

Professional Dining Etiquette Tip Sheet



Understanding etiquette plays an important role in making a favorable impression. The point is not to give you a lot of stuffy rules to memorize, but to make you and those around you feel comfortable in professional social settings. Your boss and colleagues will definitely notice if you make an etiquette blunder, and poor manners can have a negative impact on your career. Don't worry, it's pretty easy to get up to speed!

Basic Etiquette Tips:

Keep elbows off the table, and your non-dominant hand in your lap unless you are using it.

Make light conversation with everyone. Give others equal opportunities for conversation. Pick neutral, not controversial, topics for conversation. It is your responsibility in a social gathering to contribute to the conversation.

To keep conversation flowing, ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a yes/no answer: "Tell me about your family," not "Do you have any children?"

Keep multicultural competence in mind with your dinner companions. In the professional world, you may meet a very diverse group of people. Be careful not to make assumptions about people based on what you think you know about their cultural group. Treat everyone as an individual.

Politeness counts. At a restaurant, say thank you to your server and busser.

Turn off your cell phone or switch it to silent or vibrate mode before sitting down to eat, and leave it in your pocket or purse. If you must make or take a call, excuse yourself from the table and step outside.

Say "Excuse me," or "I'll be right back," before leaving the table.

Be flexible and aware of what others are doing. Dining comes in many flavors these days, with a wide spectrum of restaurant types, place settings, and even utensils to navigate. Do the best you can!

Gender parity: all professionals should be treated the same at a professional event. This means no pulling out a chair, or ordering dinner, for your female co-worker.

Ordering Can Be Tricky:

In any professional social setting, it's important to follow the leader. Sometimes this will be your boss. Sometimes it will be your client. Sometimes it may be you! It's important to take cues from others and adapt your behavior. For example, if your client orders a sandwich, don't order a 3-course meal. Similarly, if your boss skips dessert, you will want to do so as well, so let them order first. If you are asked to order first, feel free to quickly ask others what they are thinking about having.

Should you have the special? These are typically priced 20-40% higher than regular menu items, so order with care.

When Your Meal Arrives:

Serving: Food is served from the left. Dishes are removed from the right.

Wait until all are served at your table before beginning to eat, unless the host tells you to begin.

Butter, spreads, or dips should be transferred from the serving dish to your plate before spreading or eating.

Always use serving utensils to serve yourself, not your personal silverware.

Eating: Always taste your food before seasoning it.

Don't blow on your food to cool it off. If it is too hot to eat, wait until it cools.

Take small bites without biting down on your utensils, and chew with your mouth closed. Finish chewing your food before beginning to speak.

Always scoop food, using the proper utensil, away from you rather than towards you.

Do not hold your fork in your fist, and cut only enough food for the next mouthful.

You may see people using either the Continental style, with the fork in the non-dominant hand and knife in the dominant hand, or the American style, in which after food is cut the fork is transferred to the dominant hand to eat and the other hand goes in the lap. Either is totally acceptable, but stick to one style.

Do eat a little of everything on your plate. It is acceptable to leave some food on your plate if you have eaten enough. Don't make an issue if you don't like something or can't eat it.

Even if you have dietary restrictions, it is inappropriate to request food other than that which is being served by the host at a private function. If you have serious dietary restrictions or allergies, let your host know in advance of the dinner.



Try to pace your eating so that you don't finish before others are halfway through. If you are a slow eater, try to speed up a bit, and vice versa. Never continue to eat long after others have stopped.

Drinking: If you are not yet 21, don't drink alcohol. Just politely request something else, or drink water.

Never turn a wine glass upside down to decline wine. It is more polite to let the wine be poured and not draw attention.

Drink moderately at business dinners, even if your hosts are drinking more. In many Asian countries (for example) it's typical to drink quite a bit at business dinners, but you will want to keep your wits about you and stay sober.

Servers will often ask if you would like sparkling, still (both bottled) or tap water. They charge a lot for bottled water and it's perfectly acceptable to request tap water.

If you are hosting a dinner, do not assume that everyone drinks alcohol.

If you are 21+ and drink alcohol, learn how to order at least one cocktail with confidence. You may be faced with needing to order a cocktail without a menu, so knowing one simple drink that you like will make life easier.

Passing: Pass food from the left to the right. If asked for the salt or pepper, pass both together.

Set any passed item, whether it's the salt and pepper shakers, a bread basket, or a butter plate, directly on the table instead of passing hand-to-hand.

Never intercept a pass. Snagging a roll out of the breadbasket or taking a shake of salt when it is on its way to someone else is rude.

Mishaps

Don't clean up spills with your own napkin and don't touch items that have dropped on the floor. Politely ask your server to clean up and to bring you a replacement for the soiled napkin or dirty utensil.

If you spill food on yourself or the table, have a sense of humor – it's happened to all of us. Quickly clean up what you can, and excuse yourself if need be to clean up in the restroom.

When the Meal Is Over

At the end of the meal, knives and forks should be placed on the plate with tips at 10 o'clock and handles at 4 o'clock. This signals the waiter or host that you have finished eating.

The host may signal the end of the meal by placing his or her napkin on the table. Once the meal is over, you too should place your napkin neatly on the table to the left of your dinner plate.

Do not use a toothpick or apply lipstick at the table.

Do not push your dishes away from you or stack them for the waiter when you are finished. Some people feel they are being helpful when they stack dishes, but the wait staff prefers to do it themselves.

It should be clear who is paying the check BEFORE the meal begins. If you are responsible, request the check discreetly (don't flag down the server), and leave an tip of 15-20%. For larger groups, restaurants will often add a gratuity (tip) automatically, so check the receipt to make sure you are not tipping twice.

Etiquette Specifics: Napkins and Place Settings

How to Use Napkins:

As soon as you are seated, remove the napkin from your place setting, unfold it, and put it in your lap. Do not shake it open.

The napkin rests on your lap till the end of the meal. Don't clean the cutlery or wipe your face with the napkin. NEVER use it to wipe your nose!

If you excuse yourself from the table, loosely fold the napkin and place it to the left or right of your plate or on your chair. Do not refold your napkin or wad it up on the table either.

At the end of the meal, leave the napkin semi-folded at the left side of the place setting. It should not be crumpled or twisted; nor should it be folded. The napkin must also not be left on the chair.

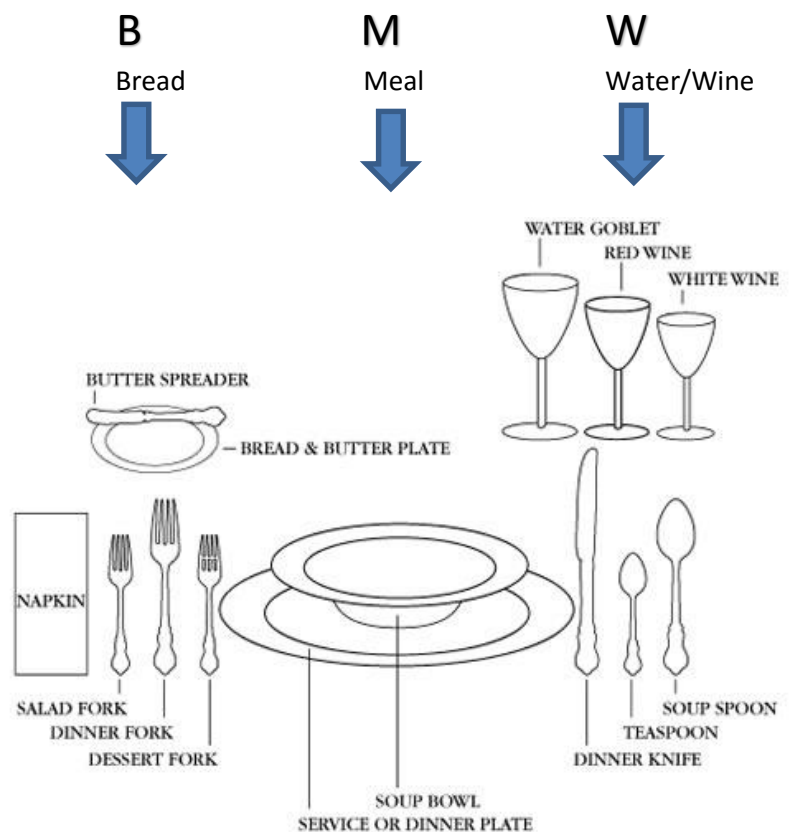
Which Glass is Yours?

Here's the silverware and dinnerware rule: Eat to your left, drink to your right. Any food dish to the left is yours, and any glass to the right is yours.

Starting with the knife, fork, or spoon that is farthest from your plate, work your way in, using one utensil for each course. The salad fork is on your outermost left, followed by your dinner fork. Your soup spoon is on your outermost right, followed by your beverage spoon, salad knife and dinner knife. Your dessert spoon and fork are above your plate or brought out with dessert. If you remember the rule to work from the outside in, you'll be fine.

Once used, your utensils (including the handles), must not touch the table again. Always rest forks, knives, and spoons on the side of your plate.

For more formal dinners, from course to course, your tableware will be taken away and replaced as needed. To signal that you are finished with the course, rest your fork, tines up, and knife blade in, with the handles resting at four o'clock and tips pointing to ten o'clock on your plate.



Etiquette Around The World – It's Different

Here is just one example: In Japan, you should hold your soup bowl with your hands and slurp or the chef will think you don't like the soup! Never leave your chopsticks sticking up in your rice bowl, and don't finish your food or your host will think they did not provide you with enough to eat. Always check on etiquette when traveling.

Etiquette Specifics: Types of Food

Appetizers, Hors d'oeuvres, Canapes: Food that is served at a cocktail party or during a pre-meal cocktail hour is intended to be eaten with the fingers. This includes olives, pickles, nuts, canapes, deviled eggs, and chips. If served with a toothpick, place it on your small plate or in your napkin.

Bread: Use your fingers to remove bread from the serving plate unless it is served with tongs. When a bread and butter plate is on the table, use it.

Break slices of bread, rolls and muffins in half or in small pieces never larger than one bite. Butter each bite at a time. Small biscuits do not have to be broken. It is never appropriate to cut a roll with a knife.

When the rolls are served in a basket, take one, and always pass the basket to your right. Place the roll on the bread plate, which is located on the left side. Never tear your roll in half or into many pieces.

Use your own butter knife and the butter on your plate; buttering should be done on the plate or just above it. Use your butter knife for spreading and not as the butter server. The butter knife remains on the bread and butter plate at the end of the meal.

Chicken: When dining in a restaurant, chicken should always be eaten with a fork and knife, with the exception of chicken wings which are typically served in a more casual setting and eaten with the hands.

Corn on the Cob: Corn on the cob is usually not served in a business setting, but if it is, it is perfectly acceptable to pick it up and eat it.

Dips: Seinfeld was right, no double dipping! If you are eating veggies and dip or chips and salsa, dip the item just once into the dip, then finish it.

French Fries: In a fine dining restaurant, use your knife and fork. In the vast majority of eating situations in the United States, French fries are eaten with the hands. It doesn't matter which hand. Exception: If they are covered with something (like cheese, gravy, chili, etc.), they are considered utensil foods.

Olives: Generally, olives are considered a finger food. It is perfectly acceptable to pick up and eat an olive with your fingers. Remove pit with your fingers. If you prefer not to use the finger method, use a small fork to stab olive and remove olive pit from your mouth.

Depending on your dining situation, you can either choose to eat olives or leave them on the plate.

Pasta or Spaghetti: The perfect method for eating spaghetti or other long stringy pasta is to twirl it around your fork. Use a spoon to help if needed.

It is also acceptable to cut pasta with a knife and fork. You can get some leverage by turning the pasta while holding the tines of your fork against the edge of your plate.

Potatoes: Baked potatoes are most often served already slit. If not, cut across the top with a knife, open the potato wider with your fork, and add butter or sour cream and chives, salt, and pepper.

You may eat the skin as you go along. Don't take the insides out and put the skin aside (or take the foil off). Eat it by scooping out the insides bite by bite.

Salad: Salad can be difficult to eat if the pieces of lettuce are large. If you are served large pieces or a whole wedge of lettuce, cut one bite at a time, using the knife provided.

If the salad is served before or after the main course, use the smaller fork. If the salad is considered the main course, use the entrée fork (large fork).

Small Plates: You may go to a restaurant where it's expected to order many small plates or tapas and share them around the table. Be adventurous and try them all, but take a small portion of food off the share plate and put onto your own plate before digging in.

Soup: Dip the spoon into the soup, moving it away from the body, until it is about two-thirds full, then sip the liquid (without slurping) from the side of the spoon (without inserting the whole bowl of the spoon into the mouth).

It is perfectly fine to tilt the bowl slightly (again away from the body) to get the last spoonful or two of soup.

To eat bread while eating your soup, don't hold the bread in one hand and your soup spoon in the other. When ready to eat a bite of your bread, place the spoon on the under plate if there is one, then use the same hand to take the bread to your mouth.

How To Use Chopsticks



Step 1:
Rest one chopstick in between the thumb and forefinger of your main hand. Keep it steady with the tip of your ring finger.

Step 2:
Hold the second chopstick like you would a pen and grip firmly with your thumb, index and middle fingers.



Step 3:
The secret to using chopsticks is to keep the bottom chopstick still and just move the top one only.

Step 4:
Keep the thumb still, but move the index and middle finger to open and close the chopsticks. Now try and pick something up!



Sushi: Pour some soy sauce into your small bowl, and add just a tiny bit of wasabi (the green paste). Swirl it around to mix it a bit. Dip your sushi quickly into the sauce before eating. Slices of pickled ginger are a palate cleanser between bites if you like.

Wine: Never turn a wine glass upside down to decline wine. It is more polite to let the wine be poured and not draw attention.

If you are asked to order wine for the table and you don't know much about it, just ask others whether they prefer red or white, then order a fairly inexpensive bottle. When the server opens the wine, you are not expected to sniff the cork. When they pour a bit of wine in your glass to taste it, there is no need to swirl it around. Just taste it, and unless it's truly awful, say "it's fine." They aren't looking for your opinion, just giving you an opportunity to tell them the wine has gone off and no longer tastes good.