Meals are a common part of both the job search process and working with clients in the business world. Below is a list of tips to keep in mind when dining for business.

**Basic Table Manners**

- If you are someone’s guest, wait to sit until you receive a signal.
- If you are a host, point out chairs for your guests.
- Wait for your host to begin to eat. If you are at a table of 8 to 10 being served by waiters, wait to eat until all at the table have been served.
- Offer to the person on your left and pass everything to the right.
- Pass the salt and pepper together. Also, do not season your food before you have tasted it.
- Used silverware should never touch the table; rather, they should rest on your plate.
- Place your napkin on your chair if you leave the table during a meal. Place your dirty napkin to the left of your plate only when everyone has finished and you are ready to leave the table.
- Rise if you are a man and a woman next to you leaves or returns to the table.
- It is inappropriate to ask for a doggy bag when you are a guest. Save the doggy bag for informal dining situations.
- It is best to order food that can be eaten with a knife and fork. Finger foods can be messy and are best left for informal dining.
- Do not order alcoholic beverages. Drinking too much when dining out is one of the most disliked behaviors.
- Do not smoke while dining out.
- Sit up straight at the table.
- When you are not eating, keep your hands on your lap or resting on the table (with wrists on the edge of the table). Elbows on the table are acceptable only between courses, not while you are eating.
- Never chew with your mouth open or make loud noises when you eat. Although it is possible to talk with a small piece of food in your mouth, do not talk with your mouth full.
- Do not slurp soup from a spoon. Spoon the soup away from you when you take it out of the bowl and sip it from the side of the spoon. If your soup is too hot to eat, let it sit until it cools; do not blow on it.
- You should not leave the table during the meal except in an emergency. If you must go to the bathroom or if you suddenly become sick, simply excuse yourself. Later you can apologize to your host by saying that you did not feel well.
- If a piece of your silverware falls onto the floor, pick it up if you can reach it and let the server know you need a clean one. If you cannot reach it, tell the server you dropped a piece of your silverware and ask for a clean one.
- If you or someone you are dining with is left-handed, it is best for the left-handed person to sit at the left end of the table or at the head of the table. This arrangement helps ensure that everyone has adequate elbowroom to eat comfortably. However, if the person you are eating with is not familiar with the fact that you are left-handed, do not mention it.
- Never spit a piece of bad food or tough gristle into your napkin. Remove the food from your mouth using the same utensil it went in with. Place the piece of food on the edge of your plate. If possible, cover it with some other food from your plate.
- Have some general conversation topics ready at all times.
Say “no thank you” if you don’t like or want something.

Eat at a moderate speed and don’t make others wait for you to finish. Remember—you’re first priority is the business, not the food. You can always eat more later if needed.

Don’t make a big fuss if you spill or break something.

**How to eat various foods**

- Asparagus is cut into portions and eaten with a fork. In Europe it is eaten with the fingers.
- Bones from small birds such as quail, squab (and frog legs) may be held in one hand and brought to the mouth to be eaten, without gnawing.
- Bread. Break off and butter rolls one bite at a time. Leave crumbs untouched on the table.
- Butter. When butter is passed, take your portion onto the butter plate with the butter knife.
- Berries are eaten with a spoon.
- Grapes are eaten by cutting a small portion away from the large bunch with a knife or scissors, and then eaten one at a time.
- Lobsters are difficult to eat. The claws are cracked with a nutcracker. The meat is extracted with a seafood fork, dipped in butter or sauce, and eaten. Large pieces are first cut with a fork. The small claws are pulled off and cleaned, drawing as through a straw. Stuffed lobster is eaten with a knife and fork. Hard-shelled crabs are eaten the same way.
- Meat. Cut one piece at a time.
- Pate de Foie Gras. Put on toast or crackers with a knife and eat with the fingers.
- Potatoes. Baked are eaten from the skin with a fork. The skin may be eaten with a knife and fork. Butter is added by taking from your butter plate with the dinner fork. Do not mash any kind of potato on your plate. Chips are eaten with fingers. Shoestring potatoes are eaten with the fingers. French fries are halved and eaten with a fork.
- Salad. Lean forward to meet your fork when eating salad. (Bring food up to your mouth in all other situations).
- Sandwiches. Tea types and canapés are eaten with the fingers. Club sandwiches may be eaten with a knife and fork or cut into fourths and eaten with the fingers. Open-faced sandwiches are eaten with a knife and fork.
- Sauces may be poured over meat or beside meat with a forkful of food at a time dipped into a sauce.
- Shrimp Cocktail is eaten with a seafood fork. Eat large shrimp in two bites or, if possible, place on serving plate and cut with fork.
- Tortillas. Place flat on hand or plate. Fill, roll up. Eat from the end.
- Water. Blot mouth before taking a drink. Do not drink water while food is in the mouth, or roll water around mouth, or swallow loudly. If you have taken too hot a mouthful of food, sip a bit of water. Do not forcefully drain an entire glassful. Hold a tumbler type glass near the bottom, a small stem glass by the stem and large goblets at the bottom of the bowl.

**Sources:**

Ball State University. “Dining Etiquette”. Career Center: 1999

*The Family Book of Good Manners* by Hermine Hartley


*Complete Book of Etiquette* by Amy Vanderbilt