Table Manners: Hints and Reminders Job Aid

Use this job aid to help you remember your place setting alignment when dining during a job interview. Review the standard dining etiquette rules for using utensils, sharing foods, engaging in professional conversation.

Table Place Setting Alignment:

Here are some standard bits of etiquette that will help you identify the proper position of the items in a place setting as they appear on the table. The following image illustrates an informal place setting. It’s important to note that you will use your silverware working each piece from the outside in toward your plate.

Informal Table Setting

When to begin eating:
So, let’s say the wait staff begins to serve the food. Remember to either wait until everyone is served to start eating, or begin when the host asks you to.

Posture and Pace:
Always sit up straight and bring food to your mouth, rather than “craning” your head/mouth down to the food. Look around the table and pace yourself with that of other diners to ensure that no one else feels hurried.

Remember “BMW” (like the car!):
B = Bread. Your bread is always on the left side of your place setting.
M = Meal. Your main entre (meal) is in the center of your place setting.
W = Water. Your water/drink is always on the right side of your place setting.
Food Sharing Etiquette

In some instances, you may be sharing foods/dips, so you’ll to be aware of these standard dining protocols as well:

- **Buttering Bread:** Always put butter on your bread plate rather than directly on your roll. Break, don’t cut the bread, and then butter one bite-sized piece at a time. Never butter a whole slice of bread at once, or slice a roll in half and butter it.

- **Sharing Sauces/Dips:** When sharing a sauce with others, spoon some of it on to your place; don’t dip your food into it. If you are unsure about how to eat specific type of foods, consult a dining etiquette guide website such as What's Cooking America.

Utensils Etiquette:

As you learned earlier, always use your silverware working from the outside in, toward the plate.

Start by cutting your food:
Typically, you’ll begin eating by first cutting your food. Do so, by placing the fork in your left hand and the knife in your right hand. Both utensils are controlled by the thumb and index finger. Use the fork to hold the food while cutting a bite-size piece with the knife. It is never appropriate to cut more than one bite-size piece at a time, as shown here.

Next, pick up your food:
Lay the knife on the edge of the plate with blades facing in, as shown in this image. Before you begin eating your food, switch the fork to your right hand, and, finally, insert the piece into your mouth.

**Signaling the wait staff that you are resting:**
Once you pick up a piece of silverware, it should never touch the table again. When resting while eating, your knife stays at the one o’clock position with blade turned inward, and your fork stays at the four o’clock position with tines up.

**Signaling the wait staff that you have finished:**
When you have finished eating, the utensils are placed together on the plate with the fork tines up and the knife turned inward in the lower, right-hand portion of the plate between the four and six o’clock positions. This signals the wait staff that they can remove your plate and utensils.
Conversation Etiquette:

Here are some general conversational tips that will make your dinner and interview go more smoothly.

- Maintain good eye contact throughout the meal and avoid dominating the conversation. Strive to come across as relaxed, friendly and interested in the conversation; stay positive!

- Never speak with food in your mouth. Take small bites, finish chewing, smile, and then carry on conversation.

- Stay away from too much personal information as well as controversial topics.

- Use this opportunity to gather more information about the job position, as well as to demonstrate that you researched the company. Possible questions to ask:

  - “What are you looking for in an applicant?”
  - “What attracted you to this company?”
  - “I know that showing initiative is important to this company. Can you give me an example of this?”