

# Business Professionalism and Etiquette Guide

If the word “etiquette” brings visions of crisp napkins and pinky-raised tea sipping to mind, think again.

Good manners and considerate behavior are simply a bridge — ensuring your interactions with people both inside and outside your organization are polished and well-received.

***Professionalism opens doors for you.***



*.Three checklists included:*

- #1 Professional Behavior:** actions, appearance and attitude
- #2 Professional Communication:** nonverbals; first impressions; small talk; assertiveness; email and phone
- #3 Professional Social Interactions:** networking, dining, meetings and introductions

## About SkillPath

SkillPath creates vibrant learning experiences that transform careers, companies and communities. Since 1989, millions of people have taken our courses to build real skills in real time and create real results. SkillPath is committed to empowering an inclusive workforce and contributing to a successful, sustainable future. Sign up for emails with free tools, deals and new training..

## 1 Professional Behavior Checklist

**Actions:** Your behavior sets the tone for how others perceive you. Actions show respect and reliability.

**Be on time.** Punctuality shows respect for others’ time. There’s no such thing as “fashionably late” in the business world.

**Respond promptly.** Acknowledge messages even if you can’t respond fully right away. Meeting deadlines and communicating delays builds trust.

**Attend meetings and events.** Skipping meetings without notice is disruptive. If you can’t attend, inform the organizer and suggest alternatives.

**Put your phone away.** Give your full attention in meetings and conversations. Mute notifications and explain if you must remain reachable.

**Stand to greet.** Standing when someone enters your space or when being introduced shows respect and professionalism.

**Don't interrupt.** Let others finish speaking. Jot down your thoughts if you're worried about forgetting them.

**Manage emotions and language.** Stay calm and respectful, even under stress. Avoid swearing or yelling — these behaviors damage your credibility.

**Avoid oversharing.** Keep personal details appropriate for the workplace. If in doubt, leave it out.

**Keep work off social media.** Don't post complaints or confidential information. It's unprofessional and could have serious consequences.

**Respect shared spaces.** Clean up after yourself in communal areas like the kitchen. Be considerate of others who use these spaces.

### **Appearance:** How you look reflects your respect for the workplace and your colleagues.

**Dress appropriately.** Follow the dress code. When in doubt, ask. Even casual days require clean, well-fitting clothes.

**Avoid overly casual attire.** Flip flops, tank tops, sweats, and dirty sneakers are not office appropriate.

**Practice good hygiene.** Keep hair, nails and body clean and well-groomed. Good hygiene is essential for a professional presence.

**Use fragrance sparingly.** Strong scents can be overwhelming. If people can smell you from across the room, it's too much.

**Respect boundaries on appearance comments.** Compliment outfits, not bodies. Avoid comments on weight, injuries or repeated clothing.

### **Attitude:** Your mindset and how you interact with others shape the workplace culture

**Be inclusive.** Introduce people and help them feel welcome. Inclusion starts with small gestures.

**Avoid criticism.** Pointing out others' flaws doesn't make you look better — it's seen as rude and unprofessional.

**Give credit.** Acknowledge others' efforts and accomplishments. Recognition builds morale and teamwork.

**Say thank you.** Gratitude is always appropriate, even for routine help.

**Own your mistakes.** Be accountable. Don't blame others or lie. Correct errors quickly and honestly.

**Stay open to growth.** Embrace learning and new experiences. A growth mindset is a key part of professionalism.

**Don't gossip.** Avoid spreading or engaging in gossip. It damages trust and relationships.



## 2 Professional Communication Checklist

Always be considerate of the other person when you talk, listen or write.

**Nonverbal Communication:** Your body language should send the same message as your words.

**Respect personal space.** Being too close can make people uncomfortable.

**Match your tone of voice with your message.** Stay away from negative tones. A warm, inviting tone helps you connect.

**Match your facial expressions with your words.** Anger, bad mood, indifference — know what your face is saying.

**Control the volume of your speech.** Don't talk too loud or soft — match your volume to the other person.

**Make appropriate eye contact.** Make enough eye contact to show interest, but not so much as to appear creepy.

**Match your body language to the situation.** Yawning, fidgeting, looking at your watch — control the messages you're inadvertently sending.

**Maintain good posture.** Propping your feet up on your desk or slouching down appears unprofessional.

**Be aware of gestures such a nodding or talking with your hands.** These communication enhancers can be taken too far when done in excess.

**Listen attentively.** Don't interrupt, finish people's sentences or rush them. Pay attention.

**Adapt your communication to the other person:** Consider the personality of the other person and match their style and level of information.

**Getting assertiveness right:** Speak up for yourself but not in a demanding, abrasive way. If you often say, "I tell it like it is," try adjusting based on the situation or person instead.

**Show mutual respect.** Stand up for your own interests but take time to understand another's view.

**Set boundaries if interrupted.** Even if someone cuts you off, respectfully ask to finish what you're saying and let them know you'll listen to their concerns after.

**Build relationships.** Compromise is easier when two people know each other.

**Don't over-apologize.** Unless you've done something wrong, avoid saying: "I'm sorry, but ..."

**Use "I" statements.** You-statements such as: "You do this..." sound accusatory.

**Be specific.** Avoid superlatives such as "always" or "never."

**Use tactful, positive words.** This prevents putting people on the defensive.

**First impressions:** Make the first few seconds when you first meet someone count.

**Appearance.** Dress appropriately for the setting.

**Manners:** Be courteous and respectful.

**Body Language:** Smile, maintain eye contact and avoid distractions like phone-checking.

**Attentiveness:** Show genuine interest in others.

**Conversation:** Engage in meaningful dialogue, not just surface-level exchanges.

**Small talk:** Small talk is the gateway to deeper relationships and successful collaboration.

**Initiate conversation.** Don't wait for the other person.

**Stay positive.** Avoid complaints or gossip.

**Be present.** Put your phone away and listen actively.

**Use names.** It builds connection.

**Ask open-ended questions.** Go beyond "What do you do?"

**Contribute thoughtfully.** Don't leave all the talking to the other person.

**Stay informed.** Current events, sports, and local news are great neutral topics.

**Avoid divisive topics.** Steer clear of politics and controversy.

**Email etiquette:** Your emails reflect your professionalism and clarity.

**Write clear subject lines.** Summarize the content of the message within.

**Use professional greetings and closings.** Avoid emojis or informal phrases.

**Use formatting wisely.** Only use bold or caps for emphasis.

**Keep it concise.** Use bullets and short paragraphs for easier reading.

**Avoid redundancy.** Rewrite unclear sentences instead of repeating the same information in a different way.

**Proofread.** Check grammar and spelling.

**Use "Reply All" sparingly.** Eliminate unnecessary email clutter.

**Choose the right medium.** Use phone or face-to-face for complex or sensitive topics.

**Attach long content.** Don't paste lengthy documents into the body of email.

**Phone etiquette:** Phone calls are still a vital communication tool — use them well.

**Prepare.** Jot down key points before calling.

**Start with brief small talk.** But don't overdo it.

**Transition smoothly.** State your purpose clearly.

**Ask questions.** Use questions to keep conversations moving or when you don't understand something.

**Check in.** Pause to ensure the other person is following and can ask questions as you go.

**Summarize.** Wrap up with next steps and expectations.

**Virtual meeting etiquette:** Get the most from this convenient way to connect.

**Be ready.** Even when working remotely, come to the meeting looking sharp.

**Be punctual.** Join on time and engage early.

**Turn your camera on.** It builds connection when people can see you.

**Watch others' reactions.** Body language matters.

**Prepare your contributions.** Don't wing it if you're responsible for meeting information.

**Send agendas in advance.** If you're initiating the meeting, set expectations.

**Introduce participants.** Help others understand meeting attendees' expertise.

**Avoid eating on camera.** It's distracting.

**Don't interrupt.** Use chat or hand-raise features.

**Pause for input.** Encourage participation by creating breaks as you talk.

**Manage interruptions gracefully.** Acknowledge and redirect.

## 3 Professional Social Interactions Checklist

Build genuine connections by being prepared and professional at business event.

### Networking

**Prepare a professional introduction.** Keep it brief (around 10 seconds) and upbeat by sharing your name and a succinct description of your role.

**Initiate conversations.** Walk up and say, "Hi, I'm [Your Name]," then pause to let them respond.

**Ask open-ended questions.** Focus on their company, role, the event or shared industry interests.

**Think about how you can help.** This mindset makes you more genuine and less nervous.

**Speak slowly.** Nervousness can speed up speech — slow down for clarity.

**Keep comments brief.** Limit yourself to 30 seconds at a time and aim to speak less than 50% of the time.

**Be confident, not boastful.** Focus on learning about others, not selling yourself.

**Prepare a graceful exit.** *Example:* "Jordan, so nice chatting. I'm off to say hello to a few more people. I hope I run into you again later."

**Exchange contact info.** Offer your card and ask for theirs. If they don't have one, ask them to write on yours.

### Business dining

**Agree on a meeting spot.** Decide ahead of time where to meet.

**Arrive early if you're the host.** Be there to greet your guests.

**Hold the door open.** A simple gesture of courtesy.

**Stand until you've met everyone.** Unless the host invites you to sit.

**Study the menu in advance.** Choose something neat and easy to eat.

**Mind your table manners.** Napkin on lap, no elbows, chew with lips closed, break bread into pieces, etc.

**Keep the table clear.** Stow bags, phones and papers.

**Order like your host.** Match the tone — if they go casual, you can too.

**Wait until everyone is served.** Or encourage others to start if you're the last.

**Limit alcohol consumption.** Stay professional.

**Skip the doggy bag.** It's not appropriate in a business setting.

**The host pays.** Don't argue. But do thank them.

## Business meetings

- Be punctual.** Arrive 10 minutes early for large meetings.
- Come prepared.** Bring materials and know the agenda.
- Avoid eating or drinking.** This applies to virtual meetings too.
- Keep your space tidy.** Avoid rummaging during the meeting.
- Put away technology.** Unless it's needed for notes or reference.
- Start with small talk.** Ask about a colleague's family or vacation.
- Speak clearly.** Make sure everyone can hear you.
- Avoid fidgeting.** Stay focused and composed.
- Actively listen.** Look at the speaker and engage.
- Don't interrupt.** Let others finish before responding.
- Follow the agenda.** Stay on track if you're leading

## Making professional introductions

- Introduce the senior or familiar person first.** "Ginger, I'd like you to meet Juan..."
- Respond politely.** "Hello Ginger, it's a pleasure to meet you..."
- Offer a handshake.** Unless the person is masked or signals otherwise.
- Make eye contact.** With both parties involved.
- Use formal names and titles.** Repeat the name if unclear and to help you remember it