

## American Etiquette



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**What do you think of these pictures? How do the pictures represent American Etiquette?**



**There are several things you need to pay into account when talking about etiquette. The things refer to 'Things Not to forget' and 'Things to avoid'.**

**These articles will guide you to those important ideas about American Etiquette.**

**Tippling:** Restaurant and bar menus indicate prices without sales taxes (which varies by city/county) and tips (15 to 20%), so everything you will order on the menu will end up costing about 21% to 26% more. The sales tax will always be included on the 'check' (bill); the tip is rarely included unless you are dining with a group of 6 or more people -- in this case, many establishments automatically add a tip or 'service charge' or 'gratuity' of between 15% and 20%. Such practices are ordinarily mentioned on the menu. 'Suggested tips' might be mentioned on the bill to aid you in calculating the amount you want to tip. If the tip is not included on the menu, don't forget to add it. Waiters' and waitresses' salaries are small so they depend on tips. If you possess an iPhone or Blackberry, there are applications that calculate tips (many smartphones also include a calculator, which comes in handy.) Since sales tax is often around 9%, an easy way to calculate a tip is to look for the sales tax amount on the check and double it; if it's 9% and you double it, you'll get a figure that is 18% of the 'food/drink' amount.

Be aware that there are different type of restaurants that have different 'tipping protocols'. In general, one does not tip at a 'fast food restaurant'. These

restaurants (like McDonald's) have a counter where you order your food and where you pick it up. As there is no server, no tip is required. Sometimes, there's a jar on the counter with a sign with the word 'tips' on it which is a request for tips which will be split amongst all of the clerks at the end of the shift. If you have some spare coins in your pocket or from your change that you receive from your food purchase, you may toss these in the can but it's not necessarily expected.

In some less expensive 'sit down' (not 'fast food') restaurants where there is an actual server, you might be expected to pay the cashier near the door of the establishment as you are leaving. In such a case, you'll receive a check from the server but you will take the check to the cashier and you'll pay the cashier. ORDINARILY, the server will signal to you where you are to pay your bill in one of a few ways:

1. He/she will tell you: 'Please pay me' or 'Please pay the cashier'. If he/she doesn't, you can ask "Do I pay you?" It will indicate on the check who to pay
2. If the check is delivered on a little tray, IN MOST CASES, that means that the server will take the payment for you, bring to the cashier for payment and return your change. If the check is delivered without a tray, it usually

means that you're expected to pay the cashier. If in doubt, ask.

In the case where you pay the cashier, it is perfectly acceptable to ask for change for the tip if the regular change from your purchase won't be sufficient. Say something like: "May I have some change for the tip, please?" or "May I have some singles (\$1 bills)?"

**Tippling** is also common in the service and hospitality industry, from valet to housekeepers at your hotel. \$2-\$3 tips for valet each time you retrieve your car (none when you give it to the valet) are common. \$2 per day for the housekeeper at your hotel, left in the room at the end of your stay is common. A note that says "Thank you" along with the money makes it understood to be a tip rather than money left behind by mistake.

**Alcohol Laws.** American alcohol laws are a patchwork of rules that vary by state, county, and towns. In some places (primarily in the South), entire counties or towns may prohibit alcohol. In all states, however, the drinking age is set at 21 for both sexes and is fairly well enforced with ID checks by the alcohol seller. Furthermore, it is illegal in most states to provide a minor with alcohol even in the company of his parents. Drinking in public is usually a civil offense in most communities, though many towns and beaches permit alcohol consumption in public (and it is often relaxed a little during public holidays, like the 4th of July: no policeman is going to hunt you down for brandishing a bottle of beer in time to the marching band's music at an Independence Day Jamboree or sitting on the beach in August enjoying a glass of wine at a

picnic.) Driving under the influence is very much illegal and could net you a large fine and possibly jail time.

**Illicit drugs** Drugs have similar risks to alcohol but can have significantly more severe consequences: the more addictive or hallucinogenic, generally, the worse the consequences shall be. American prisons have a disproportionate amount of men incarcerated for involvement in the sale and distribution of drugs: purchasing such items aggravates the problem and encourages more violent crimes like murder. (Recently, the Obama Administration has increased attention to the trouble it causes over the border in Mexico: drug cartels often are intertwined with gang activities in the larger cities of both the U.S. and Mexico and many have already died violent deaths over smuggled drugs like cocaine, marijuana, and heroin.) In the long run, it really isn't worth it if it can cost another man his freedom or his life.

**Pets:** Bringing a dog or cat with you to America is permitted, provided they go through quarantine. The general rules for having a dog with you in America are that it should be recently vaccinated against rabies prior to arrival and that it can behave itself in public; vaccination for canine distemper is also a plus for dogs. Generally, dogs must be kept on a lead in public and cleaned up after in major cities. They should also have a tag on their collar with your name, full home address, and phone number on

them: it is a quick way to identify them if they are lost. They are generally not permitted in stores or on public transportation unless they are service animals (such as guide dogs or such), but smaller ones are allowed if they are kept in a pet carrier. Dogs are allowed in nearly all parks (including national parks) and many city parks in fact have special areas for them to run and play with other dogs in. Not all hotels permit pets in them, so ask your travel agent or a hotel chain about which hotels allow pets in them. There may be additional charges or deposits for having pets in your room. Additionally, pets are not to be left alone in the room and if they cause disturbances you and your pet may be asked to leave the hotel. Any repairs needed due to damages done by the pet will be charged to your credit card.

#### **Things To Avoid (general):**

Controversial topics may include **politics, religion, homosexuality, racism, abortion, criticism of the government, and criticism of an individual's patriotism.** As in any country, locals generally do not take too kindly to constant criticisms of their government by foreigners. Make sure you know the political leanings and temperaments of those around you before broaching such topics.

**Discussions of wealth or money.** Americans generally do not discuss how much money they make or how much they paid for certain high-end items (such as houses,

cars, boats, TV systems, etc.) cost. It is considered very rude to ask and is even more uncomfortable to discuss.

**Smoking.** It is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to smoke. Buying cigarettes for a minor can range anywhere from a \$500.00 fine to Jail Time. Smoking restrictions vary greatly from place to place, from having no restrictions at all to complete city-wide bans. Smoking is prohibited on airplanes and in any public restaurant entirely-it is seen as a fire risk (this includes smoking in the toilet of the plane: you may force the plane to land if you are caught; Once on the ground, laws may be enacted by individual states, counties, and cities. Some laws even limit outdoor smoking by prohibiting smoking within a certain distance from a building's entrance. Observe to see if others around you are smoking, or ask if anyone minds before doing so. Fines for smoking in a prohibited place range in amount from \$50 on up to \$1,000, plus offenders may be thrown out of an establishment for violating house rules, sometimes barred forever. Americans rarely walk around when smoking. They find a place that allows smoking (away from restricted areas) and usually stay in one place until done with their cigarette. It is considered rude to walk in crowds with a lit cigarette

as this could end with someone being burned. Children especially in America are not on the lookout for such dangers and since they are right at the height of the burning embers are at increased risk.

Always safely dispose of your cigarette, don't throw it out of the car window or on the ground.

Littering can get you a ticket or jail time if you start a fire.

**Loud cell phone usage.** It is considered rude to speak loudly on cell phones in enclosed, public places such as trains, restaurants, museums. (Obviously, if you are in a noisy bar, ball game, etc. where people aren't trying to listen or concentrate, it doesn't matter.) But if you are on a train, elevator, in a rest room, or anywhere where people are trying to concentrate, work, or listen, please don't speak loudly on your cell--any more loudly than you would if the person were sitting next to you. As for the opera, theatre, cinema, places of worship, lectures/classes, please turn your cell to "vibrate." If you absolutely must receive messages when in any of these locations please allow your cell phone to be set to vibrate and also ask any who would contact you to leave a text message instead. In some live performances even vibrate will be too much as it interferes with the sound systems. Also don't text during performances or movies, the light

of the phone is distracting to others.

**Hugging, kissing or touching.**

Most Americans prefer a firm handshake as a first greeting. Hugging is reserved for close family members and friends. Kissing people in greeting is a more intimate affair: it's usually done only in the context of relatives, lovers, and friends; it is sometimes controversial when performed between members of the same gender. Also, refrain from touching people during conversation unless you know them well, as it generally makes them uncomfortable. When it is a kiss, friends and family typically get kissed on one cheek and lovers on the mouth. (Once an American does embrace or kiss you, however, it is a guaranteed sign you have made a friend for life or sometimes something more. Spontaneous bear hugs are not uncommon if an American grows fond of you!)

**Personal space.** Americans usually talk to each other from a distance of about two feet (.6 meters); any closer is viewed as uncomfortable. (Closer contact is reserved for closer acquaintances--the barrier shall break down as they get to know you.)

**First names.** In general, most Americans, even in a business setting, will prefer to be called by their first name. However, it is a

good rule of thumb to address them by their title (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., or Professor, in general) and last name (e.g., Mr. Anderson) until you are specifically told otherwise. Americans may also address you by your first name immediately after being introduced to you; this is not considered rude at all and reflects the more casual style of Americans.

**Miss, Ms. or Mrs.** There seems to be some controversy, perhaps regional, over the usage of Miss (pronounced "miss"), **Ms.** (pronounced "miz") or **Mrs.** (pronounced "miss-iz"). Generally speaking, it is polite to call a lady Ms. at first, unless you are prompted otherwise. An American woman will let you know what she wants to be called, or if she wants to let you know she is married.

**"Sir" and "Madam."** Many countries outside the USA use the term "Sir" or "Madam" when greeting someone new, and it is a respectful introduction before the person's details are known. Within most of the U.S. these terms are used to address people to whom great respect and deference should be shown ("Madam Secretary [of State]"), one's senior officer in the military, or one's higher level boss at work ("Yes, Sir!"), or "older" people in the U.S. One may also be called "Sir" or "Madam" in very expensive restaurants or hotels, or

in some less urban parts of the country. Colloquially, the altered term "ma'am" is considered polite for a woman older than oneself and a new acquaintance.

**No means NO in big block letters, not ask again.** American women will occasionally wear short skirts, sleeveless shirts, makeup, perfume, might even show some cleavage: she's just trying to look feminine, and often she will do so whether on the beach or in the boardroom. If she smiles at you while dressed in this way, **IT DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN SHE WANTS SEXUAL ATTENTION AND IT REALLY, REALLY DOESN'T MEAN SHE WANTS TO BE TOUCHED.** A woman's place, politically and practically, is the equal of a man in America in most every way conceivable and the way she is dressed is more a nod to the fact that she is a woman, but nothing more than this. It is a very, very VERY big mistake to assume anything else. If you attempt to advance on her, and she says no, it really, truly, undoubtedly means no, never, not going to happen. As a warning to those from East Asia, India, Russia, the Middle East, or parts of Eastern Europe, many a man has found he has gotten a good hard slap across the face for mistaking the way a woman is dressed as a signal to him that she is inviting attention and many business deals

have been irrevocably lost because some fool tried to proposition a woman in a low cut business suit in the elevator...and found out it was the CEO. Furthermore, outside the boardroom, even teasing as practiced in India and other areas of the world is absolutely 100 percent out of bounds and can land a young man in a great deal of trouble with the law: it falls under the legal code of most states as **sexual harassment** and can lose a man his job, his freedom, or possibly his dignity. In America, it

is not unheard of for a good Samaritan (or a crowd of them) to rain down fire upon the fool who even teases and comes to the aid of the victim and in more extreme situations, a woman is legally permitted to defend herself from an attacker: pepper spray, a spray with over 3 million scoville units of capsicum extract is both legal for use in situations where a woman feels she has no other choice and also can temporarily blind an attacker.



