

FIRST STEPS

- ✓ Keep yourself informed about grooming and appropriate situational etiquette.
- ✓ Etiquette is polished with experience and interaction with people – keep practicing!

INTRODUCTION

An occasion will arise when you will be asked to attend a dinner of great importance. Whether it is a job interview, entertaining a client, a meeting with a co-worker, 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 and present yourself at your best, try to focus on the event, be yourself, use your best judgment, and follow the lead of your host. If you are in doubt about any aspect of the dining experience, watch (discreetly) how your host behaves. For example, how he/she orders, what utensil he/she uses, etc., then follow suit.

If you are attending a meal as part of an interview, also check out our *Guide to Interviewing*.

BEFORE THE MEAL

Preparation: Think of some conversation topics to use 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. However, it is generally best to stay away from controversial topics such as religion or politics. You don't want to inadvertently offend your host with viewpoints that may be different from theirs. Plan ahead to make sure you arrive 15 minutes early.

Sitting Down: Everyone should rise when a person of higher rank is standing. Wait until these people take a seat before you do.

Napkin. Once the host unfolds his/her napkin, it is your signal to do the same. Fold it into a triangle and place the longest side toward you. Fold your napkin neatly to the right or left of your plate when everyone at your table is through with dessert. During the meal, the napkin should always be placed in your lap. If you must excuse yourself, the napkin should be left on the arm, seat of your chair, or to the left of the plate.

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.

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, making a noise with the spoon against the glass. You also *never* chew ice cubes. (If you take sugar or sugar substitute packets, do not take more than two. Tear them only 3/4 of the way (to minimize trash) and leave the empty

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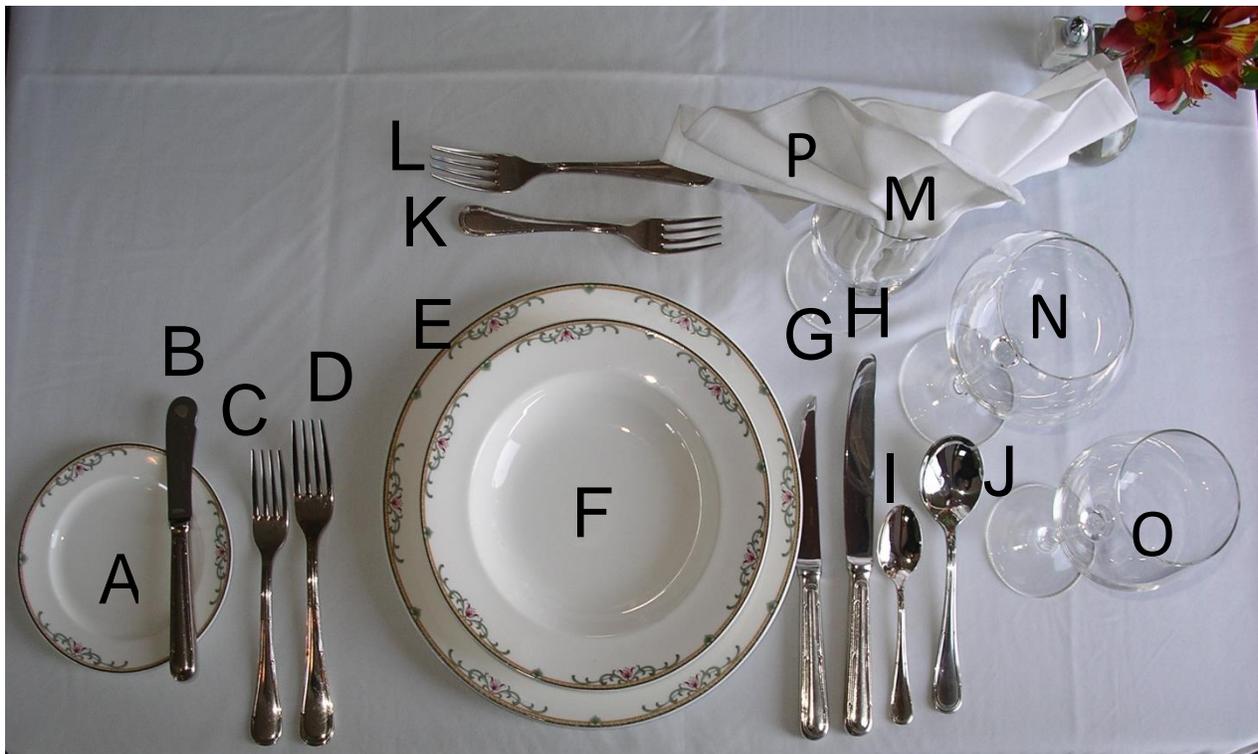


packet on the table...the server will take care of it. Stay away from alcoholic drinks. However, if your host chooses to have one and you wish to join, **HAVE ONLY ONE!** At a cocktail hour, you will be shaking hands with many individuals, so keep your drink in your left hand to keep your right hand dry.

Ordering. If you are ordering food from the menu, select a medium priced item. It is a good idea to ask the host for recommendations. Follow the lead of the host. Stay away from messy or potentially smelly foods like pasta or garlic-laden dishes (even if it is your favorite).

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

DURING THE MEAL

Silverware. A formal table set with every imaginable piece of silverware can look daunting, but things will proceed smoothly if you remember one important rule: **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 clients, 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 on plain or personal stationary to the individual(s) within 48 hours of the meal. An e-mail in this situation would also be acceptable. 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.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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 the same 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.

ETIQUETTE DO'S AND DON'TS

Do:

- **Focus on the event, not the meal!**
- 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!

Don't:

- Have 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.
- Interrupt, complain, or gossip. Everything you say reflects your personality.
- Talk with your mouth full.
- Apply makeup or pick at your teeth at the table. Excuse yourself to the restroom.
- Reach across someone to get something; instead, ask for food to be passed.
- Push your plate away from you when you are finished with the meal.

Conclusion

This is not all there is to dining etiquette. These are just some of the basics that one would need to know before dining in a formal setting. Whether it is a prospective employer, your boss, your co-workers, or just an evening with a friend, you do not want to appear uninformed regarding dining etiquette. 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

- ✓ Come to the MU Career Center to talk with someone if you have questions about dining etiquette and for tips on interviews.
- ✓ Visit <https://career.missouri.edu> and click on the "Resources" Tab to visit [Mizzou Career Tools](#), where you can search our site for more handouts on this and other topics relevant to you!