

GYM ETIQUETTE: 13 GROUP EXERCISE CLASS TIPS

It's that time of year where numerous and varied Top 10 Do's and Don'ts lists hit a selection of social and media sites. "What was the best and worst of our previous year?" "Read our Top 10 predictions for the New Year!" And what seems to be a popular theme: "The Top 10 Worst Offenders of (*fill in the blank*)."

Well, I'm jumping on the band-wagon with my own baker's dozen Top 13 list of Group Exercise Class Etiquette Guidelines. Love 'em or leave 'em, here I go.

by Diane McCabe Smith



1. A LITTLE CONSIDERATION PLEASE!

As is normal at the turn of any New Year, with a slew of new resolutions being set in intended stone, you'll notice a marked increase in the number of class participants in the studio. So upon entering the studio after most other people have taken their spots and floor space is limited, carefully and politely weave your way to a logical space. The normal ebb and flow of a studio filled with bodies should mean that you will be afforded space by your fellow gym rats. But to be on the safe side, always make sure you aren't blocking someone's view of the instructor from where you've plonked yourself. At the least, ask if the person behind you can see OK. In many cases, your fellow gym-goer will appreciate the thought and pass a nod of approval over your spot choices.

2. "DON'T STAND, DON'T STAND SO, DON'T STAND SO CLOSE TO ME!"

Don't stand right on top of the person next to you in the studio. Just like in everyday life, a certain respect for personal space should be observed. Learn spatial awareness, even if you've never taken a dance class or exercise class. There's nothing worse than having someone cramp your space – especially when arms are a-flapping and legs a-kicking. Even if a class is full to capacity, there's seems to be a natural way keep space.

3. "IT'S MY DANCE CLASS AND I'LL DANCE HOW I WANT TO ..."

Be respectful to the instructor and let the instructor lead the class. If you can't follow along, it's strongly encouraged that you nevertheless keep moving, but don't just outright do a completely different routine from the instructor's!! And this tip is directed more towards the veteran gym member than the newbie. Yes, slight

variations to the moves and steps are fine, but a group lead exercise class really isn't the time to show off your best disco moves or to make sure that everyone is aware of your many years as a trained dancer. Not only are such antics disrespectful to the instructor, they are unnerving and off-putting to the rest of the class. In many cases most people are just trying to concentrate on following the instructor with glued anticipation of his or her next set of moves.

4. THE (CLUELESS) LONE RANGER

Likewise don't enter an ongoing class only to start performing your own personalized program; now's not the time to march to a different drummer. Skip roping while a Step class is underway, shadow boxing while the Yoga class is executing a downward dog, and so on, is just wrong. Get out of the studio and find some other, more suitable, area of the gym to complete your own personal program. The group studio should be off-limits to you during the class.

5. CAN'T IT WAIT?

Being in the center of the studio with your bestie surrounded by eager exercisers is not the optimum or appropriate time to catch up on your gossip. Some people actually want to use their exercise time, well, exercising. Hold that chat until you've worked up a good sweat and the class is finished.

6. WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

OK, so you and your gym-pact pal have decided to try a few new classes that your new gym has to offer. Let's say Zumba, you know, that wiggly bum-dance class. Well don't take the mickey during the class just because you yourself are feeling uncomfortable and self-conscious, and certainly don't start mocking the people in the class with you.

7. HOLD YOUR HORSES

Before entering your class, allow the current class to finish completely. Better still, allow the current class clients to exit before you and your next group class flood in blocking the doorway and causing a sweaty, awkward bottleneck. Yes, we know the pump class has a lot of equipment to place out, but not letting the last dripping person out of the way just causes unnecessary angst, particularly if there's just one entrance available.

8. "TO DISRUPT OR NOT TO DISRUPT"

For certain types of classes it's perfectly OK to walk in slightly late. We are all busy and punctuality can sometimes slip. For danced-based aerobic exercise, such as Zumba and Cardio Fusion classes, lateness is not such a big problem (though the general standard rule is not to more than 15 minutes late), because you can either wait until the next song begins to then find your spot and join in, or jump straight in without missing a beat. The same can apply with cardio combat classes. If you're familiar with the instructor and style then your late entry should go unnoticed. But if you're brand new to the gym, or new to the class and its type of exercise, then it's highly recommended you arrive on time. Likewise, for specialized exercise classes such as Yoga, Pilates, Instructional Boxing, TRX classes and other types of classes needing equipment set up, then the rule is: "Be on time as best as possible." Clunking around to set up your gear while others are exercising on their equipment is highly disruptive, not to mention rude.



9. I OWN THIS TERRITORY- NOT!

It's normal human nature to have a fond spot in the studio, but don't be so obsessively attached to your spot that you become visibly annoyed when

some one else has beaten to you to it. Be flexible and find a new spot graciously. New members have no clue you “own” that spot (and, of course, you don’t!). Class should be an encouraging environment, not a cold one. Don’t freeze out newbies just because you’ve been ousted a few inches from your normal exercise spot.

10. INEPT INSTRUCTORS – “YOU SUCK!”

Yes many of us have experienced that earth-shattering moment when we realize that the instructor is absolutely horrid. But, if you have this moment after the class is underway, try to resist the temptation to bolt for the exit. What’s the point in disrupting the class and humiliating the instructor? Once the class is over, you can go to the front desk and voice your feelings with management. And if you find your time is far too precious to care about making a run for it - do so politely. Yelling, “This sucks” as you barge out is never good form.

11. “YOU’RE BOTHERING ME”

Bottom line is we have all chosen to use our exercise time in what may see the most efficient time. Yes people arrive late, leave early - any number of things can be driving your time at the gym. The point is to try and make these entries and exits as seamless as possible. And if you are the observer of this behavior and you are completely and utterly disgusted and bothered by it, don’t be. There will always come a time when you too will do something wrong in the eyes of someone else.

12. NEWBIE CAN’T EXERCISE; JUST BE NICE

Be encouraging to new members, particularly those who perhaps can’t perform as well, or clearly seem out of their element. Smile and encourage them to come back again and explain it gets easier (which it does).

13. CHECK YOUR ATTITUDE AT THE DOOR

Lastly, never look down at new members in any part of the gym. Yes, it’s easy to mock the surge of new members that flood in at this time of the year. After all, statistics tell us that there’s a 30-50%

increase in memberships in the month of January as people are resolute into starting their fitness regime (“for real” this time). But the drop-out rate is equally astounding shortly afterwards. There are so many reasons for this drop off, but certainly the lack of motivation is high on the list. A gym can be a hard environment to get used to, and sneering regulars are hardly the best encouragement or invitation to those who are trying to improve their health to stick with it. Don’t be so snotty and hard on newbies, because it doesn’t take much to put people off returning to the gym and achieving their intended fitness goals.

--DMS (Jan/14)

Editor@ModaFitMag.com

Diane McCabe Smith is a long time gym-goer, and while she doesn't claim to be perfect, she does believe in the need for encouraging others. "I think I'm considerate to others in the gym, but if I lapse, then I'm sorry -- it's certainly not from want of trying. My list of peeves is just a compilation of my near 20 years of being in various gym environments. I practice most of the positive tips listed and have experienced first-hand some of the negative ones. Even to this day, I can just as easily be turned off a gym and certain of its members over uncalled-for behavior. The gym is a hard environment to get used to and it is hardly unexpected why so many people drop off the radar. All I can offer to a new gym member or someone making the huge venture of starting a fitness regime for the first time is this: Keep at it and try to make that gym your own. It doesn't belong to the regulars or the veterans. And I can assure you, that it gets easier."



Photography by Gordon J. Smith
Lead Image: Zumba by Synergy Dance Fitness
Kickboxer Models: Olga Svyrdova & Jupinko
Obstacle Course Warmup: Diane McCabe Smith
(All rights reserved)