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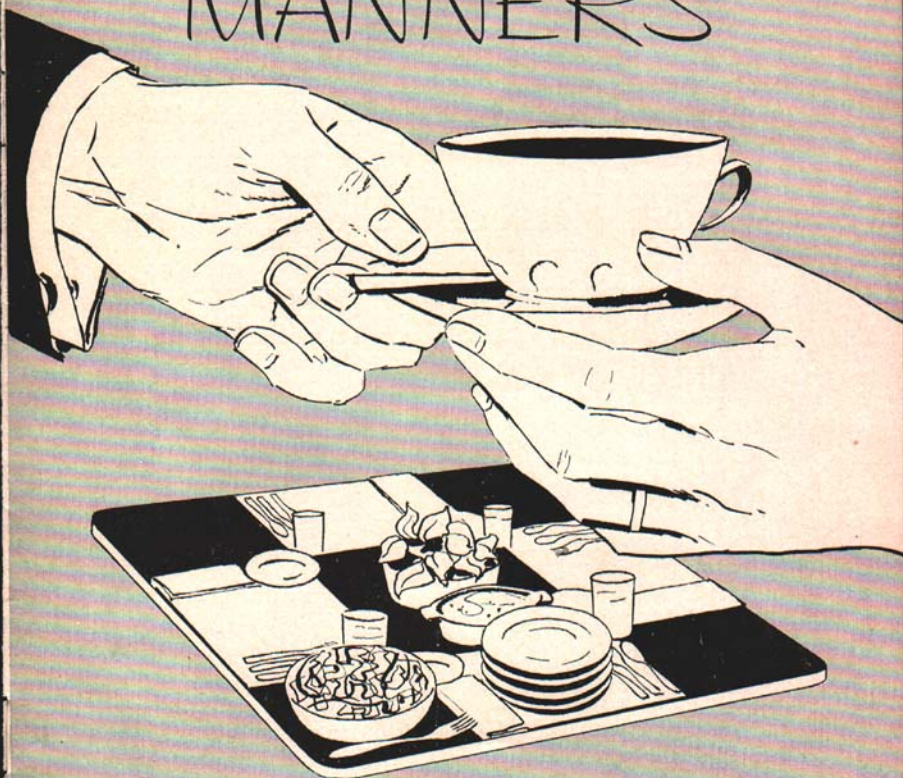
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Your Meals and Your Manners
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Your MEALS And Your MANNERS



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Cooperative Extension Service
East Lansing

Your Meals and Your Manners

by ROBERTA HERSHEY¹

Mealtime is always one of the highlights of the day. Appetite and digestion depend greatly upon the atmosphere in which food is served. Home will be a more pleasant place where adults may be proud and children confident if correct table customs are used every day.

Good table manners are truly a touchstone of culture. They are based on two very sensible aims — ease and orderliness in serving, and a kindly consideration for others. Rules are only a means to happy mealtimes. They should never be allowed to replace thoughtfulness and common sense.

Mealtime Courtesies

*Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Do my manners appeal or appall?*

Here are a few suggestions for preventing accidents and avoiding offense to others at the table.

SEATING

Stand behind the chair until the hostess is seated.

Be seated and arise from the left of the chair.

Sit erect, about 8 inches from the table. Do not lounge or bend forward while eating.

Keep feet on the floor and elbows off the table and fairly close to the sides. (In public eating places, it is permissible to lean on the elbows while talking between courses.)

Unfold the dinner napkin (halfway if large) and lay it across the lap. Neither flourish the napkin above the table nor tuck it under the chin. The napkin should be left unfolded, but not rumpled, at the left of the plate when the meal is over or when one is excused from the table. A houseguest or a member of the family folds the napkin or not as the hostess does. The napkin may be rolled and placed in a napkin ring if individual ones are provided.

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AT THE TABLE

Never start to eat until after the hostess begins.

Sit quietly. Speak in low tones and never with food in the mouth.

Take small bites.

Take part in general table conversation but do not monopolize it. Avoid unpleasant topics and those that may provoke argument.

Do not watch the table manners of others; that is a good way to neglect one's own. Do not draw attention to poor manners in others.

Anticipate the needs of others and pass dishes before it is necessary for people to ask.

Use your napkin to wipe your lips — lightly — when needed. This is sometimes wise before drinking a beverage.

SOME "DO-NOTS"

Never reach in front of a person.

Do not place food or used silver on the tablecloth.

Never arrange your hair or use a toothpick at the table.

Do not play with the silver.

Never use personal silver in serving yourself from the main dish.

Do not chew food with your lips open. Never smack your lips or bolt food.

Never mention food dislikes or the cost of food at the table.

Do not read at the table when others are present.

Never pick up and hold a dish while eating from it or use a knife to carry food to the mouth.

Never show dislike for any food served. Take a small portion and try to eat some of it.

If a choice is offered, express a preference promptly.

Do not use fingers as a "pusher" to load the fork.

Never place "sticky" fingers in mouth.

USING THE KNIFE AND FORK

In raising food to the mouth, hold the fork in the right hand, the tines up. Do not hold food on the fork while talking.

Use a fork rather than a spoon if possible. Buttered vegetables, ices served with the meat course, brick ice cream, frozen puddings, cakes with soft icing, melons, and salads are usually eaten with the fork. In case the ice creams or puddings are too soft, a spoon is the best choice.

In cutting meat, the knife should be held easily with the fore-

finger reaching along the handle. The fork is held in the left hand, tines down, the forefinger extending along the handle and pointed toward the tines.

Do not cut more than one or two bites of meat or other food at a time. Never use the knife for pie. A knife may be used when necessary to cut head lettuce salad or toast which is under creamed foods.

When not in use, leave the knife and fork near the center of the plate with the cutting edge of the knife toward the center and the tines of the fork turned upward.

Foods should not be mashed between the prongs of a fork nor stirred together on the plate.

Do not rest the tips of silver on the edge of the plate with handles on the tablecloth.

A relish, jelly, or pickle served as a meat accompaniment is placed on the dinner plate. If preserves or honey are served, eat them with the fork or spread on one bite of bread just before eating it. Do not use a piece of bread to obtain the last bit of jam or gravy.

To butter bread, break a small piece off the slice and rest it on the edge of the dinner plate or the bread and butter plate. Never spread a whole slice at a time or take a bite from the whole slice.

Never fill the fork with more food than is suitable for one mouthful.

USING SPOONS

Never allow a spoon to stand in a cup or sherbet glass. A saucer or service plate should be provided.

Stir beverages only once or twice, sip a spoonful to make sure of the temperature, but drink the remainder directly from the cup.

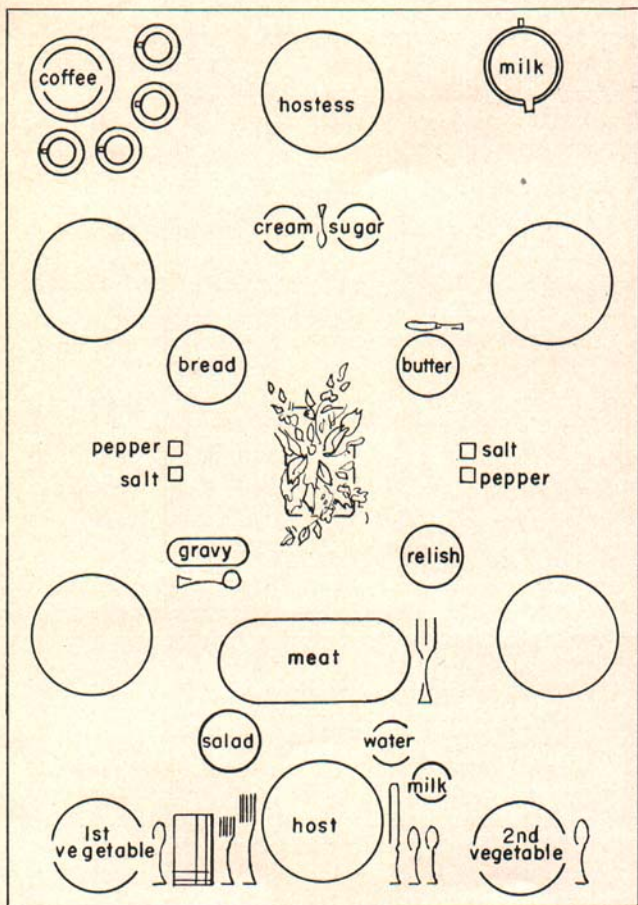
Dip a soup spoon away from you and drink soup quietly from the side of the spoon. Never break crackers or bread into the soup, blow upon it, or tip the soup plate to obtain the last drop.

Pits from fruit are removed in the dish with a spoon. For small fruits, it may be necessary to remove pits from your mouth. Use a spoon to carry them to the service plate.

CUP CUSTOMS

Hold a cup by the handle only. Do not curl the little finger or hold it at an angle from the rest of the fingers.

Handle a goblet by the stem with the bowl part resting on the thumb and first finger.



Informal service for family.

GENERAL HINTS

Drink beverages only when there is no food in your mouth.

It is not necessary to leave part of the food on the plate at the end of a meal. Take only such food as may be eaten.

Cake without soft icing, cookies, bread, olives, small pickles, hard cheese, nuts, celery, and candy are eaten with the fingers.

Corn on the cob is not usually served at formal affairs. If it is served, break the ear into 3-inch pieces and hold in one hand only.

It is only in the privacy of the family circle that one may pick up a chicken or chop bone with the fingers.

Dishes should be left in place at the end of a meal; they should not be stacked or pushed toward the center of the table.

Accidents should not receive needless attention. Quietly say, "I'm sorry" to the hostess, who will remedy the difficulty. If a particle of food falls on the table cloth, it should be left untouched. Food which falls upon clothing should be removed with the napkin, not with the blade of the knife.

Finger bowls are not used except when each person has one. The fingers of but one hand should be dipped into the water at a time and dried upon the napkin.

Table Service

There are a few generally accepted patterns for placing china and silver on the table. The rules given here are not the only ones, but probably represent the most popular system.

SETTING THE TABLE

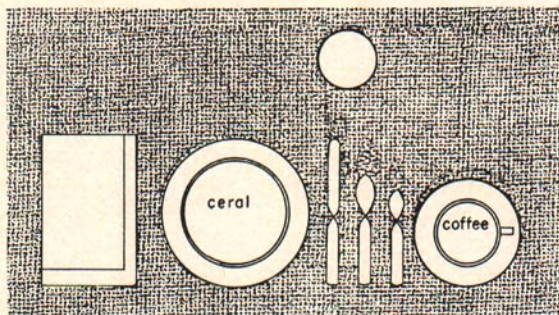
Luncheon cloths or place doilies may be used for breakfast, luncheon, or informal dinners. Preferably, for formal dinners, a linen table cloth over a silencer pad is used. The folds in the cloth should be parallel with the edges of the table or with the sides of the room and the cloth should fall about 10 inches below the edge of the table.

Table decorations should be low or of such a nature that they do not obstruct the view across the table. Flowers are more pleasing if they are not massed and are arranged at irregular heights. Care should be taken that extremely fragrant flowers are not used on the table. Small growing plants or low bowls of greenery make attractive wintertime centerpieces. Crepe paper decorations are used only

for "feature" parties. When placecards are used, they are placed directly above the plate or on the napkin.

The place setting for one person at the table is called a "cover". The space allowed should be at least 20 inches wide (24 inches is better) and 15 inches deep. All linen, china, and silver for the cover is placed 1 inch from the edge of the table. Covers should be set directly opposite each other unless there are an uneven number of guests.

All lines should be parallel to the sides of the room. Avoid diagonal lines.



Breakfast cover.

Silver is placed in the order of use, with the pieces to be used last nearest the plate. Some variations are occasionally used to obtain better balance. If much silver is required for the meal, have that needed for the last course ready on a side table and then place it at each cover just before serving the dessert.

Knives are placed at the right of the plate with the cutting edge toward the plate. The butter spreader is placed on the bread and butter plate parallel to the edge of the table, handle to the right. Spoons are placed with the bowls up at the right of the knives. Forks are placed at the left of the plate with the tines up. If no knives are needed, forks are placed at the right in place of the knives. (Oyster forks are placed on the extreme right.)

The napkin is placed at the left of the forks with the hem and selvage parallel to the forks and to the table, and with the open corner at the lower edge toward the plate.

The water glass is placed at the tip of the knife. It should be about three-fourths full.

The cup and saucer are placed at the right of the spoons.

If a bread and butter plate is used, it is placed at the left at the tip of the fork.

The salad plate is placed at the left of the bread and butter plate somewhat nearer the edge of the table. If no bread and butter plate is used, the salad plate is placed at the tip of the forks. If coffee is to be served with dessert, the salad plate may be placed at the right.

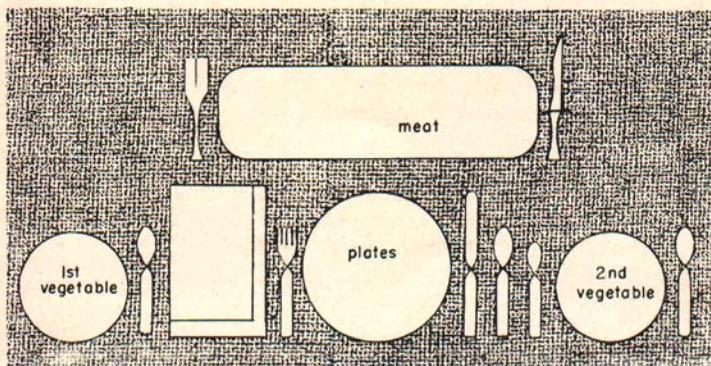
Individual salt and pepper shakers are placed above each cover, or between two covers, in a line parallel to the edge of the table.

Individual side dishes are placed at the left, as near the plate as possible without crowding.

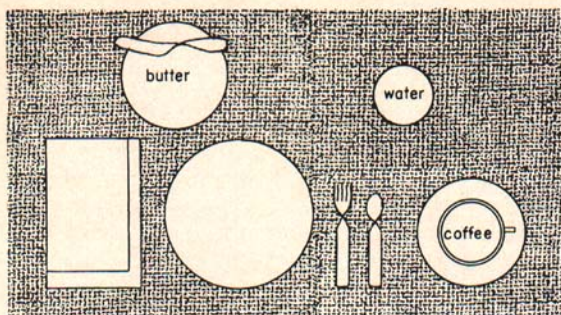
Butter, jelly, pickles, relishes, cream, and sugar are placed in an orderly fashion convenient to some one cover.

If the host is to serve the main course, it may be necessary to rearrange his cover. Hot plates are placed directly in front of him, the meat platter beyond the plates toward the center of the table, and the dishes containing vegetables on his right or left, conveniently close to the plates. Serving silver is placed on the right and left of the platter, according to the general rules for placing knives, forks, and spoons.

A side table is always a great convenience. Extra silver, the coffee service, plates and silver for serving the dessert, the water pitcher and a napkin or two for emergencies may be ready on the side table.



Host's cover.



Luncheon cover.

TYPES OF SERVICE

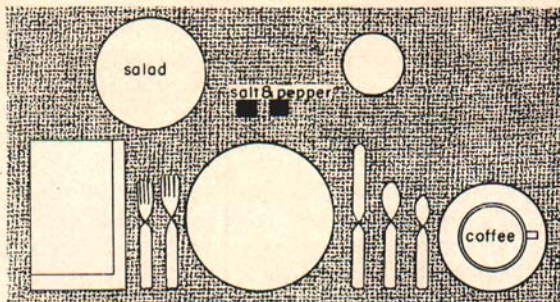
The English type of service is best suited to the average family. The food is served at the table by the host and hostess. This service is much more orderly and hospitable than the passing of all main dishes from person to person.

The Russian service is used for formal occasions and for banquets. All the food is served from the kitchen in individual portions. This service is also becoming common practice in many homes.

The compromise service is a combination of the English and Russian services. The main course is usually served at the table, while the soup, salad, and dessert are served Russian style. This service is better suited to the home where a maid or one of the children helps in serving.

Buffet service is a convenient way to serve many people with the minimum amount of help and space. Food, silver, and china for the first course are in place on the table when the guests enter the dining room. Each guest helps himself to a plate, then to the various foods. The silver, napkin, and beverage are taken last.

Small tables may be provided or trays may be used. If the guests are seated at small tables, covers should be laid. The hostess asks the guests to serve themselves to second helpings or she may pass dishes of food. The table is cleared and re-set with dishes and silver for dessert. Guests are asked to place the dishes from the first course on a side table and then help themselves to dessert.



Dinner cover.

SERVING THE MEAL

The room should be well-aired and not too warm. All the food for the first course should be ready before guests are invited to the dining room. Foods such as cocktails, bread and butter, jelly, pickles, relishes, and individual salads may be on the table when the meal is announced. Soup should be served after the guests are seated. The hostess announces dinner and leads the way to the dining room.

The hostess indicates where each guest is to sit. If she waits on the table, she will be seated at the end of the table nearest the kitchen door. If there is someone else to wait on the table, she may prefer to sit facing the kitchen door. If some member of the family waits on table, this person should be seated near the kitchen. The host is seated opposite the hostess. The woman guest of honor is usually seated at the right of the host, the man guest of honor at the right of the hostess. Members of one family are not usually seated next to one another at a large formal dinner.

When the food is served at the table, the host serves the meat and vegetables. He should carve enough meat for everyone before beginning to serve the plates. He may also serve the dessert while the hostess serves the beverage.

The hostess is served first unless she is doing the serving. Those at her right are served next and then those at her left. Each guest passes the plates to the next guest. The host never serves a guest and then asks her to pass another plate past her.

The host or hostess may ask a guest to help himself and then pass a food which has been placed near him.

Food is passed to the right, that is, counterclockwise.

WAITING ON THE TABLE

On formal occasions, when 10 or more persons are present, the first waitress serves the hostess, and the second waitress serves the lady at the right of the host, each continuing to the right until all are served. If one of the family waits on the table, she rises quietly, leaving the napkin partially folded beside her plate at the left.

Place, pass and remove all dishes from the left. Beverages, however, must be placed at the right since the cup or glass is raised with the right hand. Cups or glasses are removed from the right, since one should not reach in front of a guest. When a salad is served with the meat course, it may be placed at the right, if no beverage is served. Usually, the salad is placed at the left. If the salad is placed at the right, it should be removed from the right.

In removing, placing, or passing food, use the hand farthest from the guest. The elbow of the person serving is then never pushed under the nose of a guest.

In placing a plate, hold it on the palm of the hand, steadying the edge with the thumb. Use care that the thumb does not extend over the edge of the plate. In serving from the kitchen, bring in two plates at a time.

A folded napkin or small tray may be used by the waitress in passing dishes containing food. A tray may be used when bringing silver and accessories to the table, when passing sugar and cream, or in removing salts and peppers. Hot breads, baked potatoes, or other foods may be covered with a napkin to keep them warm.

In passing food, hold the dish low and have the serving silver in place. In passing a dish with a handle, turn the handle toward the person receiving the dish. Always pass the most important accompaniment to a course first, the others in the order of their importance.

To fill a glass, do not lift it from the table. If the covers are crowded, the glass may be drawn to the edge of the table and filled. Take hold of the glass well toward the bottom. Water glasses should be kept filled.

If the dessert is served in sherbet glasses, service plates should be used. The filled sherbet glasses may be brought in on a tray to a side table and each glass placed on a service plate before the dessert is served. A service plate is also placed under a cocktail glass or soup plate.

In removing the dishes, remove all food first, then the plates and

other soiled dishes. The hostess, by a nod or a word, gives the signal for the removal of the dishes. Remove the plate of the hostess first unless she herself is waiting on the table. In this case, the hostess begins to remove the dishes at the cover on her right and continues in regular order around the table.

Remove one complete cover at a time, using the left hand to reach for the plate. The plate may be held in the right hand while the left hand is used to reach for the side dish. Soiled dishes from one cover may be placed on the serving table while another cover is cleared; the dishes from both covers are then taken to the kitchen. A tray may be used to carry food and dishes between the service table and the kitchen.

Dishes should not be stacked in front of the guest. In reaching for the dishes, stand sidewise so the guests will not be crowded.

Remove everything pertaining to one course before serving the next course. There should be no unsightliness nor appearance of great haste, but the work should be done quietly and quickly. There should be no unnecessary trips to and from the kitchen. If it is necessary to crumb the table, use a napkin and a plate.

The truly hospitable home offers orderly table service every day in the week—not only when company is present. Cheerful conversation and easy, graceful table manners may then become family habits which add much to a happy mealtime atmosphere.

Reference: "Meal Planning and Table Service" by N. Beth Bailey. Manual Arts Press.

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