



## **Can You Spell Etiquette?**

VJJE Publishing Co.

# Table of Contents

<a href="#"><u>Book Cover</u></a> .....	1
<a href="#"><u>Personalized Cooking Aprons</u></a> .....	2
<a href="#"><u>Planning A Dinner Party</u></a> .....	3
<a href="#"><u>Entertaining</u></a> .....	5
<a href="#"><u>Introducing People</u></a> .....	8
<a href="#"><u>Setting a Table</u></a> .....	11
<a href="#"><u>Serving Formal Tea</u></a> .....	15
<a href="#"><u>Hosting A Shower</u></a> .....	19
<a href="#"><u>Dining Out In Style</u></a> .....	24



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# Planning A Dinner Party

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Color is the key in a table setting. Three polyester/cotton-blend tablecloths are inexpensive and can coordinate beautifully with other colors that are featured in the dining room. If price is a concern, a single mattress-size bed linen works great as a tablecloth.

Double-sided place mats are a great way to save money.

Marble slabs are cheap, easily attainable and can be used as trays to serve food upon or as place settings.

Food that has been steamed looks delicious served in the bamboo steamer. There is no need to buy a second tray.

A tablecloth can be transformed with three simple, inexpensive runners. Consider this look for a party or get-together in which you plan to feature interesting centerpieces.

People do not seem to entertain as much today as the used to. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that it can be intimidating. Actually, a well-planned dinner party is well within the scope of even the most modest cook and homemaker, and once you successfully have one party, you will be hooked. The first step is to decide on your guest list. Of course you can invite all couples, but if you are inviting single folks as well, make sure that there is an even number of people. There is no need to attempt to play matchmaker, just having an even number will make for an easier presentation of dinner, as well as make it easier to socialize without someone feeling left out. You can invite as many or as few people as you like, but eight is really a good number to start out with. This is enough people to keep the conversation going, but not so many as to be a burden to cook for.

Now that you have narrowed down your list of invitees, it is time to mail out the invitations. It is generally best to mail out the invitations at least two weeks before the party, but around the holidays, you may want to give yourself a full month. As you start to get R.S.V.P. 's back, you can begin to plan your menu.

There are several ways to plan your evening meal. You can have hors d'orves, served buffet style, or you can have a sit down meal around the dining room table. If you go for the buffet style meal, plan your meal so that there are plenty of options for your guests to choose from. While some people will think nothing of diving hand over fist into barbecue ribs, others will go

hungry rather than risk walking around with sauce on their shirt all evening. A good mix would be to have about half cold food and half hot, including a tray of cheeses and crackers, and some fruit. Everyone will enjoy these, and will allow you to try some adventurous dishes, confident that there will be something everyone will like. If you decide on a sit down dinner, you will want to provide a light first course, perhaps a soup or salad, as well as the entr e, with side dishes, and a dessert. You may also plan to have some fresh fruit for dessert, for those people who do not eat sweets.

Once you have decided on a menu, make sure that you know how to prepare everything. This is not the time to experiment with new dishes, if you want to try something new, test it on your family ahead of time. Be certain that you have all of the necessary ingredients. Nothing will throw you off schedule quicker than having to make an emergency run to the grocery store.

Try to have as much done ahead of time as possible so that on the day of your party you only have to prepare the food and get yourself ready. This means having the house cleaned and any dishes that can be prepared ahead of time completed. The day of your party, relax, prepare the meal and allow yourself plenty of time to shower and dress for the party. Be sure to have some music selected and playing softly. Once guests start to arrive, take time to great them, invite them into the kitchen if they seem interested and enjoy yourself. The preparation should pay off, and you should have a wonderful time.

# Entertaining

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You've been to a great dinner party before. The food was delicious, the wine flowed endlessly, the sparkling conversation never stopped, and the host was relaxed and gracious. You've probably also been to a disastrous dinner party, complete with food fights, drunken brawls, and a main course of burned popcorn.

Now it's your turn. Luckily, throwing a great dinner party doesn't require any time in Martha Stewart boot camp. All you need is some smart planning and a little know-how.

Before you launch into menu mode, take a few moments to think about the purpose of your dinner party. Do you have to wow your scrutinizing, potential in-laws, or are you just trying to have a few interesting people over for an enjoyable evening?

The basic rule is, the simpler, the better. In general, people don't go to dinner parties expecting live entertainment and flaming desserts. The goal is a relaxing evening with good food and conversation.

## **Invite your guests**

The most important ingredient for any party is a well-balanced guest list. While it's not necessary for all your guests to know each other in advance (in fact, one of the elements of the party can be meeting new people), you do want to ensure compatibility. For example, if you invite your delightful but teetotaling neighbor, he might feel a little alienated if everyone else in the room is guzzling beer.

It's also important to limit the size of your list. The last thing you want to do is spend your evening tossing spaghetti for 25 people—especially when they came to spend an evening with you. Six to eight (including yourself) is an excellent number for most situations. If you choose to go larger, make sure you have enough room at the table for everyone.

Invite your guests at least a week ahead of time. They'll appreciate that you took their schedules into consideration. If the party is small, it's fine to invite over the phone, but for a larger party, written or emailed invitations add an official touch. Some of your guests will invariably ask if they can bring something. If you let them, they'll feel useful, but limit the gift giving to wine, bread, or dessert. If they bring wine, it's appropriate to open it immediately and offer them some.

## **Prepare the food and surroundings**

Your guests are not expecting five–star cooking, so stick with something you know. They'll be much more impressed with a large, tasty serving of chicken and pasta than with burned crepes and runny souffles. Some great dinner party choices include pasta dishes, lasagna, or stir–fry. Or why not fire up the grill and prepare a variety of fish, chicken, and vegetables? Find out ahead of time what the dietary restrictions of your guests may be, such as vegetarianism or any allergies.

When you're planning your dinner, make a list of what you'll need for all of the courses. Be sure to consider cocktails, wine, non–alcoholic beverages, appetizers, salad, the entree, dessert, and coffee.

Buy your groceries the day before so you won't be in a rush, (besides, some recipes will call for ingredients from more than one store). Dishes you can prepare ahead of time are always great choices, because they give you more time on the night of your party. Either way, try to have as much cooking done (or well underway) as you can before the party begins. This way, your guests won't have to wait 2 or 3 hours for dinner, and you won't have to spend all night in the kitchen.

When the guests arrive, take their coats and bags, and offer them a drink right away. Have the table set (now's the time to use those cloth napkins Mom gave you), music playing in the background, and appetizers set out. Fresh flowers and hand–written place cards are two simple flourishes that add a touch of class.

## **Relax and entertain**

The best thing you can do for your party now is to have a good time. You'll need to make sure everyone has enough food and drink, but most of the work is behind you. Now it's time to concentrate on your guests and enjoy yourself.

Make sure everyone's comfortable by introducing them in more detail than just names, and that everyone's involved in a conversation. If your guests are really unfamiliar with each other, try warming them up with a simple game or activity.

Games are a great idea for after dinner, too. Drawing games, trivia, and card games give guests an activity to focus on while getting to know each other. Another idea is to come up with a theme for the entire evening, like a Hawaiian luau with flower leis and tropical drinks, an Italian feast with a red checked tablecloth and crooning music, or a murder mystery party,

where guests are given clues to a mock "murder" and have to guess the culprit. However elaborate you decide to be, make sure your main focus is on the guests.

Finally, there's nothing quite as disconcerting as sitting at a pleasant dinner table after a good meal and having the host jump up, clear the plates, and head to the kitchen to do the dishes. You might as well put up a neon sign that says, "GET OUT."

Let your guests linger for a while, and if you think it's time for them to go, offer to call them taxis, ask about their plans for the rest of the evening, or just tactfully tell them you're exhausted. When they're gone, put your feet up, nibble on a bit of extra dessert, and congratulate yourself on a job well done.

# Introducing People

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Pleased to meet you, hope you guessed my name!

Introducing people to one another doesn't need to be awkward. Rather, it's a simple, friendly gesture that anyone can master. While in the past there were formal dictates regarding status, gender, age, and so forth, that's no longer the case in most instances. We'll show you how to introduce people politely and gracefully, without ever missing a step—even if you forget someone's name.

Always keep common sense in mind when making introductions, and don't make a big deal of it if you make a mistake. The really essential thing you need is respect for people. If that's sincere, any mistakes you make will be easily forgiven.

## **Be gracious**

The best thing to keep in mind when making introductions is to be equally gracious with everyone.

If the occasion is formal, being gracious means addressing and introducing people by their titles. This would include functions where elected officials or royalty are being introduced. It could also include business functions. If you're at a casual gathering, first names can be the basis for introduction. Use last names if you think the parties being introduced will benefit from this, or if differences in age or status could make them feel uncomfortable addressing one another by first names only.

Graciousness also means making sure no one feels like a stranger in a new situation. This means that if you're talking to someone and someone you know walks up, you introduce them. If you're hosting a party, make sure the guests meet one another (if you're too busy to do this yourself, assign a "hospitality stand-in" to do it for you).

If someone new comes to a meeting or party and doesn't seem to know anyone, walk up and introduce yourself. Sometimes this is the most daring and gracious thing to do. The new person in the room will certainly appreciate it.

## **Make the introductions**

The words you use to introduce people can be elaborate or simple, according to the situation and the flow of conversation. "John, I'd like you to meet

Edward," or "John, this is Edward."

For every introduction there's an equal and opposite re-introduction. Which means after introducing Edward to John, you introduce John to Edward. It can go like this: "John, this is Edward. Edward, John."

Make sure you make eye contact with each party as you speak to them. This will keep the introductions smooth and will show you respect both parties. Remember, you're acting as the person in command of this situation, and both people being introduced will naturally want equal attention.

For a special spin, you can add a little information about each person. This will help them to identify one another better, and give them an opening for conversation. Pointing out something the two people have in common usually works. For example, "John, this is Edward. Edward knows our mutual friend Nancy."

In the case of introducing someone to a family member or spouse, it's just good manners to identify their relation to you. "John, this is my husband Edward."

### **Get around forgetting a name**

Most of the awkwardness in introducing people occurs when the person making the introductions forgets someone's name. But there are several ways to get around this gracefully. In fact, not introducing people is much ruder.

One way to handle the situation is to ask the mystery person to clarify his or her name. "Please repeat your name, so I'm sure to get it right. Edward Rice? John Stone, this is Edward Rice. Edward, this is John." This way, you can show that you care about a person's name, without admitting that you forgot it.

You can also get through this situation by addressing the person whose name you've forgotten and introducing the person whose name you do know. For example, turn to the mystery person and introduce your friend by saying, "This is my friend John." This usually smooths the way for the mystery person to give his or her own name.

### **Respond respectfully**

If you're the one being introduced, both a physical and a verbal response are called for. Extend your hand for a handshake and say something simple, such as, "Hello," or "It's nice to meet you."

## Can You Spell Etiquette?

In some circles, kissing on the cheeks is accepted practice. Before attempting this on your own, see if the other party begins the action. Then kiss accordingly, either an actual kiss or a kind of kissing noise or gesture near the cheek. Go slowly, though not lingeringly, to see if the other person is accustomed to kissing on both cheeks. If they do so, follow their lead and kiss the other cheek. This same strategy is useful in the case of hugging.

If you happen to be sitting down when a new person enters the room and is introduced to you, stand up as a form of greeting. This is always the proper thing to do if you are sitting, regardless of gender.

Once introductions and responses have been made, you've done your duty as a polite person. You can be certain that everyone is grateful you took charge and helped them meet someone new.

# Setting a Table

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Don't drink from the fingerbowl!

You've just invited the boss to dinner at your house, and TV trays just won't do. Or you want to impress that special someone with a hot, home-cooked meal, but can't remember which side the fork goes on.

Never fear. Here are some basic guidelines and rules of etiquette to setting tables from intimate tea parties to banquets for a crowd. Some forethought and organization will allow you and your guests to spend the dinner hour enjoying food and conversation rather than navigating the flatware.

The basic placesetting discussed here has been developed over centuries of European and American dining. Some differences exist from country to country and even family to family and are often argued with remarkable passion. Still, a few basic guidelines are generally accepted and will be adhered to in most American banquet halls.

This tutorial will show three types of placesettings: a basic setting, a formal banquet setting and variations on folding the napkins.

## **Check what you have**

Take out the flatware, dishes, glassware and tablecloth or placemats that you intend to use. Are they dusty? Soiled from the last time you used them? More often, the worst culprit will be a little dust. Take a clean dish towel and rub the dust from glasses and plates. Use a polishing cloth to shine up your flatware.

If you use a tablecloth, make sure it's clean and pressed. You do not want any stains to remind visitors of last year's Christmas dinner. Inspect your tablecloth, placemats and napkins early to be sure they are presentable. Give yourself time for a last-minute wash if needed.

## **Understand the basics**

Rule 1. Everyone at the table gets a placesetting, whether or not they intend to eat. Anyone can change their mind at the last minute, and only a careless host or hostess would be caught unprepared.

Rule 2. Flatware is placed evenly on either side of the plate in a manner comfortable to use by a right-handed person (sorry lefties, this one never

varies). Forks go on the left, knives and spoons on the right. The cutting edge of the knife should point towards the plate. Spoons go to the outside of knives.

Rule 3. Place the flatware in the order it will be used, with the first utensils set furthest away from the plate. The idea is to avoid rooting around for the appropriate fork or confusing your guests.

### **Master the standard placesetting**

It may take a bit of fussing around the first few times out, but nothing impresses a guest so easily as a perfectly set table. Chalk it up to the communal nature of mankind, or synchronicity or tribalism or whatever, but a precisely set banquet of multiple settings creates a wonderful atmosphere. Even if it's just you and a guest, a placesetting helps you feel important on that special occasion when you turn off the television set and eat in the dining room.

If you have placemats: set each one square to the edge of the table where each chair will be. The bottom of the placemat (the side closest to the chair) should be about an inch (2.5 cm) from the edge of the table. Although this distance may vary from occasion to occasion, every placesetting at a table or banquet should be exactly equal to every other placesetting. The dinner plate (the big one) goes dead center in the middle of the placemat, or put the bottom of the plate two inches (8 cm) from the edge of the table if you are using a tablecloth. The napkin goes lengthwise on the left side of the plate. Fold square napkins once to make them rectangles, then lay them in the same direction the utensils will go. The crease goes next to the plate. Each utensil should be about a half-inch (2 cm) away from the plate and from each other. The fork goes on the left, tines up (the pointy ends), on top of the napkin; the knife goes on the right, cutting-edge towards the plate. Place the spoon next to the knife, parallel and to the right. The drinking glass goes above the knife, about two inches away from the tip.

### **Master the formal placesetting**

Generally, the more formal the occasion, the more courses are served, which of course means more flatware. There should be a different set of utensils for each course: salad fork, dinner fork; dinner knife, bread knife; and so on.

Some special dishes such as oysters have special utensils. These can be served at the presentation of the food, but generally are placed on the

table in order of course. When oysters are served as an appetizer for example, set the oyster fork to the right of the spoon.

Building from the basic set-up (see above), the following utensils may be added.

On the left side of the plate put the salad fork to the left of the dinner fork. On the right add a soup spoon to the outside of the dinner spoon if soup will be served. Place the soup bowl above the soup spoon and to the right. The bread plate goes to the left, about two inches above the fork. Place the butter knife across the bread plate at a diagonal, upper left to lower right. Small salad plates go to the left and a little below the bread plate. Dessert spoons, or in some cases knife and fork, are placed about an inch above the top of the plate with the handle(s) on the right side.

The largest glass on the table is the water glass (see above for basic placement). It may be filled and iced when guests arrive or left empty to be filled at each diner's request. If wine or some other beverage is served, set the appropriate glass to the right and a little down from the water glass.

### **Master the napkin variations**

One way to vary table settings is through napkin folding -- an art in itself -- and placement. Try one of the following simple and exotic variations when you really want to show off.

Two simple, effective techniques:

1. The Fan: Open each napkin completely and lay it flat on the table. Fold napkin back and forth like a fan, then press it down so the creases are sharp. Fold the long rectangle in half and place the center in an empty water glass. Open the two ends of the napkin sticking out of the glass in fan shapes. Set the glass in its original placement or directly in the middle of the dinner plate.

2. The Triangle: An even easier method is to open the napkin flat and fold one corner on top of its opposite corner. Take one of the other corners and fold it over onto its opposite. Fold these corners on top of the other ones and crease. Take the corner of the resulting triangle (which used to be the center of the napkin) and place into an empty water glass. Or you can open up the folded triangle a little and set it directly on the dinner plate.

### **Adapt to your circumstances**

## Can You Spell Etiquette?

**Uncommon utensils:** If you have some specialized pieces of silverware that you're dying to show off, think up a dish you can use them for, and add it to the menu. Got shrimp forks? Use them for shrimp, not fondue.

**Left-handed diners:** If formal arrangements are awkward, try to seat left-handed guests at the left end of a long table. The informed host should make this allowance for lefties, but please don't insist upon it. The result could mean an embarrassed guest.

**Small tables:** Sometimes, small tables and numerous guests make crowded gatherings. If you find you are running out of room for your place settings, rearrange each setting with the utensils grouped more closely together. The most important thing is that each setting looks identical to every other setting.

**Tablecloths versus placemats:** Placemats seem to be a matter of taste and convenience rather than convention. An attractive set of placemats can add color to the table and initiate an enjoyable conversation, but if you are showing off with a fine white linen tablecloth you may find placemats unnecessary.

You can watch Real Time movies that show you various ways to fold napkins at: [E-Cookbooks Instructional Videos](#)

# Serving Formal Tea

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Tea for two (or more)

There are few British traditions as beloved as afternoon tea. Teatime was unofficially born in the early 19th century as a way of warding off the hunger between lunch and dinner. As the practice grew, it also became a way to fill the empty space in the daily social schedule, and eventually evolved into a formal tradition requiring special clothes and manners.

Today, you can hold a tea party at any time or for any occasion. When you take time out to have a few friends over for a good pot of tea and some pastries, you give yourself a welcome chance to pause from the rush of daily life and enjoy the company of others.

But to many of us, the intricacies of tea manners, such as which side to serve from and when to lift your pinkie, are confusing. Keep reading, and you'll learn all you need to impress even the fussiest guests. You might even turn into a teatime lover for life.

Check your china collection to make sure you have enough cups and saucers for your guests. And although fancy china (such as bone china) is nice, all you really need is a cup, saucer, spoon, fork, small spreading knife, and small plate for each person.

There's no guest limit for a tea party, but smaller parties are more intimate and encourage inclusive conversation. More important, however, is that every guest have a place to sit. Tea is about sitting, chatting, and lingering.

Finally, although the practice is typically called "afternoon tea," there's no rule saying you absolutely have to have a tea party in the afternoon. If it suits you and your guests better to have tea in the morning, or later in the evening, do so. Just try to avoid rushing the experience, so that everyone will feel free to tarry as long as they want.

## **Choose the tea**

The most important element of your party is that you serve good tea. You can present your guests with a variety of tea bags, but the best way is to serve pots of brewed tea. The type of tea you choose is up to your personal taste. The basic groups are:

**Black tea.** These teas, which include Earl Grey and English Breakfast, are oxidized, or exposed to air for a precise length of time. The oxygen turns the leaves dark brown.

**Green tea.** Teas like Sencha and Lung Ching are not oxidized, but withered and dried instead. They keep their green color and have a slightly bitter taste.

**Oolong teas.** This is a combination of green and black teas. The flavors vary from delicate to very strong.

**Infusions.** Also called herbal teas, they're not made with tea leaves at all, but instead are dried extracts of herbs such as chamomile and mint.

Because some of your guests may prefer a decaffeinated option, consider buying two kinds—one regular, and one herbal or decaffeinated. If you don't already have a favorite blend, visit a tea shop and try some different kinds. Black teas are the most typical choice for afternoon tea. Once you've made your decision, it's time to turn your attention to the menu.

### **Prepare the menu**

At least a day before your tea party, prepare a list of what you'd like to serve. That way, you won't be in a mad rush at the last minute. The classic afternoon tea menu usually consists of scones, cookies, crumpets, and sliced sandwiches. If you want to be elaborate, you can make your own pastries, or you can purchase them at a nearby bakery that specializes in these goods.

Sandwiches usually served at afternoon tea are sliced small and thin, with the crusts cut off. Popular menu choices include white or wheat bread filled with cucumber or salmon and cream cheese, or tuna or egg salad. Butter is usually spread on the bread instead of mayonnaise or mustard. Make the sandwiches small enough so people can eat them in two bites. It's a nice touch to shape them into triangles, rectangles, or circles.

Plan on serving spreads with your pastries, such as jams and butter. The classic British accompaniment to baked goods is Devonshire cream, which is a sweet, heavy cream spread. You may be able to purchase it at specialty stores or online, but it can be hard to find. Some tea shops suggest mixing whipped cream with unsalted butter as an alternative.

**Note:** Although the foods mentioned here are the standard menu for an afternoon tea, you can get as creative as you want. Fruit and cheese can be welcome alternatives to sugary pastries, as are small quiches and shelled

nuts.

On the day of your tea, arrange the food on serving trays and keep them in the kitchen with the tea. Arrange the cups, saucers, small plates, napkins, and utensils in the room where you'll receive your guests. Now's the time to use your nice table linens and set out some fresh flowers.

### **Prepare the tea**

Because you want to serve tea that's as fresh and hot as possible, you shouldn't actually make your tea until the guests arrive. As soon as they come, take their coats and invite them to sit. Now it's time to make the perfect pot of tea.

Warm the pot you'll serve the tea in by filling it with hot tap water. Set it aside.

Fill an empty kettle with fresh, cold water. Place the kettle on the burner and turn the heat up to high.

When the water in the kettle is about to boil, empty the serving pot and add the loose tea to it. The standard measurement is 1 teaspoon (5 milliliters) of leaves per teacup.

As soon as the water in the kettle boils, turn off the heat. Bring the serving pot to the stove, and pour the boiling water into the pot.

Let the tea steep for 5 minutes.

Stir the tea inside the pot, then pour it into the cups through a tea strainer.

You can use a mesh or cloth tea infuser instead of straining the tea at the end. If you have one, put the tea inside the infuser and insert it into the serving pot after you've filled it with the hot water from the kettle.

### **Serve the tea and food**

Bring out your pot of tea and set it on a table next to your cups. If your guests are sitting around a living room, offer tea to them one by one. Pour the cups three-quarters full, then ask if they would like milk and/or sugar. If they would, add sugar a little at a time as they direct; finish filling the cup with milk, stir, and then hand them the cup, saucer, and spoon together. If they're seated around a table, take the pot from guest to

guest, serving from the left, and let them help themselves to milk and sugar.

In theory, afternoon tea is a mini meal. Therefore, pastries and sandwiches should be served as small courses. Bring your food out on serving trays one by one; present sandwiches first, and then your sweeter additions. Each guest should have a small plate, a fork, and a small spreading knife.

There's no limit to how long your tea party should last. Don't be surprised if you and your friends linger for an hour or two. Although afternoon tea is widely thought of as an exercise in formality, you'll soon find that its main purpose—time spent enjoying the company of others—will be enjoyed in any atmosphere.

# Hosting A Shower

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When your friend told you she was getting married, you blurted out, "I'll give you a shower!" Now you're wondering what that means, exactly, and worrying that you'll trip up. Do you need to provide tea, cucumber sandwiches, and plenty of giggling? Or maybe you and your coworkers want to honor a betrothed colleague, but don't really know if it's proper.

Fortunately, "proper" doesn't have to be an issue if you don't want it to be. While some traditional rules remain concerning wedding showers, they're mostly rules of good sense. For instance, you can take or leave the "women only" rule (men can even have their own showers), but you still shouldn't hold a shower at the house of the busy bride-to-be.

So whether you wear your host hat gladly or can't think what got into you, we'll show you how to plan a pleasing prenuptial party. (Hint: Keep the focus on your friend, and you'll do just fine.)

What is a shower? One story of the practice's origin has it that a Dutch girl married against her family's wishes and her father withheld her dowry. Siding with the girl, the townspeople got together and "showered" her with practical presents to make up the shortfall.

Showers do emphasize gifts, but they're really about a community showing its material and emotional support for a bride (or bridal couple). Today, the "community" can be anyone—the couple's female friends and relatives, coworkers, or just their nearest and dearest. The party can be anywhere—in your living room, at a day spa, or at the ballpark. And the gifts can be anything that the bride or couple might need or want—from power tools to frilly lingerie. If the shower shows the couple that their friends are behind them and their marriage, it's a success.

Who hosts a shower? Traditionally, the maid or matron of honor or one (or more) of the bridesmaids presides over a shower. Alternatively, a female friend or family member could host. Mothers and sisters could help plan, but they could not host—lest the family appear greedy for gifts. Nowadays, these prohibitions have faded considerably, but if you're worried about propriety in your circle, ask a few people whose opinions you trust.

Since hosting a shower entails a certain amount of both work and cost, you may want to share the role with other people.

## **Consult the bride and groom**

If you're tempted to make the shower a surprise affair, don't. The bride and groom will be expecting a shower (so feigning nonchalance will be hard), and they'll be incredibly busy as the wedding draws near (so possibly unavailable). They're also the best people to ask when you're stuck for inspiration or information. Workplace showers may be an exception: They're usually not the main shower, so the surprise is easier to pull off.

Talk about presents. Even old-school etiquette mavens agree: It's proper to include gift registry information in the shower invitation. Ask the couple where they're registered, or else try to get a general sense of what they hope to receive at the shower and the wedding. As the host, you'll be the one that stymied shower guests turn to for gift ideas. Make a guest list

The guest list should be made up in consultation with the bride and groom. Their shower shouldn't include anyone they don't want to see there, or exclude anyone they do. They can give you addresses and phone numbers, too. (See? They're already coming in handy.)

Who? Invite members of the wedding party, friends, and family—anyone who's especially close to the bride and groom. Guests invited to the shower should also have received an invitation to the wedding: It's considered rude to invite people to a shower but exclude them from the main festivities. An exception to this last rule is, again, workplace showers, which tend to be more informal events.

How many? Showers can consist of as few as four or five people, or as many as 30. More than Choose a time and place

Ideally, a shower should be held about a month or two before the wedding. If it's closer to the big day, it may make the weeks before the wedding too frantic.

Time of day. Traditionally, showers take place in the afternoon, but they can very easily be brunch, lunch, cocktail hour, or dinner affairs (you could even have a slumber party). Steer away from mealtimes if you don't want to serve a lot of food, and try to pick a time when most guests will be free.

Location. It's easier to say where a shower shouldn't be than where it should be. Anywhere but the bride or groom's home is fair territory, though the host's living room is a popular choice. If you don't want to prepare or coordinate the food yourself, book a restaurant or, if you have the money, hire a caterer. If the party is large, you may want to consider renting a

space, like a church or community hall.

If you're booking a room or paying a caterer, you should expect to pay these costs. This is clearly an instance in which it would be preferable to have a co-host or two! If you're meeting in a restaurant, you may choose to treat the guests or have them pay for their own food (the guests of honor should always be treated). Simply stating "be our guest" or "please join us" in the invitation will make it clear who's picking up the tab. that, and intimacy is lost: Guests should be able to

### **Pick a theme**

Themes, though not strictly necessary, can help guide guests' gift choices and the activities at the shower itself. They can be entertaining, such as a "roast" (where guests are invited to tell funny stories about the bride and groom), or practical, such as "kitchen" (gifts are kitchen items). A theme may be especially helpful for bridal couples who already live together: It may not be obvious what they need.

If you're stumped for theme ideas, wedding shower books and websites have many suggestions. Look in your library or bookstore, or type the words "wedding shower" into your Internet search engine. Plan the activities and decorations

The main event of a shower is the gift opening, with accompanying oohs and aahs. Food and conversation—especially among those who are good friends—often suffice to fill up the rest of the time. However, you may wish to plan one or two activities to liven things up.

Play some games. Games are great icebreakers if some of your guests don't know each other. Books and websites on shower planning list a multitude of shower games. If the shower is for both bride and groom, a version of the "newlywed game" can be great fun: Each of them tries to answer a set of questions as they think the other would.

When many guests don't know each other, consider playing "who am I?": Anonymously, each guest writes on an index card a memory that he or she shares with the guest(s) of honor. Then the bride or groom has to read the cards aloud and guess who wrote each.

When choosing games, think of what the guests—the bride in particular—would enjoy. The best shower games are lighthearted and don't embarrass anyone.

Ask guests to share advice. Either pass around a blank book for guests to write in during the course of the shower, or ask each to share a favorite piece of marital advice aloud (have someone write these down for later presentation to the bride and groom).

Decorate—or not. If you're so inclined, decorate the room with flowers, candles, and accents in the bride's chosen wedding colors. Decoration is a nice touch.

### **Plan the food**

Try to prepare as much of the food in advance as possible. Avoid complicated dishes that can keep you in the kitchen and away from the fun.

Finger food is fab. Since many showers take place in living rooms, food that can be grazed from a central table or put on paper plates and eaten with the fingers tends to be most convenient. Think of crackers or bread and cheese, chips and dip or salsa, fruit and cut-up raw vegetables, and some sweets like candy and cake. Heartier dishes that can be prepared in advance include pasta and potato salads, a tray of sandwich fixings, and lasagna or other casserole-type dishes.

Think drinks. If you'll be serving wine or cocktails, also provide a variety of juices and sodas for anyone who doesn't drink alcohol. If you're serving coffee or tea, try to include a decaffeinated option, too.

Consider a potluck. If it's too much to handle, ask someone for help with the food, or make the shower into a potluck. Provide some basics yourself, and, in each invitation, suggest a type of food for each guest to bring (specify "appetizer" or "dessert," for example, rather than assigning a particular dish).

### **Send invitations**

It's best to send invitations via mail or email, so guests have all the information in writing. Send them three or four weeks before the shower. Set the RSVP date one or two weeks before the shower. Include the following information:

Name(s) of the guest(s) of honor

Date and time of the shower

Shower address (with a map if desired)

Theme (if any)

Registry information (if any)

Host's name and phone number

RSVP date

Let guests know if men or children are invited. If it's a potluck, enclose a separate note suggesting a type of dish to bring.

With good planning, the shower should run pretty smoothly. There are just a couple of important responsibilities that remain during the party.

Help people meet. Make sure you meet everyone yourself. Hand out nametags inscribed with people's names, and how they know the couple (for example "Ruth Ginsburg, groom's aunt"). Or gather all the guests early on, and ask each to tell who they are and how they know the bride and groom.

Coordinate a gift list. When the bride and groom open their gifts, have someone prepared to write down the name of the giver and what they gave.

Above all, relax and have fun. The shower itself is a gift of love and support to the bride and groom. Whatever happens is just icing on the wedding cake.

# Dining Out In Style

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Navigating the ins and outs of a fine restaurant can be a bewildering affair. What to wear? Is the salad fork appropriate for foie gras? Which fork among all of that silverware is for salad? And why did the server just snicker?

There's no need to hide in shame. From place settings to wine service to how and where to butter your bread, we'll help you master the mysteries of formal dining.

This chapter details the proper etiquette for western-style restaurants—cuisine from North and South America, Europe, and so on. Fine dining standards for restaurants of other cultures (particularly Asian) may vary. Also, be aware that even within the western frame of reference, serving styles can vary from place to place.

## **Make your entry**

By the time you enter the restaurant, you or someone in your group should already have made and confirmed a reservation (if the restaurant accepts them). Upon entry, the first staff person you'll usually meet is the headwaiter, also known as the captain, host, or maitre d'. This person is a sort of restaurant stationmaster, coordinating the servers and diners, and making sure everything runs smoothly.

The headwaiter typically stands near the entryway, greeting arrivals, taking their names, and so forth. Your job is to give this person the name your reservation was made under (or, if reservations aren't accepted, your name and the number of people in your party). Once that task is complete, and the headwaiter leads you to your table, etiquette becomes slightly more complicated. Keep these guidelines in mind:

First, do you like the area? If the table is near the kitchen, restroom, or an otherwise unattractive spot, politely ask if you can relocate. For example, "We'd prefer a table by the window, if possible." Usually, the headwaiter can accommodate you.

The host of your party—the person who has planned the dinner—decides on seating. If this person isn't you, wait by the table until you know his or her preferences, if any.

The headwaiter will sometimes pull out the chairs for the diners (ladies

first), and may also place your napkin in your lap. If either of these things don't happen, you shouldn't take offense. You should, however, help the women of your party with their chairs (if you're male) and lay your napkin in your lap immediately after you sit down (but after the party's host does so).

Once you're all tucked in, the headwaiter will hand out menus to each diner (and a wine list to the party's host), describe the meal specials, and introduce your server. Then the real fun begins. Know the settings

The formal table setting can seem a bit much to the uninitiated. Here's what you can typically expect to see:

And here's what each part is:

1. Napkin. Sometimes arranged decoratively on or above the service plate
2. Salad fork. Slightly shorter than the dinner fork, with an extra-thick tine on the far left for cutting larger greens
3. Dinner fork. The largest of the forks, for your main course
4. Service plate. A large dish in the setting's center, which is either taken away by the server once the main course is served, or the served dish is placed on top of it (this is also done with the soup bowl and its liner plate, as well as the salad plate, before the main course)
5. Dinner knife. The largest knife
6. Soup spoon. The largest spoon
7. Wine glass(es). You might find two of these—one for red wine, one for white. Red wine glasses typically have a stouter, more rounded goblet, while those for white are slightly more svelte and oval-shaped
8. Water glass. This is your largest glass. It's typically goblet-shaped and refilled through the evening by your busperson or server
9. Bread plate and knife. The smallest plate and knife on the table; the knife typically rests across the top edge of the plate.

You may, on occasion, find a little more than what's stated here. While most restaurants bring specialty utensils with the particular meal they're to be used with, others may lay certain extras out with the initial setting. Here are the possibilities:

Dessert fork and spoon. If included in the setting, these are usually placed horizontally above the service plate, pointed in and parallel to each other.

Soup bowl and liner plate. These are placed on the service plate and removed with the first course.

Steak or fish knife. These are slightly sharper than the dinner knife, sometimes with a serrated edge. They're placed between the dinner knife and soup spoon.

Salad knife. This is a little shorter than the dinner knife (which it's placed to the right of), and has a more rounded blade.

Teaspoon. A smaller spoon for coffee or tea, placed to the left of the soup spoon. You'll see these more often for breakfast or lunch settings.

Oyster fork. This thin, three-tined fork is usually placed with its head angled into the soup spoon.

### **Use the settings**

Napkins. If you're at the table and eating, the napkin should be in your lap or across your right thigh, folded once lengthwise. Using it should be more a formality than a necessity; that is, your eating habits should be so refined that all you need of the napkin is a gentle dab at your mouth (never a long swipe). If you leave the table with the intention of returning, leave your napkin neatly on the table to the left of your plate, or on the seat of your chair. When the meal is over, place your napkin to the right of your plate. You don't have to refold it, but don't wad it up, either.

Utensils. Nervous about keeping track of all that silverware? Relax. Just remember it's in order of use with the meal's courses, working from the outside in. Or it'll be brought out with the particular dish.

The most important things to keep in mind are cutting and placement. To cut food, hold the fork in your non-dominant hand, tines down and securing the food, and hold the knife in your dominant hand. Once you have your piece, there are two forking styles to choose from—American or European. American involves cutting one or two bites, setting your knife down, then switching the fork to your dominant hand and eating, tines pointed upward. For the European style, there's no switch—hold onto the knife, keep the fork in the same hand and simply raise the cut food to your mouth, tines down, one cut bite at a time. Both are acceptable in any restaurant.

For placement, the rule of thumb is, once used, utensils never go back on the tabletop. Rest your knife on the plate's edge, sharp side facing in. Rest your fork on the opposite side of the plate, handle on the edge, tines on the plate's center. Spoons rest on the accompanying saucer or liner plate, never in the actual bowl or cup. Finally, when you're done with the course, lay the knife and fork horizontally across the plate's center,

parallel to each other. This usually signals your server to clear the plate.

Plates and bowls. You shouldn't have to worry about these, since a good waitstaff will clear them as soon as you signal you're finished. However, keep a few rules in mind: Never push away a plate or bowl upon finishing. For soup, spoon away from you, and tip the bowl away from you to scoop the last spoonfuls. When using your bread plate, don't butter the whole piece of bread. Instead, cut a section of butter with your bread knife and leave it on the plate's edge, break off a bite-sized piece of bread with your hands (not a knife), cut a slice of butter, then butter the piece. Master the wine service

Ordering wine can strike terror into the heart of any diner. What to choose? How to pronounce it? And what's the deal with smelling the cork? Fear not—with a few guidelines, the service can be a snap.

The order. Your wine order may be taken by the restaurant's wine steward instead of your server. This person has an expert grasp of the intricacies of wine, as well as the restaurant's stock. Both the steward and the server should be able to give sound recommendations to go along with your meal. Although you can usually order by the glass or the bottle, certain selections may only be available by bottle—the wine list should provide this information.

The approval. When your wine is brought to the table, the ritual of approval begins: The bottle is first presented to you (or to whomever ordered the wine). This is to be sure you don't have the wrong selection, which can be a costly mistake. Once you confirm, the server or steward opens the bottle at the table and may present you with the cork. This is to verify the authenticity of the wine, since the winery's name is stamped there, and to make sure the cork isn't cracked or moldy, indicating a compromised bottle. (No, you don't have to smell the cork.)

Next, the server pours about an ounce into your glass for the final test. Drink up. There's no need to smell or swill, and you're not taste testing, either—again, you're just making sure the wine hasn't gone bad (an incredibly slim possibility). Once final approval is given, the wine is poured by the server, ladies first.

Drinking and pouring. Hold a glass of red wine with your thumb and first two fingers cupping the bowl, and your last two fingers lightly touching the stem. Hold a glass of white wine by the stem so your hand won't warm it up. In some restaurants the server will refill your glass, but in others this is

left to your discretion. If this is the case, the host of the party typically pours (unless the party is particularly large).

To properly pour, hold the bottle by its body (not the neck), without letting any part of the bottle touch the glass. Just as you finish the pouring, give the bottle a slight, swift, upward rotation as you lift it away. This should stop any stray drips from hitting the tablecloth—yet another etiquette no–no.

### **Learn the etiquette essentials**

Once you've made a flawless entrance and cleared the setting and drinking hurdles, you're almost at the end of the etiquette tunnel. There are just a few more essential rules that, once learned, will help you pass the table manners test with flying colors:

The basics. All those things your mother tried to drill into your head apply more than ever—sit up straight, chew with your mouth closed, don't speak with food in your mouth, don't reach across the table for an item (ask for it to be passed), excuse yourself if you must leave, and keep your elbows off the table during each course.

Eating guide. If you're wondering what to order, feel free to ask your server for recommendations. Women typically order first. Season your food only after tasting it first. Eat at a moderate pace—keep in step with the rest of your party. Eat quietly. Don't smack your lips or slurp liquids. Avoid flatware clatter, such as dropping or scraping utensils against your plate, or clinking them against your teeth. Watch your alcohol consumption. There are few faux pas worse than a drunk diner.

Dining dangers. Don't criticize the food unless the problem is serious enough for it to be sent back. If you do have a problem, tell it to the host of your party (if this isn't you). He or she will take it up with the server or headwaiter. If you find something in your mouth you don't want to swallow, discretely deposit the item back onto your utensil and place it on the edge of your plate (exceptions are fish bones—remove them from your mouth with your fingers and put them on your bread plate). If you have to remove something caught in your teeth, excuse yourself to the restroom.

Finger foods. Learn 'em, know 'em: artichokes (except the heart), asparagus without sauce, crisp bacon, bread, cookies, corn on the cob, hors d'oeuvres, sandwiches (except open-faced), and small fruits and berries on the stem.

Wrapping it up. The host of the party should signal when it's time to leave

## Can You Spell Etiquette?

the restaurant. If this person is you, motion to the server for your check (a raise of the hand, and a "Check, please," should do it), and pay it yourself. Don't accept any offers for payment. If you're not the host, you can offer to help pay, but once he or she declines your offer, let it go without protest. Just be sure to thank the person for the meal.

Finally, stand up and leave with the confident knowledge that you've dined with supreme decorum!