

Utensil Positions for American and Continental Dining Styles

By Jill Evans Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

Q: I dated a gentleman who always turned his fork upside down on his plate to signal completion at a restaurant. Has this gentleman taken an etiquette course or is it a long-time family habit?

A: Many people don't realize there is a utensil position to signify the end of a meal. Actually, there are two positions you would use during the course of a dinner: one is to let your host or waiter know you are "resting," and the other is to let them know you are "finished."

For the "resting" position you place the fork on the left side of your plate and the knife on the right side to form an upside down "V" shape. The tines of the fork are facing *up* while the blade of the knife is facing inward. This position is used when you want to take a break from eating, signaling the host or waiter not to remove your plate.

At the end of the meal you use the "finished" position to signal your host or waiter that it is okay to take the plate away. The correct "finished" position is to lay the knife over the fork at the four o'clock position on the plate. Be sure the tines of the fork are facing *up* and the knife blade is facing down.

Traditionally, we use what is referred to as the "American" style of dining. We hold the fork in the left hand to cut our food, then lay the knife over the top of the plate and switch the fork, tines facing *up*, to the right hand to eat. However, outside the United States, "Continental" is the most commonly practiced style of dining and is now gaining popularity here.

In the "Continental" style of dining, the fork is always held in the left hand with the tines facing *down*. The knife stays in the right hand during the meal and is used to cut and push food up over the back of the fork. There is no need to lay the knife down unless you are "resting" or you are "finished" with your meal. In either case, the same positions are assumed as in the "American" style of dining with the only difference being, the tines of the fork are facing *down* on your plate.

If your gentleman friend was eating using the "Continental" style of dining, it may very well be that he took an etiquette course. On the other hand, if he was eating using the "American" style, but turned his fork tines down, it is probably a long-time family habit.

Do you have an etiquette question you want Jill to answer in her monthly column? Visit: www.DefiningManners.com and click "In the News" to submit your questions or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708.

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