



The Etiquette of Fine Dining Eleven Rules

BY Maria Yagoda , Food & Wine (updated on June 17, 2022)

While restaurant dining etiquette standards have loosened in recent decades, formal dining conduct is still taught at finishing schools and etiquette classes, and they're honored at many fine-dining establishments in both Europe and America.

If you've ever been nervous about where to put your napkin on your lap, or how to excuse yourself to use the restroom (first rule of the restroom: never talk about the restroom), you may find this article useful. We attended an abbreviated etiquette course thrown by Uber Eats with expert Myka Meier, founder of Beaumont Etiquette and The Plaza Hotel Finishing Program, and we were scandalized by what we learned. Meier, who trained in London under a former member of The Royal Household of the Queen and served as a consultant for *Downtown Abbey*, taught us a few rules of formal dining that you can follow even if you're hosting in your own home...

Make RESERVATIONS at **901.687.3310** or **opentable.com**. You can also email us at **pepper@lebistropepper.com**. Fine Dining is available by Saturday reservation only. **Must book 1 week in advance. Seating begins at 7 p.m.** The 7-course dining price is **250.00 per person** which includes wine, tax, and gratuity. **Payment is made at the time of reservation.**

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"After a good dinner one can forgive anybody, even one's own relatives."
Lady Caroline, Oscar Wilde's A Woman of No Importance, act 2 (1893)

11 Fine-Dining Etiquette Rules You've Probably Broken

1. Never lift your menu off the table.

"In formal dining, the menu should always be touching the table in one place," said Meier. So if you're looking at the menu, make sure to have the bottom, or at least one part of it, still touching the table, even if your impulse is to bring it closer to your face.

2. Once you sip from a glass, you must sip from the exact same place on that glass for the rest of the evening.

"When you drink, you want to drink from the same place on the glass every time to avoid that lip ring, whether it's from natural oils or chapsticks or lipstick," said Meier. "Then you put the glass back in the same place where you picked it up."

3. Don't clink. Not even for the 'gram.

Clinking for a cheers could damage the glass, especially if you're using very fine glassware. Plus, "in very formal dining, the less noise we make, the better."

4. Never ask for an oyster fork.

If there's no oyster fork on the table, don't ask for one; the lack of oyster fork means that the oyster is already loosened and ready to go. (If, for some reason, there is still a bit of oyster attached to the shell, you can use a knife to loosen it.) Once you've finished the oyster, turn the shell over on the plate to signal you are done.

5. Keep the rim of your plates as clean as possible.

This is out of respect for the service staff who has to clear the plates and will be grabbing the edge of the plate.

6. Place "discards" on the upper left part of your plate.

"The upper left part of your plate is for discards," said Meier. "Let's say you had a lemon rind you didn't want to eat; that would go on the upper left hand part of your plate. Or a fish bone. The bottom right is for sauces and butter."

7. Keep your bread on the plate at all times unless you are delivering it to your mouth.

That means you should butter the bread while it is still on the plate, but do not butter the whole slice at once. Break off the piece you plan to eat, butter that piece, and *then* lift the piece to put in your mouth. This applies to bagels, muffins, biscuits, and other bread-like products, Meier said.

8. Fold your napkin with the crease toward you before putting it in your lap.

Napkins are to be folded in half with the crease facing toward you. "We don't ever wipe stains, we dab stains," she said. "And then we close the napkin and so all the stains stay closed on the *inside* of the napkin, so you'll never again have a messy presentation for your guest."

9. Never say you are going to the restroom.

If you have to leave to use the restroom, excuse yourself. But do not say why!

10. Don't say "bon appetit."

The expression isn't proper here or in France. As etiquette coach Marie de Tilly told the *New York Times* in 2007, "When people use it, it sounds just like an invitation for a good digestion and suggests that you are so hungry that you may jump on any food that would cross your mouth." Meier advises saying, "Please enjoy."

11. Leave one bite left on your plate.

This shows that you enjoyed the meal, but you weren't so famished you cleaned the whole plate — which could indicate that you are still hungry, or it wasn't enough food.