

In truth, most of us will be invited to dinners of the less formal kind. Showing consideration for your hosts is hugely important. There's simply no point in knowing the etiquette if you haven't first learnt good manners.

## Arriving for Dinner

- If you are invited out for dinner make an effort with your appearance. It shows a reciprocation of effort. The exception is an informal supper, where it's expected you'll 'come as you are.'
- Dinner jackets are still the order of the day at 'old family' country houses. If you're uncertain of the dress code, check with your hosts.
- Many restaurants still don't allow you to dine without a collar and tie, and will offer you some ill-fitting jacket if you don't bring your own. And it is still expected that women wear a dress at super-smart restaurants, even in preference to a smart trouser suit, which you will get away with these days, thanks to the late Princess of Wales.
- When dinner is stated as, 8.00 for 8.30pm, it's most polite to arrive within 10-15 minutes of the earliest stated time. It gives you time to say hello to the hosts, meet the other guests, and settle in with a drink.
- Do not arrive early. Not only is it rude, it's a pain in the butt. You'll only get in the way of the final preparations of either the food or the host.
- Should you be running more than 15 minutes late, ring the hostess letting her know of your delay. Dinner is traditionally held off for no longer than 15 to 20 minutes to avoid it being spoiled. In truth, this came about because one wouldn't want to upset the cook and the butler who didn't appreciate tardiness for dinner! The reason of a spoiled dinner still stands.

## The Must-Have Guide to Posh Nosh Table Manners

- At less formal dinners, bringing a bottle of wine, or chocolates is considered a thoughtful gesture. Etiquette states what is brought ought to be something one doesn't need.
- Avoid bringing flowers to a big dinner party. It's inconvenient for the hostess who has to extract herself from welcoming guests and go hunting for a vase she'll never be able to find. Either send them beforehand or the following day. This is the correct way.
- At a very formal dinner, it is incorrect to bring a gift at all. In fact, in some very traditional circles, it would be taken as a downright insult. What, you think we can't provide! Technically, this includes weddings, where presents, in theory, should be sent ahead.

### Welcoming Guests

- When welcoming your guests, it's important to do it with warmth and sincerity. It's an important transition from the outside world into the one you're creating. Let them know they are truly welcome.
- Offer to take your guests coat and outdoor accessories, such as wet umbrellas, and either hang them up or drape them somewhere safe such as in a spare room.
- If someone brings a gift, it is appropriate to open it in the hallway, away from other guests. Thank your guests immediately.
- There is no obligation to consume anything that is brought that evening. It is to be assumed that the hostess has already all that is needed to host the party. If it happens that what is brought turns out to be a bit of a life saver at the end of the evening because you're running a little low on the alcohol stakes, bonus!
- If things are too manic to open a gift on arrival, it is still absolutely correct to

place it aside to be opened later. Just don't forget to thank them.

## Arriving at a Restaurant

- If you're hosting the dinner at a restaurant, arrive at least 5 minutes early, check the whereabouts of the cloakroom and be there to greet your guests when they arrive.
- If you are the guest, it's simple, you're expected to be on time.
- If you arrive before your host, let the maître d' know the name under which the table is booked. You can then choose to be seated at the table or order yourself a drink at the bar. You pay for your own drinks at the bar. Don't open a tab on your host's behalf! Ordering a drink at the table is acceptable.

## Moving to Your Table at the Restaurant

- Traditionally women, led by the hostess, follow the maître d' first. The men follow, bringing up the rear, with the host last. If there isn't a maitre d', the host leads.
- As host, it is best form to offer your guest the seat with the best view. Let them decide if they would prefer, for example, the view over the restaurant or perhaps the view out the window.
- Women traditionally sit on a bench seat, if there is one.
- If arriving as a large group, the first guests are expected to move around to the back of the table to take their seats so those following don't have to scramble over or squeeze past to get to their place.