

**Teacher Directions:** Print out the following information about 21 business etiquette rules you should never break. Cut out each rule. Group students into teams of two or three. From there, direct students to create a short skit where they break the etiquette rule. They will act it out in front of the class, and their peers will have to guess what rule they are breaking. After guessing, the group can read their etiquette rule out loud.

## 21 Business Etiquette Rules You Should Never Break

### 1. Pay attention to names

Names are one of the first pieces of information that we learn about someone. It is how people recognize and address you.

When you tell others your name, include your last name. This is especially important if you have a common first name like Ashley or John.

When you first meet someone, pay attention to their name. If you aren't sure how to pronounce it, be sincere and ask. If it is an unusual or difficult to pronounce name, the person is probably used to it and won't mind. It shows that you have taken an interest in them and care about getting it right. **Don't carelessly butcher their name or invent a nickname. Call people what they want to be called.**

Remembering names can be challenging, especially if you meet multiple people at one time. One trick that you can use is to identify a characteristic that helps you differentiate them. Another is to repeat their name and try to use it in your conversation 3 to 4 times, but not so frequently that it is obvious.

## 2. Greet everyone

Greeting the people that you come in contact with isn't only polite but it establishes rapport. You never know who the people that you greeted could be, so it is important to greet everyone with the same degree of kindness.

A simple "Hi, how are you?" or even a smile and nod is enough. **However, adding more could make them remember you and view you as friendly and pleasant.** It can also strike up conversation. Be considerate though. If they appear to be in a rush or not interested at the moment, don't force a conversation on them.

Some ways to strike up a conversation could be to:

Compliment something that they are wearing and ask where they found it.

Remark on your surroundings. This can be anything ranging from the weather to a book they are holding or the office space.

The key is to ask open-ended questions that will require more than a "yes" or "no" and move the conversation along.

## 3. Offer a handshake and make eye contact

Handshakes are the universal business greeting. A firm handshake is still considered a positive trait. A weak one is negative.

**Usually, the higher ranking person will offer their hand first,** but if they don't, you can still offer yours. Make eye contact when you shake their hand and smile. Those who avert their eyes are viewed as lacking confidence and honesty.

#### **4. Give cues that show you're paying attention**

When someone else is speaking, it is important to nod or smile. This shows that you are engaged and actively listening. It tells them that you care about what they say and value their thoughts.

Be careful not to interrupt. If you wish to speak, you may send a nonverbal signal by opening your mouth, but it is polite to wait for them to finish.

#### **5. Introduce others**

No one likes to awkwardly stand with a group of people who have no idea who they are and what they are doing there. It's uncomfortable. If you strike up a conversation with someone and are with a person that they haven't met yet, it is polite to make an introduction.

**Give a little more information than just their name though.** You might add the person's role at your company and what they do. This gives others some background, but keep it brief.

#### **6. Send customized, handwritten Thank You notes**

It's perfectly fine to send out auto-confirmation and thank you emails after customers make a purchase online. However, a thank you by email—especially if it is a large account or long-standing business relationship—is considered ingenuine and rude.

Instead, write out a thoughtful thank you and send it by snail mail. It may take a few more minutes of your time and a little change for postage, but it is more appreciated.

## 7. Proofread emails for grammar and typo mistakes

If you are like most professionals, you will communicate a lot through email. Each message sent reflects on you, so you need to make sure that they are professional and well-written. You shouldn't have typos in emails. It only takes a few seconds to proofread your emails before hitting send.

Technology can even do most of it for you. For example, you can download the [Grammarly extension](#) for free. It checks your emails for mistakes and offers suggestions to correct mistakes.

## 8. Be polite and professional in all forms of communication

It doesn't matter if you are meeting face-to-face, by phone or through email, each interaction needs to be professional.

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.**

## 9. Always be on time

Whether it is arriving to work or a meeting or making a deadline, punctuality is critical. Time is precious.

When you miss a deadline, the whole team is affected and may have to cover for you. Teams rely on everyone to do their part. It is easy to underestimate how much time you'll need to complete a project if you don't regularly track your work. When you are late, you are being disrespectful and inconsiderate of another person's time and commitments. Don't be late.

If you are running behind schedule, contact them as soon as you realize that you won't make it on time. Don't show up too early either. Arriving between 5 to 10 minutes before your appointment is ideal.

## 10. Dress appropriately

Dress codes have become much more relaxed in recent decades. However, just because there is no rule that says you can't show up for work in a hoodie, sweatpants and flip flops, it doesn't mean that you should.

As much as we like to tell ourselves not to "judge a book by its cover," our immediate reaction is to do just that. In fact, studies have shown that the first thing that people notice about others is their appearance. It is the primary influence on first impressions.

You don't have to put on a three-piece suit, but **dressing smart shows that you put effort into your appearance** and are more likely to put the same enthusiasm into your work.

When you dress in loungewear in a professional setting, people may think that you are lazy. It doesn't mean that you can't wear a comfy shirt and jeans occasionally. If it is appropriate for the work environment and situation, then go for it.

## **11. Always practice good hygiene**

No matter what you wear, good hygiene is always a must. Comb your hair. Trim your beard. Clean your fingernails. Make sure your clothes smell good. No one wants to sit next to and work alongside someone who smells like body odor and fried food.

## **12. If you invite others to a business lunch, it's your treat**

Lunch meetings give you the opportunity to get to know a colleague better, impress an investor or learn more about a client and their needs. The rule of thumb is that the person who extends the invitation covers the bill. Don't make a fuss over it.

## **13. Table manners matter**

You should also be aware of other dining etiquette. Many of the rules that your parents enforced at the dinner table are still in play.

Don't talk with your mouth full or chew with it open.

No elbows on the table.

Don't blow your nose with the napkin.

No texting or playing with your phone at the table.

Eating while talking business can be difficult if you choose a messy item from the menu. (Stay away from finger foods like oysters and chicken wings.) The rules may change based on where you eat. If you are eating at a five-star, luxury restaurant, you'll want to know the table placements.

## **14. Keep your workspace neat**

A desk cluttered with old coffee cups, piles of paper and more Post-It notes than free space, will distract you and annoy others.

If you can't keep your workspace clean and organized, then how will you manage your work? It is a question that colleagues, clients, and others will think.

Your workspace reflects on your professional image as well as on your company, so clean it up. Dust a few times a month, develop a system of organization and promptly discard trash in the bin.

## **15. Show respect for shared areas and items**

Working in an office often means that you are sharing the space with others. Many offices will have a shared kitchen or at least, a company fridge to store lunches, snacks, and drinks. Don't be the person that steals someone else's food from the company fridge.

Clean up after yourself. If you use the company printer, stapler or other office supplies, then be respectful. Replenish paper and staples for the next person who uses it.

## **16. Don't overshare but don't be too distant either**

Don't drag your personal life into professional settings. Telling everyone in the office about your cheating boyfriend or your wild, drunken weekend escapades puts others in tense and awkward positions. It's not appropriate for work either, and those who overshare are often fired for it.

People want to know a little bit about you though. If you don't share anything, you will come off as snobbish or distant. It is important that you know which topics are work appropriate and which are not. Talking about the great food and beaches you visited during a recent trip to Thailand may be appropriate. However, sharing that you went skinny dipping after smoking a huge joint while on vacation there is not.

In general, politics and religion are the two topics considered inappropriate in nearly every professional setting. If you have a personal or medical issue that will affect your work, have a private one-on-one meeting with your manager or boss to let them know.

Don't be a nosy neighbor. **Remember to respect the privacy and personal space of others.** You may be comfortable sharing details about yourself, but others may not be.



## **17. Be mindful of how others work**

Some people like to work while blasting loud music. Others might need complete silence to focus and concentrate. In one office space, there is a mix of workers with different styles of working. If you like to listen to music, do it through headphones.

## **18. Use your inside voice**

Some individuals have loud, booming voices that demand to be heard. Sometimes, we get excited in conversation and forget about our inside voices. Either way, it is important to keep sound volume to a decent level. A loud environment distracts and disturbs others.

Plus, your office may share a building with several other businesses. They may be holding meetings or trying to work quietly. Be a good neighbor and use your inside voice.

## **19. Be aware of nonverbal cues**

You might be surprised by how much your facial expressions, body language and hand movements convey to others. Your facial expressions play a huge role in how others perceive you.

For example, a [recent study by Cornell researchers](#) found that people formed impressions of others based on their facial expressions in photographs. Whether the person in the photo was smiling determined if they viewed their personality as negative or positive. Their first impression from the photo even influenced how they felt about the person after meeting them face-to-face months after. Everything from your posture to your furrowed brow is a form of communication. Stand upright, smile and if necessary, put on your Poker face.

## 20. Put away your phone

We've become so attached to our smartphones, tablets and wearable devices that it can be hard to disconnect. However, there are times when pulling out your phone is offensive.

Texting or surfing the Internet on your phone during a meeting is plain rude. Checking your Facebook feed or Twitter notifications in front of a customer reflects poorly on your company and will likely cause you to lose that customer and your job.

It's impossible to give someone your full attention when you are distracted by your phone, so put it away. **Switch it to silent or turn it off completely.**

## 21. Don't be a complainer

Nobody likes a Negative Nancy.

If you notice an issue that should be addressed, don't simply whine about it. (Of course, if it is an issue that violates workplace policies or moral conduct, you should report it to the appropriate person.)

However, if it is anything else, think before you speak. Offer solutions and be careful how you broach the topic. Instead of expressing it as a weakness or a flaw, frame it as an opportunity to improve or an exciting new project.

**The rules of business etiquette may change based on the location and culture.**

For example, how you start a meeting in the United States would differ from a Hispanic culture like Colombia. Diving right into business in the United States is not only normal but expected. If you do that in Colombia, it is viewed as rude and inconsiderate, which can negatively affect your business relationships.

If your business is global or you travel internationally for work, research the business culture and etiquette. In some cases, people are understanding if you mess up because of a cultural or language barrier. However, showing that you are considerate of their traditions is appreciated.

You may not recognize it, but unspoken and implicit business etiquette exists in even the most laid-back company cultures. It can be difficult to figure them out at first, but following these universal rules can prevent you from making an embarrassing mistake.