

## *Dining Etiquette Tips*

1. Consider the meal you have with the potential employer as part of the interview process.  
Enter the chair from the left and exit the right.  
Try to find common grounds of interest (sports, travel) that are not controversial.  
Do not neglect anyone sitting near you.
2. As the employer will be paying for the meal, order from the mid-priced offerings on the menu.
3. Eat lightly and avoid messy food. You will be doing more talking than eating and you don't want to be wearing your lunch during the afternoon interviews.
4. Be very cautious about ordering alcohol, as it is important to remain alert during the whole interview process. It is recommended that no alcohol be consumed at lunch and no more than one glass of wine in the evening and then only if others are drinking. It is always acceptable to substitute mineral water for wine.
5. Always pass the salt and pepper together, even if only one is asked for. In general, if items are not being passed to a specific person, pass food from left to right.
6. Don't talk when you have food in your mouth, and don't wave or point with a utensil.
7. Understand the table setting. Your bread plate is to the left of your dinner plate and your water glass to the right. Use your utensils from the outside in.
8. Place your napkin on your lap as soon as you sit down. If you leave for a few moments during the meal, place your napkin on your chair. When you leave at the end of the meal, leave your napkin to the left of your dinner plate.
9. Never butter a whole piece of bread. Take some butter and place it on your plate. Use the butter knife if one is available. Break a bite-sized piece off of your bread and hold it on the corner of the bread plate while you butter.
10. Eat soup taking the spoon away from you, then toward you and sip from the side. When you have finished soup, always place the spoon in the saucer under the soup bowl.
11. Cutting: fork in left hand, knife in right hand, cut one piece at a time, lay knife across top of plate with blade toward you and move fork to right hand. When you have completed a meal, place your knife and fork across the plate in a 9 to 3 o'clock fashion.

Compliments of Cal-Berkley Career Center & Georgia Tech Career Center

## *Interviewing and The Art of Eating at the Same Time*

Why are more employers interviewing over food

### Success Strategies During the Interview:

- Remember the Basics
- Listening and Questioning
- The Relaxation Factor
- Determining the Personality Fit
- Preparing Conversation Makers:
  - How long have you been with the company?
  - What do you enjoy most about your position?
  - What was one of the most challenging things you encountered when you first started here?
  - How would you describe the culture of this company?
  - How is this position evaluated?
  - How will I know what you think of my performance?
  - How do coworkers view this position?
  - What other types of positions will I have regular contact with?
  - As my supervisor, how often will I have contact with you?
  - How would you describe your management style?
  - What do you expect of me?

### After the interview:

- Praise yourself for doing something really well.
- Help yourself by recognizing something you want to improve next time.
- Remind yourself that you'll improve each time you interview.

Celina E.M. Peerman

## *Meal Etiquette and The Job Interview*

The dinner or luncheon interview will usually take place in a fairly nice restaurant that offers a quiet atmosphere. Plan to arrive twenty minutes early to allow a “freshening-up” visit to the restroom. A crooked tie, a belt that is not centered, mussed hair, or an open fly is disastrous. You also need a few minutes to relax before meeting the interviewer(s).

The dinner interview should be a much softer sell than the preliminary interview (where you went for the jugular to prove that you meet the requirements). The company feels reasonably assured that you can do the job, but now needs to confirm that you fit in with the company. Your personal demeanor will be a primary factor in this type of interview. Let the interviewer guide the topics of discussion, but occasionally reinforce an important prerequisite strength. Don’t be surprised to find conversation oriented toward politics, movies, or other general issues unrelated to the job. The interviewer is interested in knowing about you as a human being. Avoid taking a controversial stand on any issue, e.g., “For my money, Jerry Falwell is our best bet for President.”

It may be tempting to get overly familiar with the interviewer after you share a few laughs and start hitting it off. Don’t let your guard down. *Maintain a professional attitude.* This is still a business meeting.

Order a light entrée that is easy to eat. You should be the center of attention, not the plateful of steamed Maryland crabs. Never order alcoholic beverages. Forget the glass of wine with dinner or a cocktail at the bar. Order a glass of Perrier water, soft drink, soda with a twist of lemon, iced tea, or coffee. The recruiter can only respect your professionalism in wishing to maintain a clear head for this important business meeting.

Use excellent manners. Candidates who do not dine often in fine restaurants should review a basic etiquette book. Tucking a dinner napkin down one’s pants is just not acceptable.

Even if the interviewer invites you to smoke – don’t! Do not smoke under any circumstances. Maintain a professional image. If you are a non-smoker, don’t make a fuss if the interviewer lights up. Accommodate his or her habit. Put up your *no smoking* sign after you get the job. The key to succeeding in a dinner or luncheon interview is to relax and present yourself as a well-rounded, intelligent, and nice person.

(source: *How You Really Get Hired*, by John L. Lafevere)

### **The Meal Meeting**

Breakfast, lunch, or dinner are the prime choices for interviewers who want to catch the seasoned professional off guard. In fact, the meal is arguably the toughest of all tough interview situations. The setting offers the interviewer the chance to see you in a non-office (and therefore more natural) setting, to observe your social graces, and to consider you as a whole person. Here topics that would be impossible to address in the traditional office setting will naturally surface, often with virtually no effort on the part of the interviewer. The slightest slip in front of that wily old sea pirate opposite – thinly disguised in a Brooks Brothers suit – could get your candidacy deep-sixed very quickly.

Usually, you will not be invited to an “eating meeting” until you have already demonstrated that you are capable of doing the job. It’s a good sign, actually. An invitation to a meal means that you are under strong consideration, and, by extension, intense scrutiny.

The meeting is often the final hurdle and could lead directly to the job offer – assuming, of course, that you properly handle the occasional surprises that arise. The interviewer’s concern is not

whether you can do the job, but whether you have the growth potential that will allow you to fill more senior slots as they become available.

But be careful. Many have fallen at the final hurdle in a close-run race. Being interviewed in front of others is bad enough; eating and drinking in front of them at the same time only makes matters worse. If you knock over a glass or dribble spaghetti sauce down your chin, the interviewer will be so busy smirking that he or she won't be listening to what you have to say.

To be sure that the interviewer remains as attentive to the positive points of your candidacy as possible, let's discuss table manners.

- **Table Manners:** Your social graces and general demeanor at the table can tell as much about you as your answer to a question. For instance, over-ordering food or drink can signal poor self-discipline. At the very least, it will call into question your judgement and maturity. High-handed behavior toward waiters and buspeople could reflect negatively on your ability to get along with subordinates and on your leadership skills. Those concerns are amplified when you return food or complain about the service; actions which, at the very least, find fault with the interviewer's choice of restaurant.

By the same token, you will want to observe how your potential employer behaves. After all, you are likely to become an employee, and the interviewer's behavior to servers in a restaurant can tell you a lot about what it will be like on the job.

- **Alcohol:** Soon after being seated, you will be offered a drink – if not by your host, then by the waiter. There are many reasons to avoid alcohol at interview meals. The most important reason is that alcohol fuzzes your mind, and research proves that stress increases the intoxicating effect of alcohol. So, if you order something to drink, try to stick with something nonalcoholic, such as club soda or simply a glass of water. If pressed, order a white-wine spritzer, a sherry, or a light beer – it depends on the environment and what your host is drinking.

If you do drink, never have more than one. If there is a bottle of wine on the table, and the waiter offers you another glass, simply place a hand over the top of your glass. It is a polite way of signifying no.

You may be offered alcohol at the end of the meal. The rule still holds true – turn it down. You need your wits about you even if the interview seems to be drawing to a close. Some interviewers will try to use those moments, when your defenses are at their lowest, to throw in a couple of zinger questions.

- **Smoking:** Smoking is another big problem that is best handled by taking a simple approach. Don't do it unless encouraged. If both of you are smokers, and you are encouraged to smoke, follow a simple rule: Never smoke between courses, only at the end of a meal. Even most confirmed nicotine addicts, like the rest of the population, hate smoke while they are eating.
- **Utensils:** Keep all your cups and glasses at the top of your place setting and well away from you. Most glasses are knocked over at a cluttered table when one stretches for the condiments or gesticulates to make a point. Of course, your manners will prevent you from reaching rudely for the pepper shaker.

When you are faced with an array of knives, forks, and spoons, it is always safe to start at the outside and work your way in as the courses come. Keep your elbows off the table and at your sides. Don't slouch in the chair. When pausing between mouthfuls (which, if you are

promoting yourself properly, should be frequently), rest your knife and fork across each other on the plate.

The time to start eating, of course, is when the interviewer does; the time to stop is when he or she does. At the end of a course or the meal, rest your knife and fork parallel to each other at the nine o'clock and three o'clock positions on your plate.

- **Other helpful hints:**

- Never speak with food in your mouth.
- To be on the safe side, eat the same thing, (or close to it,) as the interviewer. Of course, while this rule makes sense in theory, the fact is that you probably will be asked to order first, so ordering the same thing can be problematic. Solve the problem before you order by complimenting the restaurant during your small talk and then, when the menus arrive, asking, "What do you think you will have today?" or "Have you eaten here before?" If so, "What would you recommend?"
- Do not change your order once it is made, and never send the food back.
- Be polite to your waiters, even when they spill soup in your lap.
- Do not order expensive food. Naturally, in our heart of hearts, we all like to eat well, especially on someone else's tab. But don't be tempted. When you come right down to it, you are there to talk and be seen at your best, not to eat.
- Eat what you know. Stay away from awkward, messy, or exotic foods. Ignore finger foods, such as lobster or spare ribs. In fact, you should avoid eating with your fingers altogether, unless you are in a sandwich shop, in which case you should make a point of avoiding the leaky, over-stuffed menu items.
- Do not order salad. The dressing can often get messy. If salad comes with the meal, request that the dressing be on the side. Then, before pouring it on, cut up the lettuce for ease when eating.
- Do not order anything with bones. Stick with filets; there are few simple, gracious ways to deal with any type of bone.

- **Checks and Goodbyes:** I know of an interviewer whose favorite test of composure is to have the waiter, by arrangement, put the bill on the candidate's side of the table. She then chats on, waiting for something to happen. If you ever find yourself in a similar position, never pick up the check, however long it is left by your plate. When ready, your host will pick it up, because that's the simple protocol of the occasion. By the same token, you should never offer to share payment or leave the tip.

When parting company, always thank the host for his or her hospitality and the wonderful meal. Of course you should be sure to leave on a positive note by asking realistically what you have to do to get the job!

(Source: *Knock 'Em Dead With Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions*, by Martin John Yates)

## What About...?

### *Handling those awkward moments...*

You bite into an olive and discover a pit. Your last bite of fish had a bone in it. You didn't realize just how fatty the meat was. Now, you're not sure you can swallow what's in your mouth.

No noise and no faces allowed – but you don't have to swallow the inedible. If you need to remove something from your mouth, shift into reverse. Carefully, and with your hand close to your mouth, drop the olive pit into the palm of your hand and put the pit on your plate. Remove the fish bone using two fingers like a pair of tweezers. Set the bone on the edge of your plate. If you think the sight of your chewed meat is going to make your fellow diners gag, bring your napkin to your lips and remove the meat.

### **A thank you goes a long way**

Write a thank you note to your host, emphasizing your appreciation for the opportunity to talk about the job (or learn about the organization or meet prospective colleagues) over a meal.

### **Fingers or Fork?**

What's the right way to eat French fries? Pizza? Here's a primer on when to use fingers, when to use a fork.

#### **Finger Foods**

Berries, if served with the stem  
Caviar on toast  
Cheese on crackers  
Corn on the cob  
Crisp bacon  
French fries (informal situations only)  
Hamburgers  
Hors d'oeuvres  
Hot dogs  
Olives  
Onion rings  
Pizza Tacos

#### **Spoon Foods**

Berries with sauces  
Ice cream  
Melon  
Peas  
Soup

#### **Fork Foods**

Berries without stems  
Cake  
Clams  
Fish  
French fries (formal situations)  
Fruit  
Ice cream served on cake or pie  
Large chicken pieces  
Oysters  
Pastry  
Pizza

Shish kabob  
Shrimp  
Sushi (or use chopsticks, if provided)  
Steak

#### **Foods to Avoid**

Unfamiliar foods  
Spaghetti  
French onion soup  
Buffalo wings  
Ribs  
Bony fish  
Shellfish  
Big sandwiches  
Cheesy food  
Foods requiring special utensils