

Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior In Company and Conversation
George Washington

By age sixteen, Washington had copied out by hand, 110 *Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*. They are based on a set of rules composed by French Jesuits in 1595. Presumably they were copied out as part of an exercise in penmanship assigned by young Washington's schoolmaster. The first English translation of the French rules appeared in 1640.

This excerpt highlights Meal Time Manners (Rules 90-107)

- 90 Being Set at meal Scratch not neither Spit Cough or blow your Nose except there's a Necessity for it.
- 91 Make no Show of taking great Delight in your Victuals, Feed no[t] with Greediness; cut your Bread with a Knife, lean not on the Table neither find fault with what you Eat.
- 92 Take no Salt or cut Bread with your Knife Greasy.
- 93 Entertaining any one at table it is decent to present him wt. meat, Undertake not to help others undesired by the Master.
- 94 If you Soak bread in the Sauce let it be no more than what you put in your Mouth at a time and blow not your broth at Table but Stay till Cools of it Self.
- 95 Put not your meat to your Mouth with your Knife in your hand neither Spit forth the Stones of any fruit Pie upon a Dish nor Cast anything under the table.
- 96 It's unbecoming to Stoop much to ones Meat Keep your Fingers clean & when foul wipe them on a Corner of your Table Napkin.
- 97 Put not another bit into your Mouth till the former be Swallowed let not your Morsels be too big.
- 98 Drink not nor talk with your mouth full neither Gaze about you while you are a Drinking.
- 99 Drink not too leisurely nor yet too hastily. Before and after Drinking wipe your Lips breath not then or Ever with too Great a Noise, for its uncivil.
- 100 Cleanse not your teeth with the Table Cloth Napkin Fork or Knife but if Others do it let it be done wt. a Pick Tooth.
- 101 Rinse not your Mouth in the Presence of Others.
- 102 It is out of use to call upon the Company often to Eat nor need you Drink to others every Time you Drink.
- 103 In Company of your Betters be not longer in eating than they are lay not your Arm but only your hand upon the table.
- 104 It belongs to the Chiefest in Company to unfold his Napkin and fall to Meat first, But he ought then to Begin in time & to Dispatch with Dexterity that the Slowest may have time allowed him.
- 105 Be not Angry at Table whatever happens & if you have reason to be so, Show it not but on a Cheerful Countenance especially if there be Strangers, for Good Humor makes one Dish of Meat a Feast.
- 106 Set not yourself at the upper of the Table but if it Be your Due or that the Master of the house will have it So, Contend not, least you Should Trouble the Company.
- 107 If others talk at Table be attentive but talk not with Meat in your Mouth.