



Etiquette refers to the guidelines for behavior that apply to any social situation, including the workplace. Whether you are starting your first job or have many years of professional experience under your belt, how you present yourself to others in the workplace matters. Professionalism is just as important during the job application process as it is when you have been in same job for multiple years. There are even specific etiquette norms you should follow when leaving your job.

Setting a professional tone is crucial to building new relationships and ensuring you have a positive, successful experience in the workplace. Professional etiquette includes how you dress, how you communicate (both verbal and written), and your behavior. All these norms, manners, and customs will be discussed in this guide.

Dress and Appearance

How you present yourself to others in the workplace speaks volumes. The reality is that people often form first impressions about others within seconds of first meeting them based on their appearance. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure you are properly prepared to present yourself as a professional. Here are some important tips towards making a good impression:

- **How you dress as a business professional will greatly depend on what business you're in.** If your business involves leading bicycle tours, then obviously spandex is a fine choice. If you're a health care professional, you'll be wearing a uniform. It's always a good idea to ask about dress codes during a job interview or before your first day on the job.
- **Nothing too tight, too short or too revealing** is a good general rule to follow when dressing for work. The general dress code for professionals **is conservative**. Want to be taken seriously? Dress seriously.
- No matter what you wear, **good hygiene is always a must**. Comb your hair. Brush your teeth. Clean your fingernails. Make sure your clothes smell good. No one wants to sit next to and work alongside someone who smells unpleasant.
- **During job interviews, it's always better to over-dress than under-dress.** Even if the person you are interviewing is wearing a T-shirt and jeans, you will make a good impression if you look professional and polished.





For more on what to wear to a job interview, read this article:

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/interview-outfits-for-women-2061091>

Professional Communication

Workplace communication skills and etiquette are essential to every job. Regardless of whether you communicate primarily with customers, partner companies, vendors, or only your coworkers, it is vital to get your message across clearly, effectively, and professionally, and to avoid making mistakes that could put you and your company in a bad light. In the modern work environment, we communicate in many ways, including face-to-face, through video meetings, by phone, and by email. It is important that no matter what mode of communication you use, each workplace interaction needs to be professional.

Face-to-Face Communication Etiquette

In-person, or face-to-face, communication can occur in multiple ways depending on your job. You might interact with customers regularly in a store or restaurant. You might also communicate with clients or business partners in an office. Or you might attend regular meetings with your co-workers or boss.

For customer or client interactions:

- **Be friendly and approachable** – Begin all interactions with a simple display of common courtesy. Smile, stand, or sit up straight, and greet potential customers with “Hello,” “Good morning,” “Good afternoon,” or “Welcome”.
- **Say “Please” and “Thank you” often** – Used with sincerity, these three words build rapport, demonstrate respect, and express professionalism.
- **Be mentally present with the people you serve** – Make and maintain eye contact, put away or quiet any distractions, and listen to what is being said to you.
- **Listen to your customers** – Never fail to make your customers feel comfortable, valued, and appreciated. A significant number of customer complaints are just about the fact that no one “listens” to them. It is a big relief for a customer to know that someone is listening to them and trying their best to resolve issues for them.
- **Be genuine** – Put yourself in the position of your customers and treat them with respect and empathy. A sincere tone and a genuine interest in the customer’s question or concern can go a long way.

For the workplace:

- **Be punctual and come prepared** – Being on time for meetings shows maturity, professionalism, and courtesy to the rest of the meeting attendees. Also, make sure you

come fully prepared with anything the organizer requires, including notes from a previous meeting or suggestions and ideas regarding a specific topic.

- **Speak loud enough** – When you speak during the meeting make sure to speak loudly and clearly so that everyone can hear you.
- **Actively listen and participate** – Meeting productivity relies on participants listening well to others and actively participating in discussions. You can demonstrate active listening by nodding or paraphrasing what the other person is saying to show understanding, expressing your concern or asking specific questions.
- **Take turns speaking** – Follow any speaking rules the facilitator has, such as raising your hand. Wait for your turn to speak and allow others to finish their thoughts before jumping into the conversation. Also, write down your main points if you think you might forget what you want to say while waiting, but try to continue listening to the conversation while writing.
- **Follow the agenda** - Staying on topic is good business etiquette because it reduces time wasted on tangents.
- **Avoid Distracting Behavior** – Tapping your foot, jiggling your leg, drumming your fingers: these are all behaviors you should avoid. If you're fidgeting, you may appear nervous or bored. If necessary, consider holding a stress ball or other object to reduce movement.
- **Ask questions at the appropriate time** – Meeting presenters might prefer you to ask questions while they are speaking, or wait until the designated question and answer period at the end. If you're unsure when is the appropriate time to ask questions, don't hesitate to ask.

Phone Communication Etiquette

Communicating over the phone remains an important tool in most workplaces. Despite digital communication advancements, customers, and professionals alike continue to use the telephone as their initial point of contact. For customers and clients, calling a business directly is usually the quickest and easiest way to get their questions or concerns addressed. It is important to be aware of proper phone etiquette in the workplace, even if your job isn't directly customer-facing.

Elements of proper phone etiquette

- **Friendly greeting** – Answering an office phone properly requires a positive and cheerful disposition. Offer a salutation, thank the person for calling, introduce yourself and your business by name and then extend your help.
- **Body language** – Body language plays a major role in communication, both in-person and on the phone. When you speak on the phone, your body language still communicates how you are feeling. For example, when you smile and sit up straight, your voice is likely lighter and easily translated by the client as cheerfulness.

- **Tone of voice** – Use a confident tone of voice to limit interruptions and maintain professional engagement. The tone of your voice is an important factor in proper phone call manners since a caller may form an opinion of your business based on your attitude over the phone.
- **Active listening** – To achieve excellent phone etiquette, it is necessary to develop active listening skills. Give the caller your undivided attention by minimizing distractions. Taking notes and repeating requests back to the caller lets them know that you care and are listening to only their needs at that moment.
- **Ask before putting someone on speakerphone** – It's proper etiquette to make sure your caller knows when they are on speakerphone and to ask for their permission beforehand. Be sure to let them know if someone else is in the room and can hear them.
- **Appropriate closing** – Remember that closing a call can be just as important as the way you begin one. Before saying goodbye to your customer, thank them again and ask if you can assist them with anything else. Develop the habit of allowing the customer to hang up first to minimize accidental hang-ups.
- **Personalize your voice mail** – Make sure to state your full name, your place or work, your role, and that you will try to get back to the caller as soon as possible. It is also wise to remind the caller to leave their own name and number.



Email Communication Etiquette

Depending on what type of job you have, email might be the primary way you communicate with co-workers, clients, or customers. If that is the case, emails should always be sent in a professional manner, using the etiquette guidelines outlined below. It is important to exercise caution when relying only on email for communication because when you communicate through text only, you don't have the tone of voice, facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues that accompany it. Remember this when writing emails. Keep messages short and to the point, but don't send anything that you wouldn't say in-person.

Elements of proper email etiquette:

- **Use a professional email address** – If you work for a company, you should use your company email address. If you use a personal email account, whether you are self-employed or use it occasionally for work-related correspondences, you should make sure that address doesn't contain any words that would be considered unprofessional, like "partygirl53" or "beerlover100." This is especially important when using your personal email to apply to jobs.
- **Include a clear, direct subject line** – Examples of a good subject line include, "Meeting date changed," "Quick question about your presentation," or "Suggestions for the proposal."

- **Use professional salutations** – Choose a salutation that is appropriate for the relationship you have with the recipient. If you are sending an email to a coworker, a casual greeting such as “Hello” may be appropriate. If you’re contacting someone for the first time or if they are a professional acquaintance, use a more formal greeting like “Dear Sarah Smith.” It is recommended to use the person’s name exactly as it’s shown in their email signature line. In other words, don’t assume that Jennifer goes by Jen unless you’ve seen them sign their emails that way.
- **Include an introduction** – Depending on who you are emailing, it is best to introduce yourself by your first and last name, as well as the company or organization you are representing, in the first few lines. This is especially important when emailing new contacts, clients, potential customers, or employers.
- **Use exclamation points sparingly and avoid using all caps** – If you choose to use an exclamation point, use only one to convey excitement and try not to include too many in one email.
- **Avoid using emojis** – With the exception of co-workers you know well, it is best to stay away from using emojis in business emails. It is always best to stay away from unusual, ambiguous or offensive emojis in the workplace no matter who you are emailing.
- **Include a signature block** – Provide message recipients with some information about you. Generally, this would state your full name, title, the company name, and your contact information, including a phone number.

- **Example:**

Sarah Smith
Program Manager, Vermont Works for Women
(802) 555-9999 Ext. 500
vtworksforwomen.org
Pronouns – she/her(s)

- **Proofread** – Proper spelling and grammar are important when sending work-related correspondence, so always proofread your work before you hit send. Likewise, double-check the spelling of the recipient’s name and email address.
- **Think twice before hitting "Reply all"** – No one wants to read emails from 20 people that have nothing to do with them. Refrain from hitting "Reply All" unless you really think everyone on the list needs to receive the email.
- **Reply within 24 hours** – When someone emails you, replying within 24 hours during a regular business week is common courtesy. If you have unintentionally passed this timeframe, express your apologies and politely explain the delay.
- **Set out-of-office replies** – If you plan to be out of the office, set up an automated out-of-office reply to let people know you won’t be able to respond to their emails until a specific date. Include a contact name if there is an urgent matter.
- **Use Bcc appropriately** – Bcc stands for blind carbon copy, which is similar to Cc (carbon copy) except that the email recipients specified in the Bcc field do not appear in the header or to the recipients in the To or Cc fields. Using Bcc is good etiquette if you want to protect someone’s email address from being revealed to others.

Video Conferencing Etiquette

It's highly likely that virtual meetings are here to stay. In particular, the increased use of platforms such as Zoom, Skype, WebEx, and Microsoft Teams have put a new focus on the importance of virtual meeting etiquette. Similar to in-person meetings, certain norms like being on-time, wearing appropriate clothing (including beyond what may be seen on camera), coming prepared, and actively listening all still apply to virtual meetings. However, there are a few technology-related etiquette rules to follow when attending meetings in a remote setting. These guidelines should also be followed when interviewing remotely for a job.

Elements of proper virtual meeting etiquette:

- **Ensure your technology works correctly** – You don't want to delay a meeting with someone important because your video conferencing system isn't working properly. It can help to do a few test runs with a friend or colleague before an important meeting or presentation. This will make sure everything runs smoothly during the real thing.
 - **Mute yourself when not speaking** – Even though you may not be speaking and think you're being quiet, most microphones can pick up minor background noises, like coughs, sneezes, or typing. These sounds can easily distract other participants and can be annoying to whoever is speaking.
 - **Use video whenever possible** – Video should be utilized as part of the meeting unless it makes presenting impossible due to a poor internet connection. A significant portion of communication is nonverbal and your message will come across more accurately when your face can be seen than if you're only presenting with your voice.
 - **Customize your profile** – If it is not shown already, change your screen name to your full name. Some platforms also allow you to upload a static image of yourself that appears on screen when you aren't using your camera. These pictures can help others in the meeting feel more comfortable if you need to turn your camera off.
 - **Stage the video properly** – Make sure your background is business appropriate and that there is enough lighting on your face for others to see you. Set yourself up so you can look directly into the camera as much as possible.
 - **Refrain from multitasking** – It's best to be mindful and give your full attention to one task at a time. Refrain from checking your email, looking at your phone, or doing other tasks on your computer while a meeting is taking place.
- Take advantage of the additional features** – Many platforms include features like chat, screen sharing, raising your hand, and more. Learn how to use these features appropriately and take advantage of them.



Professional Behavior in the Workplace

From your first day on a new job to your last, how you behave in the workplace is a reflection of your professionalism. Using proper workplace etiquette creates an environment where individuals feel comfortable, appreciated, and able to do their jobs well. Understanding what's expected in a professional environment will help you show respect to those around you. With practice, you can make polite behavior an everyday habit.

Introduction and Handshakes

Greet people when you arrive at work. Say hello to the people you know as well as the people you don't know. Don't overlook the importance of a handshake. The first impression that most people get of others in work settings is through a handshake. Make sure to keep it firm and brief.

When you're new at a job and you first meet someone, pay attention to their name. If you aren't sure how to pronounce it, be sincere and ask. When you tell others your name, include your last name. This is especially important if you have a common first name. It is also customary to stand when you are being introduced to someone.

Timeliness

Whether it is arriving to work or a meeting or making a deadline, punctuality is critical. Show you respect and value others' time and priorities by arriving promptly for meetings, completing tasks before deadlines, and arriving to work a few minutes before you're scheduled. When you miss a deadline or arrive to work late, your whole team could be affected. If you are running behind schedule, contact your boss or another co-worker as soon as you realize that you won't make it on time.

How You Treat Others

Always treat others with respect in the workplace. How you treat people says a lot about you. Remember the Golden Rule: treat others how you'd like to be treated, which is with kindness, dignity, and respect. Commit to learning all the names of your co-workers, respect pronouns, and never use language that is derogatory or offensive in the workplace. Similarly, never insult, use name-calling, disparage, or belittle co-workers or their ideas.

Eating

Although it might be perfectly appropriate in some offices or other work environments to eat lunch and snacks at your desk, normally it is customary to eat in the break room or cafeteria. If that is the case, try to eat your lunch in these designated locations. Aside from limiting distractions for your team members, eating your lunch away from your desk or workspace can help you refocus when you return to work.

Many offices will have a shared kitchen or a company fridge to store lunches, snacks, and drinks. Don't be the person that takes someone else's food from the company fridge. Additionally, don't leave your personal food in the shared fridge for an extended period of time. It is your responsibility to make sure your food doesn't go bad or give off odors while it is stored in there.

Respect Workplace Boundaries

It's great if you're friends with your co-workers and boss, but don't take it too far. Being friendly is a lot different than sharing the intimate details of your social or romantic life. Keep it professional and try to separate your work relationships from your personal ones (even if they are with the same person). Also, be mindful of establishing romantic relationships in the workplace. Many companies have policies about this especially if one of the two individuals are in a position of power. Know your workplace policies.

Avoid gossip, teasing, and other unprofessional behavior. To encourage cooperation and respect among coworkers, it is best to avoid gossip of any kind, even if it may seem harmless to you. Similarly, too much teasing, joking or nicknames may not be comfortable for everyone. Even if you feel like it is harmless fun, it is best to respect others' boundaries. Otherwise you risk creating an uncomfortable or harassing work environment.

When it comes to deciding which conversations are appropriate to have at work, get to know the environment you're working in and what the culture is. However, always err on the side of caution, especially if you are new in your job.

Keep the Workplace Clean

The workplace is a shared environment that everyone should contribute to keeping clean. When you use a common tool or item, make sure to put it back in its designated area so others can locate it. Wipe down any dirty surface areas, such as tables and counters, to maintain and clean, organized workplace. A clean workplace can increase motivation and productivity within teams.

Resigning From Your Job

When you leave your job, it is important that you follow proper resignation etiquette. How you leave your job can impact your future employment. If you maintain a positive, professional relationship with your former employer and your colleagues, you are more likely to get positive references, helpful networking advice, and more.

If you are quitting your job, for whatever reason – whether you found a new job, need to take some time away for family or health reasons, or you are retiring – it is crucial to give a resignation notice to your employer ahead of time. Usually two weeks before your anticipated resignation date is the *minimum* amount of notice that you should give your employer. Giving your “two-weeks’ notice” gives you time to complete your current work obligations, inform your managers and coworkers how to perform some of your job duties once you’re gone, and to say goodbye to your colleagues in a professional and positive way. It also gives your employer time to open a role to fill your job or to make other arrangements. However, if you have an employment contract or union agreement that states how much notice you should give, follow those contract guidelines.



For more on how to graciously leave your job and write a formal resignation letter, read this article: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/starting-new-job/how-to-write-a-two-weeks-notice-letter>

Conclusion

Many professional etiquette norms may seem like common sense while other might be easy to forget. Professional etiquette really boils down to presenting yourself and behaving in way that demonstrates you can be trusted and taken seriously to do your job. This guide covers some of the norms of professionalism including how you dress, how you communicate, and how you behave in the workplace. However, each workplace will have a unique culture, and what is appropriate in one work environment may not be appropriate in another. When starting a new job, it is a good idea to emulate how others act and dress and always read the code of conduct for employees. If you are ever in doubt about the etiquette in your workplace, don’t hesitate to just ask.