Business Etiquette and Professional Dress: Building Your Competitive Edge
Professionalism, confidence and manners are crucial to your success in many aspects of life. Competence in these areas is no longer just considered an advantage, but a requirement for today’s competitive job market. Employers demand their new employees possess a level of professionalism equal to their level of academic training. The College of Business and its supporters are committed to providing our students access to professional training that will help them succeed. Please use this booklet as a guide for networking, interviewing and social engagements. For more information or training, please visit the Business Placement Center in the College of Business.
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Basic Dinner Etiquette

BODY LANGUAGE

• Maintain good posture and eye contact.
• When you’re not eating, keep your hands in your lap or rest your wrists on the edge of the table.
• Keep elbows off the table while eating. It is only acceptable to rest your elbows on the table in between meals.
• Keep elbows close to your body when cutting food.

GENERAL RULES

• Food is passed counterclockwise.
• Do not eat until everyone has been served and your table host begins.
• Say “please” and “thank you.”
• When serving yourself, take modest portions.
• Butter should be transferred from the serving dish to your plate before spreading on bread.
• Adding sauces and spices can be considered ill-mannered. Do not season your food before you taste it.
• Use the silverware farthest from your plate first and cut your meat one piece at a time.
• Eat quietly, and do not speak when your mouth is full.
• Do not eat too fast, keep pace with others in your group.
• Use your napkin!
• Do not ask for seconds. If there is more, your host will offer it to you.
• If you are served food you dislike, leave it on your plate and do not mention it.
Mealtime Essentials

WHEN TO SIT DOWN AT THE TABLE

• Wait to sit until you receive a signal from the host. If the host does not signal you where to sit, choose the chair closest to you.

WHEN YOU ARE SERVED

• The waiter will serve you from the left and will remove used dinnerware from the right.

WHEN YOU HAVE PAUSED EATING

• If you have stopped to listen to someone speak or leave the table, the fork should be placed on the right and the knife on the left, crossing over the center of the plate. The utensils should point toward one another with the fork tines down. This will signal the waiter not to take away your plate.
• If you need to step away during the meal, place your napkin on the back of your chair.

WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED EATING

• Place your fork and knife side-by-side on the right-hand rim of your plate, fork inside the knife, and with the fork tines up or down. The blade of the knife should be inward.
Proper Business Attire

BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL

• All clothes should be neatly ironed. Always ask about the dress code policy.
• Have your clothes professional dry cleaned with starch.
• Avoid trendy styles for suits and choose neutral colors. For men, keep the suit jack buttoned while standing and unbuttoned while sitting. Make sure jackets, pants and socks match.
• Choose ties with conservative colors. Make sure it reaches your belt and use a tie tack.
• Be sure to wear a (leather) belt, especially if your pants have belt loops.
• Skirts should be knee length, not too tight, and should not have a high slit. If you’re wearing a skirt or formal dress, make sure you wear hosiery.
• For women, blouses and blazers are acceptable, but make sure no cleavage is visible.
• Avoid open-toed shoes and sandals; pumps are acceptable with a low heel of 1-2 inches. Polished leather shoes should be worn with calf-length dark socks.
• Light-colored long sleeve collared shirts are appropriate, and make sure they are tucked in.
• Polish your shoes.
BUSINESS CASUAL

• All clothes should be clean and neatly ironed or dry cleaned.
• Dress pants, khakis and slacks are acceptable.
• Wear knee-length skirts that do not have a high slit.
• Blouses, sweater, and cardigans for women, and collared shirts, polos and sweaters for men.
• Blazers and suit jackets can be worn with pants. Trendy styles are more acceptable as business casual.
• Open-toed shoes, nice sandals, flats, heels or loafers with calf-length dark socks are acceptable.
• Wear simple, yet conservative, accessories.
• Sports coat without a tie, or a tie may be worn with a long sleeve collared, button-down shirt.
• Do not wear a tie with a short-sleeved dress shirt.

WHAT NOT TO WEAR

• T-shirts
• Hats
• Flip-flops
• Sweat pants
• Non-company logos (some companies want you to wear their logos)
• Jeans (ask about company policy)
• Revealing or ill-fitting clothing
• Clothes that are wrinkled, torn or dirty
Effective Interview Tips

• **Know as much about the company as possible** by researching news articles and the company’s website. This can make your interview more interactive and show the interviewer how interested you are in this position.

• **Practice answering typical interview questions** so you will be prepared and comfortable during the actual interview.

• **Compile a list of examples in which you have successfully used skills** that will be beneficial to the employer. Emphasize what you can do to benefit the company and articulate why you are interested in this field.

• **Answer questions thoroughly but concisely.** Take a few seconds to think about the question and try to avoid rambling.

• **Be able to discuss decisions you have made and the thought process behind them.** Identify accomplishments you are proud of and things you might have done differently.

• **Prepare a list of questions** you want to ask the interviewer. Remember, you are also interviewing the employer to see if this company and position are a good fit for you.

• **Make sure you know where you are going and give yourself plenty of time.** You want to arrive at least 10 minutes early.

• **Turn off your cell phone!** Remember not to chew gum, and do not bring a beverage or your backpack.

• **Greet the employer** with a firm handshake and introduce yourself.
• **Know the name of the interviewer** and use it during the interview. Do not call the interviewer by his or her first name unless you are invited to do so.

• **Maintain good posture and eye contact** with the interviewer. Project confidence, smile and be aware of nonverbal cues.

• **Bring an extra copy of your résumé.**

• **Do not ask about salary and benefits** until the employer brings up the subject.

• **Know your skills, interests and values.** You should also consider your strengths and weaknesses. Provide examples to demonstrate how you have developed your skills.

• **Define your long-term goals.**

• **Be confident, friendly and enthusiastic.** Remember to smile!

• **Treat everyone you meet (from the janitor to the president) with respect.**

• **Write a thank you letter** and mail or email within one week of the interview, preferably within 48 hours. This ensures that the employer will remember you.

“Etiquette is not about impressing others or being better than anyone else. Etiquette is about being confident in any situation and helping others feel comfortable around you.”

– Melenie Broyles, Owner of Etiquette St. Louis
Sample Interview Questions

• Tell me about yourself.
• Tell me about your community involvement.
• Why are you interested in working for this company?
• What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
• From what mistake have you learned the most?
• What qualities do you admire most in people?
• What motivates you?
• What has been your most rewarding experience?
• What three adjectives describe your work ethic?
• What are your long-term goals?
• What makes you stand above the rest?
• Give some personal examples of teamwork.
• How have your education and employment prepared you for this position?
• Describe a situation where you used your creativity to solve a problem.
• Give an example of a time you showed initiative and took the lead.
Conversation Guidelines

• Do not engage in “one upping” during the conversation.
• Do not interrupt.
• Avoid topics involving politics, sex or religion.
• Make the conversation about everyone at the table, and not just yourself.
• Pay a genuine compliment to someone at the table.

IF YOU NEED IDEAS TO KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

• Tell me a little bit about yourself.
• Where are you from?
• What are your current projects?
• Tell me about your best day at the office?
• How did you decide to go into this business?
• What do you enjoy doing in your free time?
• Who is your role model?
• What are you passionate about?