

Interview Etiquette

Manners, Meals and Interviews

By Alison Doyle, About.com Guide

Interviews are often stressful - even for job seekers who have interviewed many times. Interviewing can be even more stressful when you are expected to eat and talk at the same time. One of the reasons employers take job candidates out to lunch or dinner is to evaluate their social skills and to see if they can handle themselves gracefully under pressure.

Dining with a prospective employee allows employers to review your communication and interpersonal skills, as well as your table manners, in a more relaxed (for them) environment. Table manners do matter. Good manners may give you the edge over another candidate, so, take some time to brush up your dining etiquette skills.

Interview Dining Tips:

- Are you really nervous? Check out the restaurant ahead of time. That way you'll know exactly what's on the menu, what you might want to order and where the rest rooms are located.
- Be polite. Remember to say "please" and "thank you" to your server as well as to your host.
- Is the table full of utensils? My British grandmother taught me an easy way to remember what to use when. Start at the outside and work your way in. Your salad fork will be on the far left, your entree fork will be next to it. Your dessert spoon and fork will be above your plate.
- Liquids are on the right, solids on the left. For example, your water glass will be on the right and your bread plate will be on the left.
- Put your napkin on your lap once everyone is seated.
- Remember what your mother spent years telling you - keep your elbows off the table, sit up straight, and don't talk with your mouth full!

During the Meal:

- Don't order messy food - pasta with lots of sauce, chicken with bones, ribs, big sandwiches, and whole lobsters are all dangerous.
- Don't order the most expensive entree on the menu.
- Do order food that is easy to cut into bite-size pieces.
- The polite way to eat soup is to spoon it away from you. There's less chance of spilling in your lap that way too!
- Break your dinner roll into small pieces and eat it a piece at a time.
- If you need to leave the table, put your napkin on the seat or the arm of your chair.
- When you've finished eating, move your knife and fork to the "four o'clock" position so the server knows you're done.
- Remember to try and relax, listen, and participate in the conversation.

To Drink or Not to Drink:

- It's wise not to drink alcohol during an interview. Interviewing is tough enough without adding alcohol to the mix.

After the Meal:

- Put your napkin on the table next to your plate.
- Let the prospective employer pick up the tab. The person who invited you will expect to pay both the bill and the tip.
- Remember to say "thank you." Consider also following-up with a **thank you note** which reiterates your interest in the job.