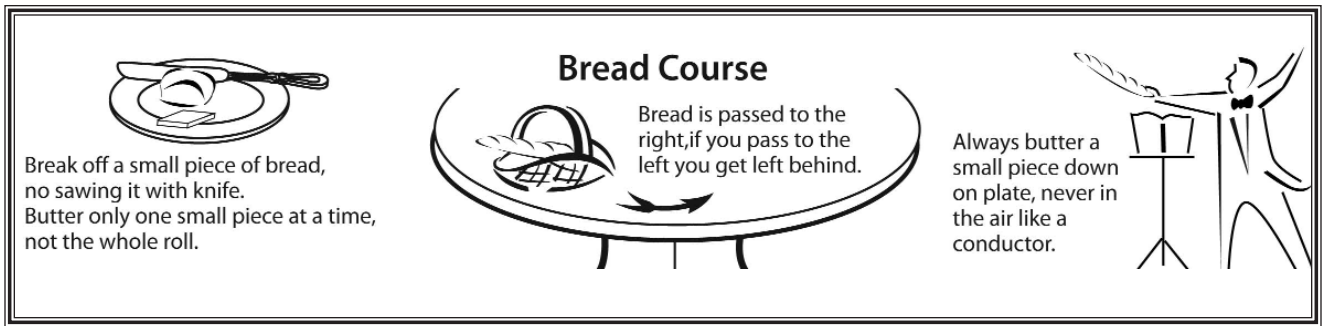
“I’d like to make a toast to our guest of honor this evening, Mr. William Bradford. Mr. Bradford is both an extremely successful entrepreneur and a generous philanthropist, and I am honored that he has chosen to spend this evening with us. Mr. Bradford, on behalf of all of us, thank you for being here. It is a pleasure to have you here with us tonight. Cheers!”

When you’re being toasted, don’t touch or even look at your glass (it’s like you’re cheering for yourself). You should return the toast, however. Simply stand up when the toast is finished and say something like:

“Thank you so much for inviting me here tonight. I want you to know that the feeling is mutual – I am honored to be here and feel privileged to be in such wonderful company. Here’s to a wonderful evening!”

Whatever you say, keep it to less than 30 seconds. Then you can take a sip of your drink!

Bread Course



There are a few simple rules to remember during the bread course:

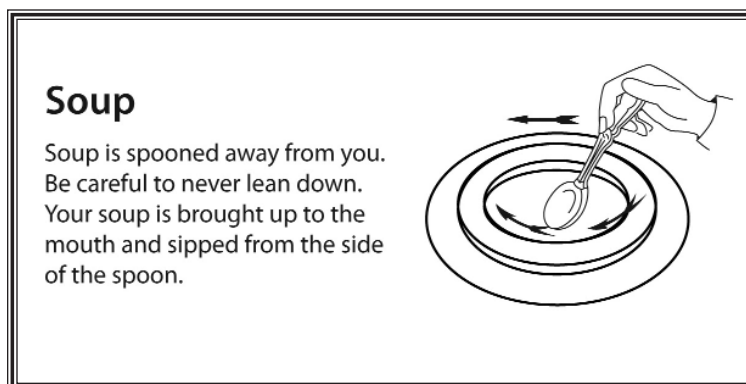
- **Always pass the bread basket to the right** (to help remember this, think “if you pass to the left, you get left behind”).
- **Don’t “molest” the bread.** You should only touch one piece – the piece you take out of the basket.
- **Don’t use the butter serving knife to butter your bread directly from the butter dish.** Use the serving knife to place some butter on your bread plate, then use your own knife to butter your bread.
- **Don’t “ice” your bread with butter as if it’s a cake.** Break off one small bite-sized piece of bread and butter it on your bread plate (not in the air as though you’re conducting an orchestra!)
- **Serve the oil onto your bread plate before using it.** If there is a dish of oil on the table, don’t dip your bread into the dish as if it’s a communal feeding trough.

Finally, although you may not want to hear this, you should really only eat one piece of bread. It’s good manners and better for your health. Don’t be a great white shark – your entrée is coming.

Soup Course

In general, foods are served from the left and liquids are served from the right. Soup is considered a food and should be served from the left.

The proper way to enjoy soup is to spoon it away from you and then bring the spoon up to your



mouth (rather than hunkering down over the bowl). Then sip (don’t slurp) from the side of the spoon. If you try to put the spoon straight into your mouth, your fellow diners will get an unexpected (and unwanted) view of your tonsils.

Remember to keep your elbows close to your sides as you eat – we're not buzzards, and we don't want to look like them!

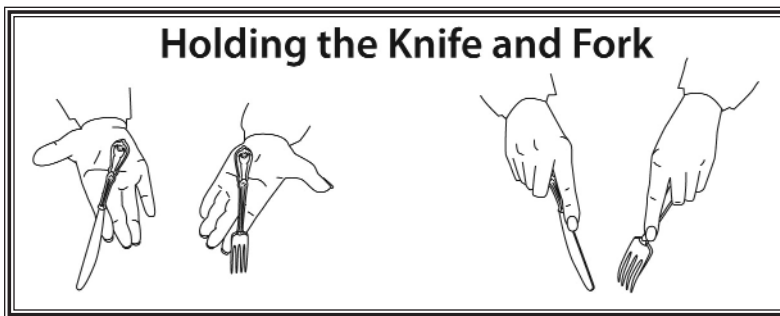
If the soup is too hot, let it cool in the bowl. Never blow on it (you might end up spraying soup onto someone else).

To get to that last bit of soup, tip your bowl away from you and spoon the soup away from you. DO NOT bring the entire bowl up to your face.

When you're finished, rest your spoon in the saucer underneath the bowl. If there's no saucer, you can place the spoon in the soup bowl itself.

Entrees

There are two styles of entrée cutting: Continental and American. No matter which style you use, the following rules apply:

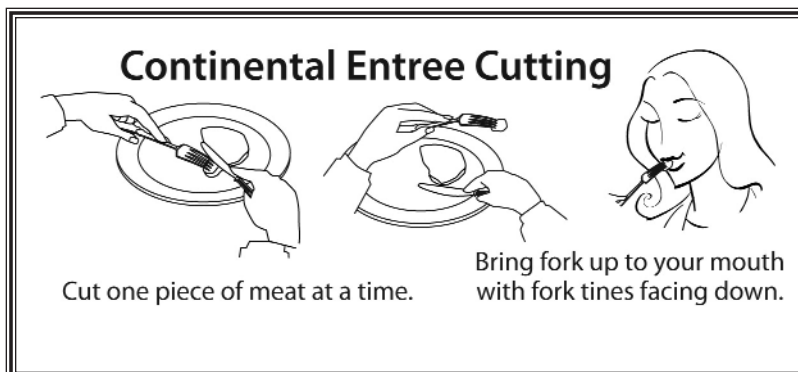


- Hold the knife in your dominant hand (so if you're right-handed, hold the knife in your right hand) and the fork in your other hand.
- Cut one piece of meat at a time, and don't "saw" it by dragging the knife back and forth

(there's no need to re-slaughter the meat). Instead, place the knife at the top and then pull it back towards your rib cage. Repeat as necessary.

After that, the two styles diverge. With the American style, after you have cut each piece of meat you lay the knife down at the top of your plate, put the fork in your dominant hand, and then bring the fork to your mouth with the tines facing up.

The Continental Style is a little bit different. Instead of putting the knife down and switching the fork to your dominant hand after each bite, you keep the fork in your non-dominant hand and bring it up to your mouth with the tines facing down. Since you're keeping the knife in your hand



throughout the meal, it's important not to use that hand to gesture as you're talking.

When it comes to which style of entrée cutting to use, it's important to be true to yourself and do what makes you feel comfortable.

At the same time, if everyone at your table is using the same style, you might want to do the same. Consider practicing both styles at home so that you are comfortable either way and can easily adapt to any situation.

During the meal, if you need to put your fork and knife down but you are not yet finished eating, place the knife and fork in the “resting” position. When you’re finished, the knife and fork should be placed diagonally on your plate, with the tops in the “10 o’clock” position and the bottoms in the “4 o’clock” position.

CHAPTER 4: GIVING AND RECEIVING GIFTS

When it comes to giving and receiving gifts, it really is the thought that counts. People want to know that you care, that you spent a little time on them, and that you put some thought into selecting the gift. It's not necessary to spend a lot of money, especially if you don't have it to spend. If someone is more focused on how much you spent than on the sentiment behind the gift, that's his (or her) problem – not yours.

As a gift recipient, the most important thing is to convey your appreciation for the other person's time, effort, and expense. Remember that not everyone has the financial ability to purchase expensive gifts, and that every gift should be received graciously.

Selecting Gifts

Think carefully about the intended recipient when selecting a gift. Does he like to read? Will she have time to use that gift certificate to the spa? What are the recipient's hobbies or favorite activities? Has he commented favorably on an item that's within your budget? If necessary, get help from someone who knows the recipient better than you do.

The closer your relationship to the person, the more carefully you should think about the gift to ensure that it's something he or she would enjoy. Giving a tin of cookies to a friend who's on a sugar-free diet is almost worse than no gift at all – it shows that you haven't been listening or paying attention to what's going on in your friend's life.

If you're having trouble coming up with a creative gift idea, try combining a few related items in a gift basket or gift bag. Here are some possibilities to get you started:

- For a friend who loves to cook – an apron, Italian cookbook, and a bottle of extra virgin olive oil.
- For someone who loves to read – a book light, a beautiful bookmark, and a gift card to a bookstore.
- For a new mom – comfy slippers, a light robe, and a few of her favorite snacks (sometimes it's hard for new moms to get to the store).
- For a sports fan – tickets to a game, a team t-shirt or cap, and a mug with team logo.
- For a golfer – a few tees, a package of golf balls, a golfing towel, and a golf umbrella.
- For a “get well” gift – a book of crossword puzzles, a bed tray, and a collection of herbal teas.

Whatever you choose, make sure to include a card with a handwritten message from you. People tend to glance over the printed portion of the card, but will always read the handwritten note at the bottom.

“Just In Case” Gifts

It can be awkward to receive a holiday gift when you don't have something to offer in return – but there's a simple solution. Have a few gifts wrapped up and easily accessible so that you never have to say, “But I didn't get you anything!”

Make sure your “just in case” gifts are appropriate for both men and women, and keep some

children's gifts handy as well. If you purchase these gifts in advance, you can take advantage of sales and stock up so you don't have to shop at the last minute.

What are some good "just in case" gift ideas? Music, books, candles, and DVDs would all be appropriate. For kids, books are a safe bet, and you can usually find great deals on children's books if you buy them in advance of the holidays.

"No Gifts"

When the invitation says "no gifts," you should respect that request. Give a wonderful card with a special message from you instead. If you really feel like a card isn't enough, consider making a donation to the host's favorite charity.

There are many reasons why someone would choose to request "no gifts" – perhaps they don't have room in their home for more things, or they don't want guests to feel obligated to spend money. Whatever the reason, it's the host's decision and should be respected.

Dinner Parties

While it's a good idea to bring a small gift to a dinner party, be careful about bringing flowers or wine. The hosts have probably selected particular flowers to display and particular wine to serve with the meal. They may not have a vase available for your flowers, and they may not want to serve your wine that evening. If you do bring wine, make sure to tell the hosts that it's for them to enjoy later, and that they don't have to pair it with anything that evening.

Some good choices for dinner party gifts are unscented candles, a little book of quotes, a CD, or a small decorative item for the home. Basically, you want to bring something the hosts can keep and use after the dinner party is over.

Weddings

It's almost always safe to give money as a wedding gift – especially given the cost of weddings these days! You can also simply select something off of the couple's wedding registry (if they have one).

If you can't afford to give something big, just give what you can. You could put their wedding invitation in a beautiful frame, write them a poem, or give them a handmade gift. Whatever you do, don't skip the wedding because of your financial situation. Weddings are celebrations, and the most important thing is to share the experience with the happy couple.

Children's Birthday Parties

The appropriate amount to spend on a gift for a child's birthday varies around the country. Around \$20 is the average in my area, but it's important to learn what's customary where you are. As with any gift-giving situation, if you can't afford the "going rate," just give what you can. Thoughtfulness is more important than how much you spend.

If you're hosting a birthday party for your child, there are a few things to keep in mind. First, don't feel obligated to give out elaborate goody bags – you can if you want to, but it's totally op-

tional. Second, decide in advance whether your child will open gifts at the party or afterwards. Consider your child's age and the number of people attending to determine whether it would be best to open gifts at the party or not.

If your child is going to open gifts at the party, make sure to teach him or her a few things about receiving gifts ahead of time. Your child should understand the difference between a polite response and an impolite response ("Ew, I hate brown socks!"), and should be told to say "thank you" for each and every gift.

No matter when gifts are opened, thank you notes are a must. If your child is old enough, he should write the notes himself. One way to get your little ones to write their thank you notes is to let them know that they won't be able to play with a gift until they have (1) written the note for that gift; (2) addressed the envelope; (3) placed a stamp on the envelope; and (4) placed the note in the mail box.

If your child isn't old enough to write his own notes, you'll have to write the notes on your child's behalf (and have your child sign them, if he or she is able). You can also take photos of your child with each gift to send along with the corresponding thank you note. We'll go into further detail on thank you notes in the next chapter.

Regifting

Etiquette experts disagree on the propriety of regifting (giving as a gift something that you received as a gift). I believe that regifting is perfectly fine, as long as you follow a few basic rules:

- Always re-wrap the gift beautifully and add a new card. Make sure to remove anything (tags, cards, etc.) indicating that you received the item as a gift yourself.
- Never regift in the same social circle. If you received the gift from a coworker, regift to someone you don't work with and who doesn't know the original gift giver.
- Don't regift anything that looks even remotely used. Only brand new items in the original packaging should be regifted.
- Make sure the gift is something you think the recipient will like. Even though it's a regift, it's still a gift – which means you should put some thought into it and consider the recipient's likes and dislikes.

Receiving Gifts

The biggest question I get about receiving gifts is whether or not to open the gift immediately. The answer is that it depends on the situation.

When you're the guest of honor at an event where opening gifts is part of the entertainment (such as a wedding shower or baby shower), you should absolutely open gifts at the event. Express appreciation for every gift, even the ones you're not crazy about, and never look or sound disappointed.

If you receive duplicate gifts (such as 2 coffee pots, for example), reassure the gift givers – you can say something like, "I'm so glad – I can use one for regular and one for decaf!" or "It will be great to have a back-up."

When opening gifts at an event, make sure to keep track of who gave you each gift so you can write thank you notes later. Ask a friend or family member to help with this task so it doesn't slow things down too much.

At other types of events (such as anniversary parties), some guests will bring gifts and others won't. In that case, you should put any gifts you receive to the side, so that those who didn't bring gifts won't be put in an awkward situation. Of course, if someone really wants you to open their gift in front of them, go ahead and open it. For many people, part of the fun of giving gifts is to see the recipient's reaction.

CHAPTER 5: THANK YOU NOTES AND SYMPATHY CARDS

If you remember nothing else from this chapter, remember this: you must send a thank you note as soon as possible whenever you receive a gift. No excuses. Someone has taken time out from his or her life to purchase or make something for you; the least you can do is express your appreciation.



When to Send a Thank You Note

It is appropriate to send a thank you note when you receive a gift, when someone does you a favor, or when someone has been particularly hospitable (by hosting you in their home for the night, for example). In each case, the sooner you can send the note, the better.

When it comes to weddings and baby showers, there is a little bit of a grace period. You have up to three months to send thank you notes for wedding gifts and two months for baby shower gifts – but it's still smart to send them sooner if at all possible.

How to Write a Thank You Note

Don't get bogged down trying to find the perfect stationery or the perfect words to express your gratitude – the important thing is to get the note written and out the door as soon as possible. There are just a few things to remember when writing a thank you note:

- Address the note to whoever signed the card that accompanied the gift.
- Mention the gift – and be specific. Avoid general statements such as “thank you for the lovely gift.” If the gift was a cashmere sweater, say “Thank you for the lovely cashmere sweater.”
- Describe how you're going to use the gift if possible: “This sweater will be perfect for the ski trip we're taking next month!”
- Recognize any special thought or care that went into the gift: “It was so sweet of you to remember how much I love cashmere – and that blue is my favorite color.”
- Include a sentence or two about your life: “We are so looking forward to the ski trip – we haven't taken a vacation in ages! It will be great to get away.”
- Sign the note: “All the best, Terry.” (You can also use “Love,” “With thanks,” “Sincerely,” or any other closing that you feel comfortable with.)
- Thank you notes should be handwritten and sent by regular mail (not e-mail). If you have messy handwriting, just write slowly and do your best to make it legible.
- Be yourself. You don't have to use any fancy language or words that you would never use in real life.

Sample Thank You Notes

Dear Yvonne,

Thank you so much for the beautiful silk scarf. I just love the colors and the pattern you chose. In fact, I like it so much I'm planning to wear it to my interview tomorrow! I'll let you know how it goes. Thanks again for thinking of me.

All the best,

Susan

Dear Aunt Joy,

I just received the book light you sent for my birthday – what a perfect gift! Now I can read in bed without disturbing Leonard. I'll think of you every time I use it. Hope you and the kids are doing well.

Love,

Charlotte

Dear Claudia,

Thank you for the lovely crystal vase. I can't believe you remembered the exact one we were admiring on Newbury Street last month! You are so thoughtful – I'm really lucky to have a friend like you. Hope to see you at our barbecue next month!

Best,

Traci

Dear Jackson,

Thank you so much for the gift certificate to Hal's Steakhouse. My husband and I can't wait to use it – Hal's is our favorite restaurant!

I hope you and Beverly are doing well – it was great to see you at our anniversary party.

With thanks,

Angelina

Dear Kelly Ann,

It was so kind of you and Stan to open your home to us last weekend. We really enjoyed our trip to Seattle and can't thank you enough for your hospitality.

If you're ever in Boston, we hope you'll stay with us – although we can't guarantee that our french toast will be as delicious as yours!

Best wishes,

Kristin & Rob

Dear Maria & Harrison,

Thank you so much for bringing us dinner last week! With a newborn at home it's not easy to get out to the store or a restaurant, so we really appreciated the homemade meal. How did you know that Italian food is our favorite?

We feel truly fortunate to have such wonderful friends and hope to see you again soon.

Warmly,

Michelle & Bobby

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Rothman,

Thank you so much for your generous wedding gift. Michael and I are working towards buying our first house in the fall, and your check is going to help us reach that goal. Hopefully you'll receive an invitation to our housewarming by the end of the year!

Thanks again for thinking of us.
Sincerely,

Liz

Dear Stephen & Carly,

We just received the adorable baby clothes you sent and can't wait to put them on Chloe. I especially love the pink outfit with the matching hat and socks!

Chloe is doing great since we brought her home, and Joey seems to like being an older brother so far. We look forward to seeing you at the baby naming next month.

Love,

Theresa

Sympathy Cards

It's not easy to find the right words when someone you know loses a loved one, but it's important to try. Here are a few tips for writing notes of condolence, followed by a couple of samples to get you started:

- Send the note as soon as possible after hearing the news.
- Use stationery or a blank greeting card, and write a personalized message in either blue or black ink.
- Express your sympathy for their loss. It can be as simple as, "I am so sorry for your loss."
- If you're having trouble finding the right words, say so: "It's so hard to find the right words at a time like this."
- If you knew the deceased, add a personal memory: "I used to play cards with your mother every Sunday and thoroughly enjoyed her company. When I was down, she always knew just what to say to make me feel better."
- If you're close with the person to whom you are writing, and you genuinely want to help, offer to help. But be specific – saying something like "let me know what I can do to help" is unlikely to elicit a response. A more meaningful offer would be, "If it's alright with you, I'd like to come over and make dinner for you and your family sometime next week. I'll give you a call to find out what night would be best."
- End the note with a few comforting words: "You are in my thoughts and prayers."

Sample Sympathy Cards

Dear Estelle,

I was so sad to hear about the death of your husband. He was a wonderful man – kind, giving, funny, and generous. He will be truly missed.

It's so hard to find the right words at a time like this, but I want you to know that you're in my thoughts.

With Deepest Sympathy,

Geraldine

Dear Susan,

I am so sorry for your loss. Your father was a special person, and I know how close the two of you were. I only wish I had some way to ease your pain.

Next week, after your mother goes back to Florida, I would like to bring you dinner. I'll give you a call to find out what night works best for you.

You are in my thoughts.

Anita

CHAPTER 6: TOUGH ETIQUETTE QUESTIONS ANSWERED

During my career as an etiquette coach, I've gotten a lot of tough questions. Here are a few of those questions (along with my answers) that I thought might be useful to you.

Q: I'm so confused about tipping at hotels. Who am I supposed to tip, when am I supposed to tip, and how much?

A: When you check in, tip the porter or doorman if he helps you get your bags from the car to the check-in desk. Although the amount is up to you, around \$2 per bag is usually acceptable. You can also tip the doorman throughout your stay if he calls you a cab, holds an umbrella for you, or helps you in some other way. You may tip the doorman each time he assists you or just wait until the end of your stay and then give him one larger tip.

If the bell staff brings your bags to your room, the same rule applies – around \$2 per bag. If the bell staff not only brings your bags up to your room, but also prepares the room and/or shows you around, a tip of about \$10 total (this includes the per bag tip) should be sufficient.

When it comes to room service, the hotel will usually include a 15 – 20% gratuity as part of the bill. If you get great service, tipping a little extra when the food is delivered is always appreciated.

You should also tip the housekeeping staff. It's better to leave a tip each day instead of waiting until the end of your stay (since there may be different people cleaning your room each day). In general, around \$3 – 5 per night is appropriate.

Q: Sometimes when I show up at someone's home (for dinner, a party, etc.), I am greeted by one or more dogs barking, jumping, and/or licking. Even if the owner tries to control the dogs, I am still somewhat annoyed that I have to spend the first 15 minutes of the visit watching her deal with her pets. What is the proper etiquette for pet owners (and for me in this situation)?

A: Pet owners should never assume that their guests will enjoy spending time with their furry friends. Some people are allergic to dogs and/or cats, and others may even be afraid of them (especially if they've been bitten or scratched before).

When you invite people to your home, make sure your dogs are outside, in a separate room, or restrained by the time guests arrive – unless you know your guests very well and feel confident that they won't mind the dogs.

As a guest, if you arrive at someone's home and are greeted by their dog(s), be careful not to insult the dog or its owner! If you really don't like dogs, or are allergic, you could politely request, "Is there any way we could step into another room? I'm terribly allergic to dogs."

Q: How do you know when it's appropriate to greet someone with a hug rather than a handshake?

A: When greeting family members and close friends, hugs are almost universal. It's harder to know what to do when greeting acquaintances, co-workers, or new friends, especially now that hugs are starting to become a more common way of greeting others.

This is the type of situation where you really have to try to read the other person's body language. If it looks like they're coming in for a hug, and you don't mind, go ahead and give them a hug! If they look somewhat reserved or timid, it's probably better to offer a handshake instead.

If there's any doubt in your mind about whether the other person wants to be hugged, go for the handshake and skip the hug.

Q: It seems like more people are coughing and sneezing into their upper arms these days, instead of covering their mouth with their hands. I was always taught to do the latter. Which way is proper etiquette?

A: We've learned a lot about how to stay healthy in the past few years. When you cough or sneeze into your bare hands, the next thing you touch will be contaminated with whatever germs you're carrying – so don't do it!

The best thing is to cover your mouth with a tissue, and then immediately dispose of the tissue. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your upper sleeve. In all cases, wash your hands as soon as possible after sneezing or coughing.

Q: My friend is on a diet, and now she thinks she's the diet police! Every time we go out to lunch, she feels the need to tell me the fat content, calorie count, and nutritional value of everything on the menu. She even comments on what I order – saying things like "French fries, huh? You know those go straight to your hips." I like this person but she's making me feel like I never want to eat with her again. What should I do?

A: It's never appropriate to comment on someone else's food choices. Unfortunately, some people don't seem to know or care about this rule. If you're out with a friend who's looking over your shoulder and pointing out "food facts" that you really don't want to know, you're going to have to say something – especially if you want to remain friends.

Try something like, "I know that you're trying to eat more healthfully, and I think that's great – but I really just want to enjoy my lunch. Would you mind if we talked about something else?" Hopefully she'll get the message and back off.

Q: I'm never sure about the etiquette surrounding RSVPs. First of all, what does "RSVP" mean? How long do I have to respond? Is there anything else I should know?

A: The acronym "RSVP" comes from the French phrase, "Répondez s'il vous plaît," which means "Please respond." Basically, if an invitation says "RSVP," it means the host wants you to let them know whether you'll be attending. Usually the invitation will tell you how

to RSVP (by phone, e-mail, or using a formal response card), and the RSVP deadline (“please RSVP by August 23”).

If you can, try to respond as soon as you get the invitation. Even if you have a couple of weeks, it’s better to get it out of the way so you don’t forget. It also makes things easier for the host when you respond quickly.

When you RSVP, thank the host for inviting you. If you’re sincere and the event isn’t a formal occasion such as a wedding, you might also say, “please let me know what I can bring or how I can help.”

If you’re going to attend, you should mark the date of the event on your calendar right away so you don’t end up with conflicting events. Keep the invitation handy (on your bulletin board or on the refrigerator), so it’s easy to find on the day of the event. You’ll probably need to refer to it to get directions to the event, or to remind you of other details.

Q: Other than “please” and “thank you,” what words and phrases should I teach my kids first?

A: There are a few other “magic phrases” that your kids should learn as soon as they are able. They are:

- “Yes, please.”
- “May I...”
- “No, thank you.”
- “You’re welcome.”
- “Fine, thank you. How are you?” (teach your children to answer this way when someone asks them how they are – it’s much more polite than the typical “fine” and will really impress adults)

Incorporating these phrases into their everyday vocabulary will really smooth the way for your children as they go through life.

Q: Is it okay to eat french fries (and other “finger foods” such as nachos, chicken wings, etc.) with your fingers?

A: Yes. French fries, for example, are traditionally a “finger food.” Unless they have gravy or cheese on them, it is acceptable to eat them with your fingers. Of course, if you are in a “fine dining” establishment, you may want to err on the side of caution and use your fork instead.

Q: At our children’s soccer game last week, the behavior of both the children and the adults was truly appalling. What is the best way for parents to behave at their children’s sporting events, and what should they be teaching their kids about how to behave?

A: Both parents and children should be “good sports” in any type of competitive situation. That means:

- Be considerate of other players.

- Follow the rules.
- Don't argue with your coach, teammates, players on the other team, umpires, or referees.
- Thank your teammates, your coaches, the scorekeepers, the manager, and the players on the other team.
- Be a gracious winner. Thank the losing team for a good game.
- Be a gracious loser. Thank the winning team for a good game, and do so with a positive attitude

If you have an etiquette question please contact Patricia @ PatriciaRossi.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patricia Rossi is America's etiquette and protocol coach, with over 20 years of experience in business etiquette and protocol training.

Patricia is a sought-after etiquette coach, consultant, public speaker, columnist, and television & radio personality. Her focus is on kindness as opposed to formality; relationships as opposed to rules. Her seminars on social and professional protocol shed new light on modern manners for business leaders, professional athletes, children and young adults in real life situations.

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