

Fashionably Late Verses Punctuality

By Jill Evans Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

Q: I was taught to be a punctual person, but a friend told me it is more appropriate to be “fashionably late” to a dinner party we’re both planning to attend. Wouldn’t it be considered rude to show up to dinner late?

A: While most of us were taught the importance of being on time, there are some exceptions to the rules when it comes to social functions. Your friend must have a clue as to how things work where you live since customs governing arrival times can vary from region to region. The type of occasion will also play a role.

For instance, if you live in a rural area, the general rule is to show up for dinner on time. However, some city dwellers have a built-in 15 to 30 minute window in which a hostess will expect you to arrive. These hostesses would be surprised if you showed up on time, but would consider it in bad form if you showed up more than 30 minutes late.

Usually at a dinner party you can expect an informal time of drinks and hors d’oeuvres before the meal. In this case you can be “fashionably late” by 10 or 15 minutes and no one will blink an eye. Be aware, if you show up even one minute before the appointed hour, you may catch your hostess in the midst of last minute preparations and it will create an awkward situation for both parties.

Different occasions call for different treatments of time. Open houses and cocktail parties are typically held between certain designated hours. A host or hostess will expect the guest to stay for at least an hour, but arrival and departure times are determined by the guest. On the other hand, if you are attending a surprise party or meeting friends at a restaurant for dinner, you are expected to be prompt. Being late by 5 minutes warrants a courtesy phone call to either the friends or the restaurant.

Arriving early has its merits. When attending a wedding, church service or a public performance, for example, you should arrive at least 15 minutes ahead of schedule. Business functions and funeral or memorial services call for guests to arrive on time.

Since customs vary depending on situations and people involved, it is best to use good judgment. You can always ask your host if uncertain what to do. Remember that punctuality is part of being a well-mannered person. It shows respect for the host and her time to plan and coordinate an event. In general, you should strive to arrive on time.

Do you have an etiquette question you want Jill to answer in her monthly column? Email your question(s) to: information@DefiningManners.com or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708.

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