

# Table Manners

A child should always say what's true  
And speak when he is spoken to,  
And behave mannerly at table;  
At least as far as he is able.

This is a verse by Robert Louis Stevenson that you may have heard before.

Your mother has probably been telling you about table manners ever since you came down off your high chair and joined the others at the dinner table. So you already know some of the rules.

Here are some simple ones that you are familiar with: Sit up straight; do not balance on the back legs of your chair.

Do not wave your knife and fork around or stick them up in the air or bang them on the plate or the table.

Do not hold your knife and fork upright in your fist, like a dagger ready to stab someone.

Eat slowly, with your mouth closed. Don't gulp or make noises. Sip your milk or water quietly, and never make gurgling sounds through a straw. ( It's fun, but it isn't etiquette.)

Ask politely for something to be passed to you - salt, or

another helping - do not reach across the table for it.

But you already know all these things, don't you?

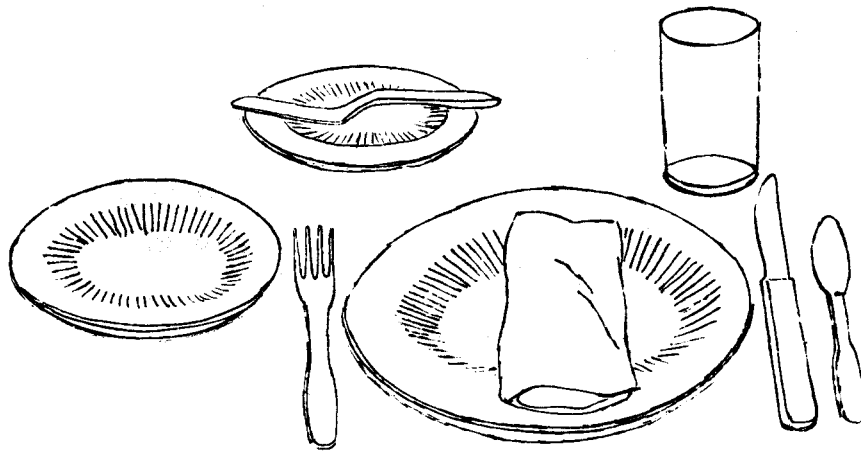
When you are invited to your friend's house for dinner you may find that his family's arrangements are more formal than yours - especially if you are invited to a dinner party and there are several other guests. That is why you should know how a formal place setting looks, and exactly what to do with everything.

Here is the etiquette for dining out - a great and happy occasion!

Place settings vary a little according to what food is going to be served. For instance, if the first course is soup, the soup plate probably will already be on the table when you go into the dining room. But perhaps the dinner will begin with a shrimp or fruit cocktail or an artichoke. Then other kinds of dishes will be needed.

But certain things will always be much the same:

The fork, or forks, will always be at the left of the dinner plate. At the right, from the inside out, will be the knives and then the spoons. Be prepared, however, for a host who might put the dessert fork and spoon across the top of the plate.



There is no need to be confused about finding a lot of cutlery at your place, for this rule is the simplest one of all: always use the one at the outside first. (If your first course is soup, you will find the soup spoon at your far right. If it is a shrimp cocktail, you will find a tiny fork at your far left.)

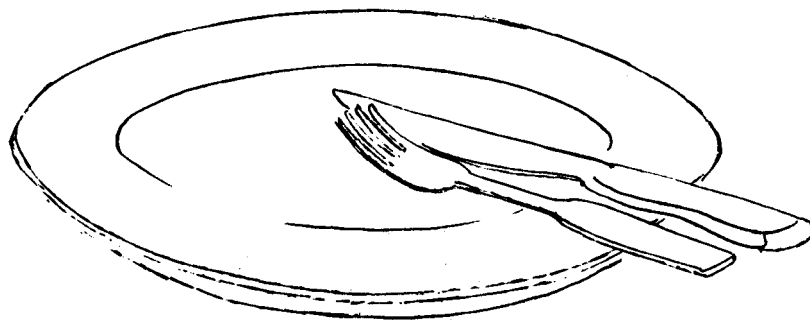
As you can see from the diagram, the butter plate and butter knife are placed above the forks, and the glass above the knives. Napkins are usually placed at your left but some hostesses fold them on top of the dinner plate.

Younger guests wait for adults to be seated first. As soon as you sit down, unfold your napkin halfway and put it on your lap. Then, after grace has been said, wait for your hostess to begin eating. It is very impolite for a guest to begin first, and besides, if you are in any doubt about which fork or spoon to use, you can watch her and do the same.

When you are not eating - when you pause to take a drink of water or to talk to someone - your knife and fork should be placed like this:



and when you have finished a course, place your knife and fork like this -



-so that your hostess can tell that you have finished eating.

Your bread and butter are, of course, on your bread and butter plate, and the butter knife must stay there, too. *Break* off just a portion of bread at a time, and butter it. Never take up a full slice to eat.

When someone passes a dish to you, take the portion nearest you and then pass it on to the next person. If a maid is serving, she will stand at your left so that you can help yourself with your right hand.

Do not reach for the pickles, the gravy, or the salt if they are not in front of you. Instead, ask the person nearest the dish you want to pass it to you, and be sure to say *please*.

When you leave the table, place your napkin (without folding it again) to the left of your place. Never leave the table before the others do. But if you must, say "May I be excused, please?" and slip away quietly.

When you are dining out, eat a little of everything that is passed to you. You may think that you do not like strange things such as artichokes or turtle soup or oysters or curry - but you may have a pleasant surprise. Millions of people have learned to love unusual food after taking "two bites for politeness." Besides, refusing your hostess's food is *not etiquette!* But if there is something you particularly like, do tell her .

Table manners are really easy because they make sense.



## *Know-Your-Table-Manners Quiz*

Do you:

1. Sit down as soon as you have been told which is your chair?
2. Put your napkin on your lap as soon as you sit down?
3. Choose your fork by size, according to the kind of food on your plate?
4. Put your fork beside your plate when you've finished eating?
5. Take the largest portion of food on the platter handed to you ?
6. Ask for something you want to be passed to you?
7. Try things that you don't think you like?
8. Tell your hostess that you like the food, if you do?

Now turn to the next page and see what your score is.

- 1.N
- 2.Y
- 3.N
- 4.N
- 5.N
- 6.Y
- 7.Y
- 8.Y

If you have 8 right: You will be a welcome guest any time!  
5-7 right: You are making a few mistakes. Better polish up your table manners!  
1-4 right: Oh, dear, your hosts probably won't invite you back until you learn the rules and practice them some more.  
None right: Read the chapter very very carefully again, and ask your mother to explain the parts you don't understand. Practice at your dinner table at home.