

# CAREER ETIQUETTE IN A BUSINESS/INTERVIEW MEAL

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY MICHELIN® CAREER CENTER

The fundamental premise of etiquette is to make people feel comfortable. Most "rules" of etiquette are based on common sense, so when in doubt, use common sense.

## *General Guidelines*

- Let your host/interviewer know about any special eating requirements you have when the invitation is extended. This will let him or her adjust plans accordingly.
- Be on time if you are meeting the host/interviewer at the restaurant. If you arrive before the host/interviewer, decide if you would be more comfortable waiting in the lobby area or at the table. If you wait in the lobby and sit while you are waiting, stand as soon as you see the host/interviewer enter the restaurant and greet him or her just as you would at the beginning of an interview. If you wait at the table, it is best not to order anything until the host/interviewer arrives. The table should appear unused, with the exception of sipping your water, until the host/interviewer arrives.
- If the host/interviewer is fifteen minutes or more late, call their office. Re-schedule the meeting if that is the preference of the host/interviewer.
- Let the host/interviewer order first. Order a dish that is no more expensive and should take no longer to prepare.
- Let the host/interviewer request service, initiate the order, and decide when to leave.
- When the host/interviewer begins to use his or her napkin, do the same. This signals the beginning of the meal. Put the napkin in your lap within the first ten seconds after sitting down at the table, and do not remove it until you are ready to leave. If you must leave your place during the meal, place your napkin on your chair. The end of the meal is signaled by the host/interviewer placing his or her napkin on the table.
- Do not bring up business until the host/interviewer does. If the host/interviewer does not discuss any business, you may express your interest in the organization toward the end of the meal.
- Do not order alcohol or smoke.
- Avoid soup, spaghetti, ribs, and other messy dishes.
- Do not take medication at the table.
- Do not apply makeup at the table.
- To signal to the server that you are finished, lay your fork and knife diagonally across your plate, with the top of the utensils on the top left side, and the bottom on the bottom right side. The blade of your knife should face inward.
- Do not complain about anything; the food, service, size of portions, etc.
- Do not reach for the check. The host/interviewer will take care of it.
- Thank the host/interviewer at the end of the meal.

## *Handling "sticky" situations*

### *Spills*

If you spill food or drink on your clothes, excuse yourself to the restroom to clean it, or wet a small corner of your napkin in your water glass to remove the spill. If you spill on the tablecloth, use your napkin to wipe up the spill, and quietly alert the server to take appropriate action.

### *Removing unwanted food*

If you put something in your mouth that needs to be removed immediately, do so as inconspicuously as possible. Different schools of etiquette do not agree about the best method of removing unwanted food from one's mouth. Some rules of etiquette recommend removing the unwanted food in the same manner which it was placed in your mouth. For example, if you used your fork to place a piece of meat in your mouth, use your fork to remove it. Other rules of etiquette recommend using your napkin to remove the unwanted food from your mouth. An overall guideline: Do whatever makes you feel most comfortable and will draw the least amount of attention to you. Be very discreet.

### *Silverware*

If you discover a soiled piece of silverware, quietly ask the server for a new piece.  
If you drop a piece of silverware on the floor, do not pick it up. Notify the server and ask for a new piece.

### *Sneezing*

If you feel a sneeze coming on, turn your head away from the table and cover your mouth and nose. If you must blow your nose, excuse yourself from the table to do so.

### *Food stuck in your teeth*

If you have a piece of food stuck in your teeth and can discreetly dislodge it with your tongue, do so at the table. However, if it is a stubborn piece of food, excuse yourself to the restroom and use the mirror to make sure that you have removed all of the food. Never use a toothpick at the table to dislodge a piece of food that is stuck. If someone with whom you are dining has a piece of food stuck in his or her teeth, quietly mention it, if the group is small. You will spare him or her embarrassment later.

### *General guidelines*

If another "sticky" situation arises, use your common sense to handle it. Do what is most discreet to address the problem and briefly apologize if other people notice. Then move on to a new topic of conversation or resume the previous conversation.

**Sources:** *Career Etiquette from Job Search Through Career Advancement, Don't Slurp Your Soup; A Basic Guide to Business Etiquette, Emily Post*