

# Politeness

**Syllables**  
po•lite•ness

**Pronunciation**  
puh-lahyt-nis

## Definition

Behaving with consideration, tact, and courtesy.

(She held the door for the man on crutches out of concern and **politeness**.)

**Simply put:** Don't be rude. Mind your manners.

## Related Terms

Civility: Courtesy.

## Fundamental Question:

Have manners changed over the years?

**Students will investigate the ideas that** being polite means much more than saying “please” and “thank you.” It’s about kindness, fairness, tolerance, sharing, and consideration for others. But specific social graces have changed throughout history.

## Objectives

Each student will:

1. Investigate etiquette of the past (or modern etiquette of a country other than his or her own);
2. Compare and contrast the rules of etiquette identified during the investigation with modern rules of etiquette in his or her home country;
3. Plan and participate in a period party (1920s or earlier) using the standards of etiquette of the time; and
4. Compile a list of words related to politeness and write a poem based on those words.

## Before you begin

- Arrange for classroom visitors (e.g., members of a senior center, parents) who will be invited to the class party; and
- Print out a copy of *Where Are My Manners?* for each student.

## Suggested Sidebars:

### Speaking of Politeness (Discussion Idea)

Discuss the meaning of the following quotation. Tell why you agree or disagree with the writer. “A good manner is the best letter of recommendation among strangers. Civility, refinement, and gentleness are passports to hearts and homes, while awkwardness, courseness, and gruffness are met with locked doors and closed hearts.” (*Our Deportment*, 1881)

### Taking It to the Next Level

When George Washington, the first president of the United States, was in his early teens, he made a list of 110 rules to live by. They were a guide for his actions. He called them his “Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in

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Company.” A few of the rules are listed below, but the complete list may be found online at:

<http://www.history.org/Almanack/life/manners/rules2.cfm>,

<http://wwwFOUNDATIONSmag.com/civility.html>,

<http://www.nationalcenter.org/WashingtonCivility.html>, and other sites.

1st Every Action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present.

2d When in Company, put not your Hands to any Part of the Body, not usually Discovered.

3d Shew Nothing to your Freind that may affright him.

4th In the Presence of Others Sing not to yourself with a humming Noise, nor Drum with your Fingers or Feet.

5th If You Cough, Sneeze, Sigh, or Yawn, do it not Loud but Privately; and Speak not in your Yawning, but put Your handkercheif or Hand before your face and turn aside.

6th Sleep not when others Speak, Sit not when others stand, Speak not when you Should hold your Peace, walk not on when others Stop.

7th Put not off your Cloths in the presence of Others, nor go out your Chamber half Drest.

110th Labour to keep alive in your Breast that Little Spark of Celestial fire Called Conscience.

Create your own set of rules for proper behavior (good manners and etiquette). Write the five most important ones here:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Procedure

1. Say: "I am going to read a few statements out loud. If a statement is true of how you behave at home or at school, please raise your hand. If a statement does not describe your behavior, please leave your hand down."
2. Read: "Boys only: In the lunchroom or in the dining area at home, I remain standing until all of the ladies present are seated." Say: "If you lived during the Victorian era in the mid- to late 1800s you would have been required to do this."

Read: "When I dance, I dance quietly. I do not kick and caper about, nor sway my body to and fro. I dance only from the hips downwards." Say: "That was certainly considered appropriate ... during the time of the Civil War."

Read: "When I go into a room with adults or guests I always (boys) bow to visitors; (girls) curtsy." Say: "That's what Emily Post told us to do in 1922."

Read: "I never, ever disobey, 'show off,' become pert, contradict, or answer back." Say: "Emily Post again."

Read: "Girls only: When speaking with a man I never say 'Yes,' 'No,' or 'What?' I say 'Yes, Mr. Smith' or 'No, Mr. Jones.'" Say: "Yep, Emily Post during the Roaring '20s."

Read: "Boys only: When speaking with a man I never say 'Yes,' 'No,' or 'What?' I do not say 'Yes, Mr. Smith' or 'No, Mr. Jones.'" I say "Yes, sir" or "No, sir." Say: "Emily Post."

Read: "When my food is too hot, I quickly take a swallow of water. I never spit it out! In fact, no matter how much I hate the taste of any food, once it is in my mouth I must swallow it. It is unforgivable to take anything out of my mouth except dry bones and stones (pits)." Say: "Emily Post."

Read: "I believe that rules of table manners are made to avoid ugliness. I think that to let any one see what I have in my mouth is repulsive; to make a noise is to act like an animal; and to make a mess at the table is disgusting." Say: "Once again, Emily Post. Do you think that you would have enjoyed being a kid in the 1920s?"

Read: "I know that the enjoyment of the family meal is greatly enhanced when each member is polite and attentive to the others; when parents and children alike are cheerful, agreeable and look after each other's comfort." Say: "This is from *Youth's Educator for Home and Society*. It was written in 1896. Think about what meals are like in your home. Is supper time a time for your family to share stories about the day? Do you ever eat in front of the TV or alone?"

Read: "Finally, I agree with the following statement. 'Many children form habits that are not nice, such as spitting on the floor, scratching the head, stretching themselves out upon a chair, yawning, etc. All such habits are exceedingly low-bred, and are avoided by the child who aims to acquire good manners.'" Say: "Again *Youth's Educator for Home and Society* written in 1896."

3. Ask: “Think of the examples that we just discussed. How are the manners of ‘yesterday’ different from those of today?” (Allow time for responses.) “Which set of manners do you think is or was ‘better’? Why?” (Allow time for responses.)
4. As a class, plan a party based on a specific period in history. Assign committees to research the clothing, food, entertainment, invitations, and most of all, social graces (manners, etiquette) of the time. Invite guests from outside of the class to the party and role play as accurately as possible an event of the times.
5. **Follow Up:** Distribute the *Where Are My Manners?* sheets.
6. Extra: (Note: It is advised that you obtain parental permission prior to doing this activity.) Have your class view two or three TV sitcoms from the 1950s or 1960s. *Father Knows Best*, *The Adventures of Ozzy and Harriet*, and *The Donna Reed Show* would be good choices, although there are others that would work as well. Discuss examples of politeness and rudeness observed in the shows. Then, watch two or three recent shows. Examples might include *Modern Family*, *Full House*, and *Spongebob Squarepants*. Again, discuss examples of politeness and rudeness observed in the shows. Finally compare and contrast the two sets of sitcoms. Ask: “Suppose you were a visitor from outer space who had no prior knowledge of the culture or rules on Earth. All you had to go on was the shows we saw. What conclusions might you draw?”

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Reminder:** Politeness means behaving with consideration, tact, and courtesy.

## Where Are My Manners?

Think of the ten most etiquette-filled, highly mannered words you can to describe politeness. Include each of the words in an original poem about politeness.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

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Today's Thought: *Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others. If you have that awareness, you have good manners, no matter what fork you use.* — **Emily Post, authority on social behavior**