

R.S.V.P. Please!  
By Jill Evans Kryston  
Etiquette Consultant

Recently a friend shared a story about a hostess who prepared for one hundred twenty-five people but only seventy-five showed up. Have *you* ever been a victim of R.S.V.P. abuse?

The following scenario may sound familiar. An invitation arrives, and we set it aside with good intentions to deal with it later. Later comes, and we're still busy. Finally, it's too late to respond. We're either too embarrassed to call and we don't show up, or we presume extras were factored into the count and show up anyway, thus scoring a victory for procrastination.

R.S.V.P. is a French acronym for "répondez, s'il vous plait" which means "respond, if you please." However, the phrase *does not* indicate an option, rather, it's a directive to "please reply." The person sending the invitation would like to know whether you're planning to accept or decline the invitation.

Most Western cultures follow etiquette practices that require individuals to respond immediately, if not the same day, when a formal, written invitation is received. The reply should match the invitation. For example, if the third party is used on the invitation, one would reply with a third party response. When a response card is issued, the card *must* be returned whether or not postage is supplied. If a phone number is given, the reply would be made using the telephone. A person need only respond if they *can't* attend when an invitation says "regrets only."

Keep in mind that a person is never obligated to accept an invitation except by his or her own conscience. However, once having accepted, there is an obligation to attend. An acceptance may be followed by regret *only* in the following circumstances: illness, sudden death in the family, or an unavoidable need to be out-of-town. If a person refuses on any of these grounds, they must not accept another invitation for the same day.

You may wonder, "Why are French initials used for an invitation written in English?" The answer lies with King Louis XIV who, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, had much influence over "inventing" proper etiquette. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the United States, French happened to be the language of refinement that was adopted by our early ancestors.

If someone was nice enough to invite us, why do we have a problem with discourtesy? We need to be sensitive to another person's need to plan and make preparations for an event. When we fail to take time to communicate our intentions, the message we're conveying is, "I don't want to be bothered," or "Don't interrupt my life."

The next time someone thinks you're special enough to invite to an occasion, show appreciation and take a moment to R.S.V.P. *on time*. The hostess will long remember the courtesy.

