



## ***Interview Dining Etiquette***

In recent years, more and more employers have begun conducting second or third round interviews in restaurants. This isn't merely a matter of convenience or an excuse for the recruiter to eat a good meal on the company's tab. Rather, employers want to see how potential hires will act with clients in social situations. No company can afford to hire someone who might cause them embarrassment or ridicule by not knowing proper etiquette. Before you go to a restaurant interview, you should brush up on your dining etiquette. Don't let the subject intimidate you -- etiquette is simply a set of rules that serve as tools to help you appear polished and professional.

### ***Important Tips to Remember for Interview Meals***

As a guest, you should not order one of the most expensive items on the menu. Regardless of how hungry you feel, you are there to interview, not to eat enough food to last you for the next 3 days. Food should be secondary. You may even want to eat a light snack before you go so that you can concentrate fully on the interview. An employer will generally suggest that you order your meal first; he or she will order last. Sometimes, however, the server will decide how the ordering will proceed, encouraging women to choose their meals before the men. Therefore you won't always be able to follow your host's lead in ordering. Select menu items that are relatively easy to eat so that you can focus on having a conversation and answering the recruiter's questions. Above all, don't order wine or another alcoholic beverage -- even if the interviewer does. Interview questions are difficult enough without the effects of alcohol making them harder. Stick with a soft drink, iced tea, coffee or water.

### ***Basic Table Manners***

#### **Napkin Use**

Place the napkin, folded in half with the crease toward you, in your lap as soon as everyone at the table is seated. If the silverware is rolled into your napkin, carefully unroll it and place the silverware as if you were setting the table, with the fork to the left of where your plate will rest and the knife and spoon to the right. Keep the napkin on your lap throughout the meal and use it to gently blot your mouth when needed. Remember, that it is a napkin -- not a handkerchief for blowing your nose or a flag to wave for the wait staff's attention. If you need to leave the table during the meal, place your napkin on your chair or to the left of your plate. Once everyone at the table has finished the meal, neatly place the napkin to the right of your dinner plate. (Do not refold your napkin, but don't wad it up, either.)

#### **The Place Setting**

At a crowded table with several diners, it's often hard to tell which glass, napkin or coffee cup is yours. This can be especially difficult if the table is round. Solve the problem by looking at the place setting in front of you. Your liquids (water, coffee, iced tea, etc.) are always located on your right. Non-liquids, such as a bread plate or salad plate, are always on the left. Here's a tip to help you remember: Place your hands on the table to the right and left of the charger or place setting. Form a lower case "d" (as in "drink") using the thumb and fingers on your right hand and a lower case "b" (as in "bread") using the thumb and fingers on your left hand.

#### **Ordering**

If there are items on the menu that you are uncertain about, politely ask your server any questions you may have. It is better to find out before you order that a dish is prepared with something you do not like or are allergic to than to spend the entire meal picking tentatively at your food. (Appropriate questions are: "How is the trout prepared?" or "Do you prefer the veal or the beef?" Do not say things like, "This doesn't have asparagus does it? Because I hate that." or "I've never heard of any of this stuff. Is there anything on here that you would eat?")

#### **Use of Silverware**

Choosing the correct silverware from the variety in front of you is not as difficult as it may first appear. Start 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 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. There are two ways to use a knife and fork to cut and eat your food: the American style and the European (or Continental) style. Either is considered appropriate, but obviously the American style is used most frequently in this country. To cut a piece of food, place the fork in your left hand with the tines down to hold the food. Place the knife in your right hand to cut the food.

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After cutting one piece, lay your knife across the top of the plate with the sharp edge of the blade facing in and transfer the fork to your right hand to eat the piece of food. (If you are left-handed, keep your fork in your left hand, tines facing up.) Only cut the next piece of food after you have chewed and swallowed the first piece. To “rest” during the meal, whether to take a drink or to listen intently to your companions, place your knife across the top of the plate with the blade toward you and your fork on the right side of the plate with the tines up.

### **Eating Bread**

Place a piece of bread or roll on the bread plate (to the left of the dinner plate). Use the knife that is passed with the butter to cut off a small pat and place that on your bread plate. Do not use this knife to butter your bread -- pass it along with the butter to the person next to you. Break off a bite size piece of bread, butter it, and eat that piece. Do not split a roll in half, butter each side and begin munching. If a butter knife is part of the place setting, place it across the bread plate when you have finished. If you use the main course knife because a butter knife is not provided, place the knife across the top of the main course plate after finishing your bread. The waiter or waitress will bring you a new knife when your entrée arrives.

### **When You Are Finished**

Do not push your plate away from you when you are finished eating. Leave your plate where it is in the place setting. The polite way to show that you are finished with your meal is to lay your fork and knife diagonally across your plate. Place your knife and fork side by side, with the sharp side of the knife blade facing inward and the fork, tines up, to the left of the knife. The knife and fork should be placed as if they are pointing to the time 4:20 on a clock face. Make sure they are placed in such a way that they do not slide off the plate as it is being removed. Once you have used a piece of silverware, never place it back on the table. Do not leave a used spoon in a cup, either; place it on the saucer. You can leave a soup spoon in a soup plate. Simply leave any unused silverware on the table.

### **General Rules of Dining Etiquette**

- Sit up straight at the table.
- Never chew with your mouth open or make loud noises when you eat. Although it is possible to talk with a small piece of food in your mouth, do not talk with your mouth full.
- When you are not eating, keep your hands on your lap or resting on the table (with wrists on the edge of the table).
- Elbows on the table are acceptable only between courses, not while you are eating.
- Do not season your food before you have tasted it.
- Do not slurp soup from a spoon. Spoon the soup away from you when you take it out of the bowl and sip it from the side of the spoon. If your soup is too hot to eat, let it sit until it cools; do not blow on it.
- If food gets caught between your teeth and you can't remove it with your tongue, leave the table and go to a mirror where you can remove the food from your teeth in private.
- You should not leave the table during the meal except in an emergency. If you must go to the bathroom or if you suddenly become sick, simply excuse yourself.
- If you need something that you cannot reach easily, politely ask the person closest to the item you need to pass it to you. For example, “After you have used them yourself, would you please pass me the salt and pepper?”
- If a piece of your silverware falls onto the floor, discreetly tell the server you dropped a piece of your silverware and ask for a clean one.
- If you or someone you are dining with is left-handed, it is best for the left-handed person to sit at left end of the table or at the head of the table. This arrangement helps ensure that everyone has adequate elbow room to eat comfortably.
- If food spills off your plate, you may pick it up with a piece of your silverware and place it on the edge of your plate.
- Never spit a piece of bad food or tough gristle into your napkin. Remove the food from your mouth using the same utensil it went in with. Place the piece of food on the edge of your plate. If possible, cover it with some other food from your plate.

### **Final Thoughts**

It's impossible for you to memorize every dining etiquette rule, but don't stress out about that. If you aren't certain what to do during a restaurant interview, use common sense. If you're still unsure, watch and do what the interviewer does. That way, even if you make an etiquette mistake, the interviewer will never know.

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