

The
ETIQUETTE
BOOK

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO MODERN MANNERS

JODI R. R. SMITH

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An Imprint of Sterling Publishing
387 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016

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2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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Book Design: Laura Palese
Illustrations: Karen Greenberg

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Sterling ISBN 978-1-4027-7602-1
Sterling eBook ISBN: 978-1-4027-8251-0

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THIS
Book

IS DEDICATED
to

*Sophia, Daniel, Nolan, Eliana, Calvin,
Evan, Oliver, Maya, Jared, Sadie,
Sullivan, Ella, Nadav, and Yoav; as well as
Casey, Lily, Harry, Shoshanna, Elianna,
and those who have yet to arrive.*



CONTENTS

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[· 1 ·](#)

[Around Town](#)

[· 2 ·](#)

[The Thoughtful Host](#)

[· 3 ·](#)

[The Gracious Guest](#)

[· 4 ·](#)

[At the Table](#)

[· 5 ·](#)

[Dating Decorum](#)

[· 6 ·](#)

[Getting Married](#)

[· 7 ·](#)

[Pregnancy & Baby's Arrival](#)

[· 8 ·](#)

[Charm for Children](#)

[· 9 ·](#)

[Better Behaviors for Tweens & Teens](#)

[· 10 ·](#)

[Personal Appearance](#)

[· 11 ·](#)

[Small Talk](#)

[· 12 ·](#)

[Keeping in Touch:](#)

· 13 ·

Formal Correspondence

· 14 ·

Etiquette for the Busy Professional

· 15 ·

On the Move: Planes,
Trains & Elevators

· 16 ·

Tipping

Conclusion

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book came to fruition due to the care, concern, love, and support of so many individuals. I am grateful to so many, from those who assisted me with my questions to those who endured my writing absences.

In the world of books: Michael Fragnito, for being a long-term advocate of etiquette, and Hall Einhorn, for inspiring me to write at all and returning for the final round of this manuscript to bring it to a higher level; you are my guardian editor. All of the editors who worked on this book, including but not limited to: Meredith Hale, Laura Koch, Jacqueline Deval, Marisa Bulzone, Sarah Scheffo, Mary Hern, and my champion, Jennifer Williams.

Those in my office who witnessed all of the updates and edits and encouraged me to write more: Marianne Cohen, Winston Jenkins, and Ellen Kayser.

To the thousands of participants of the Mannersmith workshops, seminars, and presentations with your skepticism, curiosity, and ultimate interest; your energy fueled me.

The fabulous Liz Cooper, whose interest in etiquette is ongoing.

To the reporters, producers, journalists, hosts, interviewers, Web masters, bloggers, and DJs who continue to contact me and share the gospel of good manners with their readers, viewers, and listeners.

To my fellow authors who truly understood the constraints and empathized with my deadline: Diane Danielson, Eric Dolin, Mim Harrison, Steve Leveen, Jenna McCarthy, Margaret Shepherd, and Duncan Watts.

To my patient husband, Douglas, and my family, who allowed me to slip away and write while playfully claiming sibling rivalry with the computer.

To my parents, who have always loved me. To my grandmother, whose sense of perspective is priceless. To my in-laws, who seamlessly support me. And a special thanks to Stacy and Allen Kammer for playing the dual roles of both family and friends.

To my friends, whose support is enduring (in order of appearance in my life, beginning with the first day of school): Robin Judd, Lauren Santos, Susan Berkun, Lisa Ashenmil, Ellen Samberg, Mar Pomerantz, Jennifer Lee-Olmstead, Amy Bannerman, Michelle Dawson, Kim Comatas, Jeanette McGarry, Sabrina Brock, Michelle Hasty, and Jennifer Dolin.

To my first mentor, the marvelous Ginger Burr.

Lastly, to my Phi Sigma Sigma sisters, who selected me many years ago as their recruitment chair and set me down a lifelong path of good manners.

As I write, I know there are those worthy of being named who are not mentioned. I can only hope they are gracious enough to understand that I already hold them in my heart.

INTRODUCTION

ETIQUETTE IS EVERYWHERE. It is there to guide us through our interactions, from everyday events to special occasions. The door held open for the person whose hands are full, the flowers sent to the new mother in maternity, the thank-you note to the reference for a new job—etiquette is behind all of these thoughtful gestures. It is also there to help us craft an informative invitation, to eliminate confusion at the dinner table by letting us know which fork to use, and to provide instruction on how to be a gracious guest in someone else's home. Etiquette comes to the rescue in tricky situations, guiding us to the proper action to take when a companion has a piece of spinach stuck between two teeth or when we need to end a phone conversation with a person who is particularly chatty. And it assists us during difficult episodes such as leaving a job, visiting a sick friend, and attending a funeral.

Often people mistake etiquette with “rules.” However, this is not an accurate interpretation. While firmly set in precedent, etiquette is also flexible, perpetually morphing according to situations and times. Not only does etiquette respond to the specifics of the circumstances at hand (such as who we are with and what region of the world we are in), but also it evolves over the years to keep pace with what is happening in technology and culture.

Etiquette is about expectations. Based upon the way a situation presents itself, etiquette allows us to anticipate behavior. Understanding what is expected of ourselves and others creates conditions where everyone feels more at ease. For example, when someone extends his or her hand for a handshake, we know to extend our hand in response. There is no awkward fumbling or surprise involved. When we are dining with others, knowing that serving dishes should be passed counterclockwise means that we are prepared to receive a dish when it comes our way and that when it is time for us to pass something along we are unlikely to enter into a collision with someone else. When properly employed, etiquette minimizes confusion and maximizes confidence and comfort.

This is not to say that one must always remain within the guidelines of etiquette. A modern bride may opt to eschew etiquette and wear red down the aisle. However, knowing that her choice will come across as a shock to many, a considerate bride will graciously provide a brief explanation of her attire selection in the ceremony program. All etiquette asks is that when we choose an action to take, we are doing so with full knowledge of and a readiness to accept the consequences.

Etiquette is about our relationships with others, from those we hold dear to people we do not even know. Whether meeting someone new, running into a casual acquaintance at a party, honoring a loved one with a special role in a baby's naming ceremony, ending a romantic relationship, disagreeing with a colleague, or sharing space with strangers in the tight quarters of an airplane or elevator, etiquette is there to guide our actions. In both the social and professional spheres, etiquette provides us with the tools we need to make our communications and encounters go as smoothly as possible.

Above all, etiquette is about consideration for others. The guidelines of etiquette are designed to ensure the comfort of all involved and to prevent an individual's behavior from offending, disturbing, or hurting the feelings of others. From arriving at a performance on time so as not to interfere with others' enjoyment of the show to keeping the ringer of a cell phone turned off while in a restaurant, codes of conduct have their roots in common sense and revolve around demonstrating respect for those around us, whether we know them personally or not.

This guide is designed to educate and enlighten, to aid and assist as you navigate the intricacies of interacting with others. For both the personal and professional realms, the information contained

within these pages should provide you with guidelines, perspective, and direction so that you may live a considerate and courteous life.

Warmly

JODI R. R. SMITH

www.mannersmith.com



AROUND
Town

A man's manners are a mirror
in which he shows his portrait.

—*Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe*

When it comes to etiquette, there is a time and a place for almost everything. Ripped clothing with paint splatters is perfect for a Sunday afternoon of cleaning out closets, but this type of outfit would be out of place at the opera. Similarly, cheering at the top of your lungs is fine at a hockey game but would be completely out of place at a museum. Understanding the appropriate attire, behavior, and communication (those etiquette ABCs) for any particular outing is essential for your enjoyment as well as the enjoyment of those around you.

RESTAURANTS

Dining out can be a lovely experience or it can be, well, dinner and a show—but not in a good way. The behavior of the waitstaff, your tablemates, and the other patrons in the restaurant can all have an impact on your meal. Of course, you cannot control the way others act, but you can do everything in your power to ensure that you are making the dining experience enjoyable for everyone involved. Whether at a seaside fish shack or the swankiest restaurant in town, codes of conduct exist to ensure that the atmosphere does not negatively affect anyone's appetite. (For an in-depth discussion on table manners, see [Chapter 4](#).)

Ultracasual Spots

When getting food at such highly informal places as beachside shacks, hot-dog carts, and concession stands, there are only a handful of considerations. First, never assume that the vendor accepts credit cards. If the stop is an anticipated one, be prepared with cash, so as not to go hungry or put your companion in the position of needing to pay for you. If the stop is spontaneous, you should ascertain the accepted forms of payment before it is actually time to pay; you do not want to end up holding up the line because you arrived at the register expecting to pay with plastic and then had to scour every pocket to scrape together the necessary cash.

While you are on line, wait patiently for your turn and make sure to give the person in front of you a moment to breathe. Review the menu as you wait, and be prepared to order by the time you reach the front. Special orders should be kept to a minimum. If required, step aside as your order is prepared.

Should you catch sight of a line jumper, it is always best to act as though the person were simply unaware of the offense. Politely state, “Oh, excuse me; I’m sure you didn’t realize this, but the line starts over there.” Many people are just in their own little world, and a kind word or two will usually remedy the situation. If this approach is unsuccessful, you may bring the situation to the attention of the vendor.

Food and beverage stands often have tip jars at the spot where you pay for your order. Whether or not to tip is completely up to you. Generally, this type of service is not tipped; however, if you frequent the place or prefer not to carry your change, tips are, of course, always appreciated. When you finish your food, dispose of your trash in the appropriate receptacles and return any trays to the proper place.

Casual Corner Coffee Spots

Unlike your local eateries, the coffee cafés have a dual function. The first is to grab and go. The second is sit and savor. For the grab and go crowd, know your order as you approach the counter. If the

concoctions and creations are unfamiliar to you, do stand aside until you know what you would like. You will pay when you order, so have your wallet at the ready. As with other counter service spots, there will be tips jars clearly visible. If you have loose change or are particularly pleased with the crew, feel free to tip, but tipping for grab and go is completely non-obligatory. Move on down the line to claim your coffee and proceed to the fixings bar for cream, milk, sweeteners, stirrers, and napkins. If the supplies have diminished, do let the employees know so they can refresh for you. If you sprinkle sugar or dribble some cream, grab a napkin and tidy up after yourself. If there has been a coffee catastrophe, such as your entire drink toppling over onto the counter, notify the staff and ask for assistance.

No matter how tight your deadline for your morning meeting, getting coffee is a non-contact sport. Wait your turn rather than reaching over others for your preferred dairy product. During the morning caffeine crunch, doctor your drink quickly to keep traffic flowing. For those in the sit and save crowd, you too would order quickly and pay. If you are planning to linger, if you will be taking up space at a table, or if you are a regular, then you should consider contributing to the tip jar. Just like the grab and goers, you will need to keep the lightener and sweetener area neat and clear. Many of the coffee cafés are designed to have you linger while you enjoy your drink; if the space is empty, then a bit beyond too. If there are other customers vulturing your table, be courteous with your time and allow others to sit once you are through. If your internet café of choice has specific table time guidelines, respect and honor them. For example, some will request you order a new drink after a hour's time.

Fast-Food Joints and Cafeterias

At fast-food places and cafeterias, where speedy service is a main feature, the atmosphere is of course casual. Nonetheless, as in other relaxed settings, you need to be considerate of others. This includes allowing others their personal space while you wait on line to place your order or receive your food being prepared with your order and your wallet when you get to the front of the line; and busing your tray at the end of your meal. In some of these establishments, members of the staff will actually bus the tables, in which case you may obviously leave your tray. If you are unsure about the protocol in a particular place, pay attention while you are eating to see if staff members are clearing trays. In places where this is taken care of for you, you should decide to leave a small tip of 5 percent or one dollar whichever is greater, on the table. Even in more boisterous venues, you should keep your voice level in check. Whether you are with a friend or dining alone, but on the phone, your conversation should not disturb those around you. Should you need to borrow salt, pepper, ketchup, sugar, or creamer from a neighboring table, politely ask, "Excuse me, may I borrow the . . . ?" When you are finished with the item, return it so your neighbor does not need to ask for it back.

In busier establishments, finding an available table can be a somewhat stressful experience. Whether or not it is acceptable for you to "reserve" a table by having one person sit there while the others in the group get the food is highly specific to the location. Generally, patrons with young children or those in need of assistance will sit down at a table and send a delegate to order food for the group. When you are eating by yourself and there are no available tables, you may ask to share a table of another singleton if there is an open seat. Be sure to ask before sitting. If the patron declines, do not sit. It is difficult to enjoy a meal with a surly tablemate. If and when you notice a crowd beginning to form, while there is no need to rush, you should not linger over your meal. Vulturing patrons can be acknowledged by eye contact as you ingest the last few bites of your meal. When you are the one

circling a table, make eye contact while maintaining a respectful distance. Only make your move once those at the table rise from their chairs.

Diners, Pubs, and Cafés

When it comes to such casual eateries as diners, pubs, and cafés, the level of informality, as well as the standard protocol, will vary from place to place. As you enter, take note of whether there is a hostess seating customers or a sign indicating that you should seat yourself, and act accordingly. Once you are settled at your table, if there is not a menu there already and no one brings one within a few minutes, you should try to catch a staff member's eye to beckon him or her to your table and then politely ask for your server. After you have decided what you want to order, close your menu, as this sends a signal to the waitstaff that you are ready. If you wish to linger at the end of your meal, you may do so, provided there is not a line of customers waiting for your table. It is always nice to have a good time, but keep your conversations, laughter, and revelry at a volume level that is not disruptive to others.



At the end of the meal, the usual custom is that if a bill is brought to your table as a single piece of paper and left there, you should take it to the register and pay on your way out. If you have the proper amount of cash, you may leave the tip at your table as you rise to go pay the bill. Otherwise, you may pay the bill and then return to the table to leave the tip. When paying by credit card and there is a place on the slip for a tip, you may add the tip to your total. If the bill is brought on a small tray or in a folio, then you can assume that your server will be returning and you should leave your payment on the tray or in the folio at the edge of your table. The guideline for tipping is 15–20 percent of the bill. Of course, if the service was exceptional, do feel free to be generous.

Counter customers in diners, pubs, and cafés will find their experience similar to those seated at tables. If you are in a chatty mood, you certainly can engage, or be engaged, in conversation with your neighbors. If not, answer briefly and then behave as if your food is truly fascinating. Unlike counter service in take-out situations, when seated, you will need to tip your server 10–20 percent, but a minimum of at least a dollar is kind.

Fine Dining

At more formal restaurants, your dining experience will follow a prescribed practice. Contact the

restaurant well in advance to ask if reservations are necessary. If you have not dined there before, you should also determine the dress code; additionally, you may wish to review the menu and pricing, as well as confirm whether or not smoking is allowed or alcohol is served.

If you will be dining with friends or colleagues, you may want to go the extra mile and make note of any interesting facts about the venue, owner, or chef. Doing so will not only provide you with an appropriate topic for table talk, but also enable you to enrich the dining experience of your companions. For instance, the building in which the restaurant is located may have some historic significance, the owner might be a famous sports star, or the chef may have recently moved from a well-known establishment in another city.

PRELIMINARIES When meeting others at a restaurant, endeavor to arrive a few minutes early so that no one need wait for you. If you are the host for the meal, you will need to be there early enough to finalize any last-minute details before your guests begin to appear. (For additional information on hosting a gathering at a restaurant, [Having a Guest of Honor](#).) Regardless of whether you are the host or a guest, upon your arrival, check in with the restaurant's host to confirm your reservation and let him or her know you are there or to request a table.

At an elegant establishment, when you arrive, someone will offer to take your outerwear or direct you to an attended coatroom. In this situation, if you have a coat, a jacket, an umbrella, and/or accessories, you should check them. This way, you do not end up cluttering the area around the table and creating obstacles for the waitstaff. In less formal restaurants, there may be a self-service coat rack and umbrella stand. Should you decide to leave your belongings unattended, remove any valuables on the off chance another patron mistakenly ends up taking your coat or shopping bag. It is best to leave valuables at the door, but dry outerwear may stay with you. If you decide to take your coat to the table, be sure to handle it neatly. Once you reach your table, while standing, fold the coat vertically shoulder to shoulder, tuck the arms behind, and drape the coat over the back of your chair so that the collar will be even with your lower back. Fur coats may also be worn to the table, though their removal requires a different procedure. While standing, remove your arms from the sleeves so the coat rests on your shoulders. Then sit and shrug the coat off your shoulders onto the back of your chair.

If upon checking in with the restaurant's host you discover that the rest of your party has not yet arrived, a number of different options might be open to you depending on the situation. If your table is ready, it is possible that the maître d' will go ahead and seat you. When there is a chance your table will not be held, it is best to sit; some restaurants, however, will not seat patrons until all the guests in their party have assembled. Should you take your seat at the table, you may want to use the time to review the menu. If you decide to wait near the entrance or by the maître d's station, be sure to step aside so that others may pass. You may also have the option of waiting in the lounge, if there is one; just be sure to ask that the rest of your party be informed that you have arrived. If you are the host and if you do not know those joining you well, you should refrain from ordering a drink until at least one other member of your party has arrived. To order before the rest of the group can send a silent signal that you have been kept waiting.

Upon the arrival of everyone in your group, or when your table becomes available, you will proceed to the dining room. Drinks should be left in the lounge unless you have only recently ordered them, in which case a member of the waitstaff will bring them to your table. In the majority of cases, you will pay for each round as it is ordered, tipping the bartender as appropriate. On occasion, you may run a bar tab, which should be settled before transitioning to your table. On other occasions, the bar tab will be added to your dinner bill. When this is the case, be sure to designate a tip for the bartender too.

The maître d' will lead the way to the table. If you have invited just one person to dinner, allow your guest to go ahead of you. If you are hosting multiple guests, follow immediately behind the maître d', ahead of your guests, so that you are ready and waiting at the table to help guide them to their seats. (For information on [seating arrangements](#).)

Alcohol

Knowing how to conduct yourself well around alcohol is integral to achieving a successful social persona and a polished professional image. If you are dining with others and unsure about how alcohol will be handled, take a cue from those at your table; if they order drinks, then you should feel free to follow suit if you so desire. While it is commonly understood that a mixed drink, a beer, or a glass of wine all have approximately the same alcohol content, you should consider your surroundings before choosing a beverage. In general, a glass of wine is a safe bet. Consider what the other people in your party are drinking and choose a similar drink.

PLACING YOUR ORDER Once everyone is comfortably seated, introductions and pleasantries should be exchanged, drink orders placed, and menus reviewed. When deciding what to order, there are a number of considerations to take into account. One issue involves how many courses to order. When dining out, you and your companions should all order the same number and types of courses. (This is an element of what is known as the symmetry of dining.) When a course is served, no one should end up with a void at his or her place. For instance, some members of the party should not be enjoying their appetizers while others look on hungrily. If your gathering has a host, this individual should indicate how many courses to order. If he or she does not, or if there is no host, take your cue from the rest of your tablemates. If you are the first to order in this situation, order just an entrée. If it turns out that others will be having appetizers and salad, then you should add those to your order as well. This can easily be done by saying something along the lines of “A watercress and endive salad sounds lovely, I’ll have one too please.”

This symmetry extends to drinks as well. If others at your table are ordering drinks, so should you. That said, not all of the drinks must be alcoholic. It is perfectly acceptable to order a soft drink or sparkling water when others are having cocktails or wine. Note that you do not need to order a drink every time someone else does as long as you still have some of your beverage in your glass. As glasses are emptied and additional drinks ordered, so long as the waitstaff clears used stemware while bringing fresh drinks, each diner will have a drink in front of him or her, even if not everyone is on the same round.

When deciding what to order, you should also take into account the prices of the various dishes. When you are being treated to a meal, do not order the most expensive item on the menu, as doing so would be taking advantage of the host’s generosity. (If the host highly recommends the most expensive dish to you, strongly suggests that you get it, and is ordering it for him- or herself, then you may too.) Note that it is also important not to order the least expensive item on the menu, as this action can be highly insulting to your host; it is as though you are saying that it was so sweet of your host to invite you out for a meal, but you fear that he or she may not be able to cover the bill. At extremely high-end restaurants, only the host’s menu will have prices listed. If you are someone’s guest in this situation, use your judgment. Clearly the twin lobster tails will be more expensive than

the chicken.

Your taste preferences will also obviously come into play when selecting your meal. Note that while you should order something you will enjoy, you should not completely rewrite the recipe. It is one thing to ask the kitchen to leave out the olives; it is another to provide instructions on how to create the sauce.

Some restaurants will allow for the sharing of meals. This should occur only between people who know each other well, in a situation where there is no host, and in a setting that is not terribly formal. If you plan to split an order, the waitstaff can prepare the plates in the kitchen so that you do not need to do the work at the table. This saves you from potentially creating a mess. Note that some restaurants will charge you extra for sharing a meal. When this is the case, the policy is usually stated on the menu.

If someone is hosting your meal, the server will acknowledge that individual when it is time to order. The host, in turn, will indicate to the server whose order should be taken first. This decision may be based upon rank in business situations, gender and age in social situations, or simply the host's preferences.

Note that later on in the meal, when it comes time to order dessert, the symmetry of dining guidelines still apply. If others are ordering dessert, you should too. If you are watching your figure, you may opt for fresh fruit, which is almost always an option, even when not listed on the menu. If others are having coffee or tea, you should order a hot beverage as well.

TRICKY SITUATIONS On occasion, you will be confronted with an awkward, uncomfortable, or unpleasant situation while dining out. When this is the case, you will need to assess the matter before taking any action. If someone dining at another table is loudly using inappropriate language, removing his or her shoes, smoking in the nonsmoking section, or engaging in some other disturbing behavior, the first step is to give the offender a passing yet steady look. If this does not do the trick, enlist the aid of the waitstaff as discreetly as possible. Do not confront the individual directly, and do not make a scene at your table.

Mind Your Manners

Dining with others can be telling. You may see a different side of someone—not just in that individual's table manners but also in how he or she treats others. An acquaintance may be lovely to you, but disrespectful and rude to the waitstaff. People's manners while out on the town speak volumes about their true character. You should keep this in mind with regard to your own behavior as well.

When you need to get your server's attention, be sure to go about this in the proper fashion. It may be common in the movies for someone to signal a server by snapping in the air while calling out, but this is rude behavior. Instead, make eye contact with your server and beckon him or her to your table. If you do not see your particular server for a while, take the same approach with another member of the waitstaff and inform that individual that you need your server. As a last resort, you may excuse yourself from the table and find the manager or maître d' to ask for your server.

LEFTOVERS Before asking to have your leftover food wrapped up to take home, evaluate the situation. If you are out with an important client, on a job interview, on a first date, or someone

guest, it is best not to request a doggie bag. If you are out with friends, then taking your leftovers with you is perfectly acceptable.

PAYING THE BILL When you are hosting, the most sophisticated way to handle the bill is to arrange with management to pay the bill once your guests have departed. The bill arriving at the table creates an uncomfortable tension at the end of what should have been a lovely meal. If while reviewing a bill you find inconsistencies, inquire about the particular charge. To avoid any discomfort, it is critical that discussing and paying the bill is not conducted in front of guests or clients. Whenever possible, it is better to resolve the issue at the time than to try to do so after the fact. If there was a problem with the meal or the service, it is important that you inform the manager or maître d'. After all, the person in charge cannot fix an unknown problem. Once you have brought the situation to the attention of the appropriate person, he or she will have the opportunity to remedy your experience. Note that it is unacceptable to leave no tip, or a tip of below 15 percent, without letting the manager or maître d' know that there was a problem with the service.

Often when dining in a group, the bill will be shared by the members of the party. There are two different ways to go about this. One is for each person to pay just for his or her portion of the meal (in other words, just for what he or she ate and drank), as well as the appropriate share of tip and tax. Be aware that while this seems to be a fair approach, it does not always work out that way. On occasion you may find that the payments contributed by members of your party are not sufficient to cover the bill. If you are the one reviewing the bill and the payment, you must take control of the situation. At this point, you might call out the owed amounts or pass the bill around again, hoping others own up to their portions. Chances are, the problem was an honest error and this will take care of the matter. If not, stay calm and keep counting, gently encouraging everyone to pay up: “Joe, don’t forget that extra round you ordered, and Leona, you only had a soda—you’ve paid too much!” As a last resort, to prevent shorting the waitstaff, you may need to make up the difference for your friends who are generosity-challenged and keep this experience in mind the next time you dine together. Separate bills may be in order.

The other option is to divide the bill equally among the members of the group. This tends to work well when everyone is of similar financial means. However, that may not be the case, and you should be sensitive to inequities. If you partook of the surf and turf and enjoyed more than one round of cocktails, graciously ante up more than those who supped on salad and tonic water with lime.

ENDING THE MEAL As you stand up after the meal, return your napkin to the table, exit your seat to the right, push your chair into the table, and make your way to the front of the restaurant. Retrieve any belongings from the coat check or coat rack, and don your outerwear in the entryway as you say your good-byes. Coat checks are an often overlooked service. The attendant should be tipped; the guideline is typically one dollar per item. If you check costly items or anything in need of extra attention, more should be given.

APPRECIATING THE ARTS

When attending the theater, symphony, opera, or ballet, it is important to adhere to the behavioral guidelines associated with these types of performances. These guidelines exist to ensure the enjoyment of the audience, as well as to prevent the performers from being distracted.

Attire

In the past, patrons would always dress to the nines for these types of performances. Now, gowns and tuxedos are reserved for opening night, solo debuts, and gala events, while the dress code at other performances is less stringent. Your attire should express your appreciation for the arts and artists as well as respect of yourself and others. Jeans and T-shirts, no matter how pricey, are casual clothing and should be saved for casual events.

Arrival and Seating

Plan to arrive early when attending these performances. You should be settled in your seat—with your personal belongings stowed away—*before* the show commences. Note that in many venues, the usher will not seat you once the performance has begun, and you will need to wait until intermission. When scheduling your arrival, allow time for a visit to the restroom, as getting up in the middle of the show will not be well received—and you may not be permitted to return to your seat while the performers are onstage. If you want to have a drink or snack at the theater, you should also allow time for this, as in many venues, food and beverages are restricted to the lobby and/or lounge. When picking up tickets at will call, make sure you are aware of any time limits for doing this.

Restroom

RESPECT

During intermission and at the conclusion of the performance, people tend to rush for the restrooms. Elbowing others aside is not acceptable. You must patiently wait your turn. If it is an emergency, you may make your needs known to those in line and ask to go ahead of them. Generally, young children, pregnant women, and those who are disabled are graciously allowed to skip to the front. When it is your turn, do not linger if others are waiting.

Seats are usually assigned in advance for these types of performances. If your seat is on or near the aisle, you may want to linger in the lobby for a bit to avoid having to stand and sit back down repeatedly as others file into your row. When others need to get by, you should stand to create more room for them to pass. Or, if you are not seated too far into the row, you may file out and then back to your seat. When you need to walk past others to reach your seat, face the stage and move sideways to prevent contact. You should also make sure not to touch the seats in front of you with your body or your belongings so as not to bother anyone there. Once seated, make sure that your personal belongings are not spilling over into another person's seat or leg area. Be aware of the person behind you as well. You should not drape your coat over the back of your seat so that it lands in the individual's lap or personal space. Quarters tend to be tight in these venues, so it is especially important to be respectful of others. You will also need to determine which armrest you are going to use—both is not an option. Some experts will insist you always lean right, others prefer that you lean left. Use your best judgment and pay attention to what your neighbors are doing. Before the show begins, all electronic devices should be turned off. If you think you are going to need a cough drop, it is best to pop one in your mouth before the curtain rises or, at the very least, take it out of your pocket or purse by that point so that you are not creating a rustling sound or shifting around in your seat while

people are trying to focus on the action on the stage.

Lawn SEATING

For summer series concerts, where lawn seating is allowed, be courteous of your neighbors. Do your best to avoid setting up folding chairs in front of people who are sitting on a blanket, so that you do not block their view, and make sure to allow adequate aisle space between your area and that of others so that concert-goers are able to pass easily. Choose foods for your picnic that are low on the aroma scale so as not to disturb others. Should wine be permitted at the venue, be sure to stop imbibing before the point of becoming overly boisterous. Even though you are outdoors, smoking may be prohibited. Be sure to check before smoking, and if you have any doubts, refrain from lighting up.

Show Time

It is important not to disturb other audience members—or the performers—during the show. It should go without saying, but do not talk while the performers are onstage. Other no-nos include fidgeting, jangling your jewelry, and blowing bubbles with gum. In fact, all chewing gum should be properly disposed of in the lobby or restrooms. Should a dry throat or cough require a lozenge, unwrap it as quickly as possible, as a long, drawn-out crinkle is bound to be much more distracting to your neighbors. Chatty neighbors should be addressed first with a pointed look accompanied by a raised eyebrow, next by a quick “shush!,” and lastly by signaling an usher to intervene.

Applause should be held until it is clear that the performers have finished. Clapping during a pause at an inappropriate time will disturb those around you, as well as distract the performers. Note that for plays and musicals, applause often occurs at the end of an act or upon the first appearance of a star onstage. For concerts, operas, and ballet, applause is more reserved. When in doubt, refrain from clapping and then follow the lead of the more experienced audience members around you. When the performance you are attending has reached the very end, unless you have a valid need for hurrying, do pause for at least a little while to thank the performers with appreciative applause rather than immediately making a beeline for the exits. At this point, the audience might give a standing ovation to reward a job especially well done. Shouts of “bravo!” or “brava!” by exceptionally appreciative listeners are also sometimes heard at the end. Note that other shouting should be avoided.

POPULAR MUSIC CONCERTS

Popular music concerts are at the other end of the spectrum from classical concerts when it comes to what is considered acceptable behavior. At these far more relaxed events, the attire is casual, singing along is allowed (sometimes even encouraged), and standing and dancing during the performance are often permitted. That said, be aware of those around you. If a “slow song” is played and everyone else has taken a seat after having been up and dancing for a while, then so should you; otherwise, you will be blocking the view of those behind you. For this reason, as well as safety reasons, you should not

dance on your chair at any point. And do be careful not to hit anyone inadvertently in the enthusiasms of dancing. If you are holding a beverage, take care not to spill it on anyone.

MOVIE THEATERS

While sharing many of the same guidelines for audience behavior as certain types of live performances, such as a play, ballet, or classical concert, the cinema does have some customs of its own. Unlike many live performances, movies have open seating. The earlier you arrive, the more seating options you will have. Clearly, if you tend to fidget or are moderately claustrophobic, the aisle is a better choice. And if you do not like to have people trying to get by you, then the middle of the row is the place to be seated. Note that with regard to moving in and out of a row, choosing an armrest, and being considerate of your neighbors, the same guidelines that apply at a fine arts performance, apply here ([Appreciating the Arts](#)).

If you are attending a movie with friends, after selecting a seat, a delegation from your party may make a foray to the concessions stand. For showings that are likely to attract a large audience, it is best to encourage your entire group to arrive early to ensure that you are able to sit together, although it is perfectly acceptable to hold a seat or two for companions, especially if the tickets have already been purchased. Saving an entire row, however, takes real moxie. If the theater is crowded, do not take up seats with your personal belongings. Before the show starts, take a moment to visit the facilities. Better safe than sorry. It is not fun to pay for a ticket and then miss a critical scene, nor do you want others to miss a critical scene because you blocked their view while you were getting up from returning to your seat.

By now, only those who have been living under a rock would even think of leaving a cell phone ringer on during a movie. However, many moviegoers overlook the fact that even with the ringer off, cell phones, pagers, and the like can still be annoying. Those glowing blue screens can really detract from the viewing experience. Do everyone a favor and just turn the device off. Talking should be kept to a minimum. Obviously, it is fine to converse before the movie begins. However, do not scream out the answers to trivia questions on the screen and ruin the game for others. When the previews begin, whispering is allowed. Once the movie starts, it is time to turn your complete attention to the screen. Avoid excessive coughing, foot tapping, and squirming so as not to bother others.

Once the movie is over, you certainly may stand to stretch, but be aware of those around you. People in the seats behind you are watching the credits, either sit back down or move into the aisle. If you prefer to sit and watch the credits, do make way for those wishing to exit the row.

When allowing children to attend a movie, you must think of others first. It is fine to bring your baby to a G-rated film and most PG-rated films. Movies that are aimed at children are going to have a bit more activity in the audience. (Even so, if your baby starts to cry loudly, you will need to take him or her out of the theater until the child has quieted down.) But to bring a baby, toddler, or young child to a movie intended for grown-ups is simply wrong. Splurge for a babysitter to avoid annoying others and traumatizing your child.

MUSEUMS

Attending a gallery opening or visiting a museum is a wonderfully cultured way to pass the time. You

behavior experiencing the exhibits varies widely. From revered silence in almost all museums of fine art, to engaged interaction in most science museums; how you will be best behaved depends upon what type of museum you are visiting. No matter where you are, do your best to follow posted signs and all gallery guard instructions. Photography, especially flash, may be frowned upon so it is best to ask before taking any pictures. Running, shouting, eating, drinking, and general jostling are all out of order. When viewing exhibits in a crowd, you will need to wait your turn. Most museums have cafés and gift shops. If you find the gallery too congested, take a break and return to that particular area again later.

DINNERS, PARTIES, AND GALAS

In addition to joining friends and family at restaurants or private homes, you may receive invitations to awards banquets, retirement dinners, political fundraisers, professional symposiums, and philanthropic galas. These events possess a purpose in addition to providing the opportunity to socialize. Of course, you will need to employ all of your gracious dining skills (see [Chapter 4](#)) as well as adhere to various guidelines specific to these events.

Preparing for the Event

Upon receiving an invitation to such an event, pay close attention to the information provided. Is there an honoree or agenda for the evening? Is there a cost, donation, or gift associated with the program? Will there be a live or silent auction? What will the food and drink situation be? What is the appropriate attire? You may want to do a little digging to gather some additional details, such as who else will be attending and whether there will be assigned seating. A quick call to the host or someone serving on the planning committee can provide answers prior to the event. Do use care and tact when asking others if they were included as you may find yourself in a sticky situation if the person you asked was not on the guest list. The more you know in advance, the better prepared you will be for the event.

ATTIRE As with most situations, it is always better to be overdressed than under. Unfortunately, some invitations sacrifice helpfulness for cuteness, using such vague phrases as “business festive.” In such a case, consider the reason you were invited to the event, as well as the reason you accepted. If you are representing your professional self, it is better to err on the side of conservative. Should you decide to wear a business suit, be sure to add a festive splash with a colorful pocket square or artistic jewelry and some party shoes—you should not appear as if you just stepped out of the office. For all social situations with the “festive” attire instruction, take care. There is a fine line between festive and sane and festive-silly. Themed sweaters and ties should be saved for entertaining small children. Your clothing should reflect you with an added touch of whimsy in the accessories.

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