Dining Etiquette

IN THE BEGINNING

- Elbows on the table are acceptable only between courses, not while you are eating. Keep your hands on your lap or resting on the table (with wrists on the edge of the table).
- If you need to leave the table temporarily, place your napkin on your seat.
- Handle the “grace period” carefully. Religious practices are personal. So whether you are a host or someone else’s guest, avoid saying grace aloud or interrupting someone else.
- Sit up straight to denote confidence.
- When all else fails follow the example of the host.

KNOW YOUR TERRITORY: Formal Table Setting

Know your place settings. Use silverware from the outside in and when in doubt, follow the host’s example.

1. Salad plate (placed in center of dinner plate or to the left of the dinner napkin)
2. Napkin (can also be placed in the center of the dinner plate)
3. Salad fork (the smaller-sized fork)
4. Dinner fork
5. Dinner plate
6. Dinner knife
7. Teaspoon
8. Soup spoon (only if soup is served)
9. Bread & butter plate (optional)
10. Water/Iced tea glass (usually placed at the tip of the knife)
11. Wine glass (optional, placed to the right at a slant to the water/iced tea glass)

TIP: Drink from YOUR water glass; it is to your right, at the tip of the knife (#10).
ORDERING

- Say please and thank you to the waiter.
- Scan the menu quickly.
- Think before ordering. Order foods that can be eaten with a knife and fork. Don’t order messy foods or finger foods that are apt to splatter or spray (i.e. Spaghetti) and are best left for informal dining. A chicken breast or vegetable plate is always safe.
- If you are not sure what to order, follow the host’s lead.
- If the host is not first in line to order, ask him/her, “What do you recommend?”
- Order a medium-priced entrée.
- Don’t have more than one alcoholic drink. In an interview situation do not order an alcoholic beverage. Stick to soft drinks, tea, coffee, and water. Avoid beer, wine, and mixed drinks.
- If your host insists on seeing the dessert menu, he/she wants you to have one.
- Follow your diet quietly. If you have a special diet, call the restaurant or view an online menu in advance to explore your menu options.

EATING

- Always taste food before you add salt.
- Cut one bite (meat, fruit, vegetables) at a time. Keep your fork prongs pointed down, not up.
- When eating dinner rolls or bread, tear off and butter one small piece of bread at a time. Avoid making a sandwich.
- When sharing a sauce with others, spoon some of it on to your plate; don’t dip your food into it.
- Pace yourself. Dining is not a race to see who can finish first. Eat at the same pace as your host or hostess.
- Don’t eat with your mouth open.
- Don’t eat the garnish. The parsley is there for decoration only.
- Don’t drink from the soup bowl. Do not slurp or blow on your soup.
- Don’t eat as if this is your last meal. On the other hand, don’t dine on half a lettuce leaf. You’ll make the best impression by eating like a human – not like a wolf or a bird.
CONVERSATION:

- Be prepared to engage in conversation.
- Read national and local newspapers ahead of time so that you can discuss current news and events.
- Relax and keep the conversation focused on business-related or casual topics.
- Don't talk about personal relationships, recent parties, politics, or religion. This includes your choice of jokes.
- Don't discuss dietary restrictions; down play your food preferences.

WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Don’t reach. Simply ask the closest person to the item to pass it once they are finished.
- Don’t perform any personal grooming at the table.
- Don’t use toothpicks in the presence of the hosts or other guests.
- Don’t smoke, chew gum, burp, or pick your teeth. If you feel something in your teeth excuse yourself to the restroom to remove it.
- Don’t blow your nose in your napkin.
- Don’t forget to turn off your pager or cell phone. No texting during dinner.
- Don’t pile purses, keys, eyeglasses, etc. on the table.
- Don’t hold silverware and gesture like you are conducting an orchestra.
- Don’t shout, whisper, or otherwise disturb others.
- Don’t request a take home box.
- Don’t get too comfortable. Even if the meal isn’t technically an interview situation, you need to be on your toes.
- Don’t argue over the check or offer to pay the tip; the host who invited you will take care of both.