

Chapter 9 – Etiquette

1. Engineers may be required to entertain, either in their own homes or at the mess. Entertaining should be a pleasure but, for those who do not have much prior experience, it can be a daunting task. This chapter provides guidelines on general etiquette for social functions. There are many books, videos and Internet sites with more detailed information on etiquette for those who wish further material on the topic.
2. Social etiquette and protocol are common courtesy, sincerity and consideration for others. They are combination of common sense, good manners and the nicest way to be gracious. Be yourself. If you are truly sincere and keep an open mind and a pleasant attitude you will be successful in most social situations. A simple rule to follow is to be yourself. Social etiquette and protocol may sound like something only a debutante would need to know but, in the Forces, there are various occasions for which certain social standards and procedures should be followed.
3. Social etiquette will come easier if you have some idea of what you are getting into. Knowing what to expect and what is expected provides confidence in any situation, particularly those social situations that are unique to the military environment. And as many social functions are ‘mixed,’ both you and your partner should familiarize yourselves with the practices appropriate to the particular occasion. See [Annex A](#) for a summary of common points of etiquette.

GUEST LISTS

4. When planning a guest list for a private function, members should consider other unit members, friends and those who have entertained them. Normally, a dinner obligation is repaid with a dinner, a barbecue with barbecue, and so on. However, common sense and economic planning must be considered. To extend yourself beyond your financial capability is poor judgement and not in good taste. Apologies are not necessary if returning an elaborate dinner with a backyard barbecue.

INVITATIONS

5. There are two types of invitations – informal and formal. Informal invitations may be made by letter, note or verbally, while formal invitations are either printed or engraved. Figure 9-1 shows an example of a formal invitation.
6. Formal invitations are always written in the third person. No abbreviations are used, except for Mr., Mrs. and post-nominals such as decorations. Numbers are written in full, with even the time and year written out. However, numbers are acceptable in the address section or in unit designations.
7. Guests Names. Ranks should always be written out in full. The rank of retired members is optional but, when used, “*(Retired)*” should follow the name; for example, “*Warrant Officer G.H. Black (Retired)*.” Guests’ decorations should be included on the invitation. However, when a spouse or escort is included in the invitation, the guest’s decorations are omitted. The decorations of hosts issuing invitations should never appear. Care should be taken in researching the proper names, initials and decorations. Often abbreviations following a member’s name are not decorations and should not appear on an invitation. For example, PEng for Professional Engineer, CET for Certified Engineering Technician, or degrees such as MBA or PhD should not be included; however, the title “*Dr.*” should be used for PhD graduates. If the correct decorations cannot be confirmed, they should be omitted and titles may also be omitted if desired. A civilian lady or gentleman may be addressed simply as “*A.B. Jones*” instead of “*Mr. or Mrs. A.B. Jones.*”

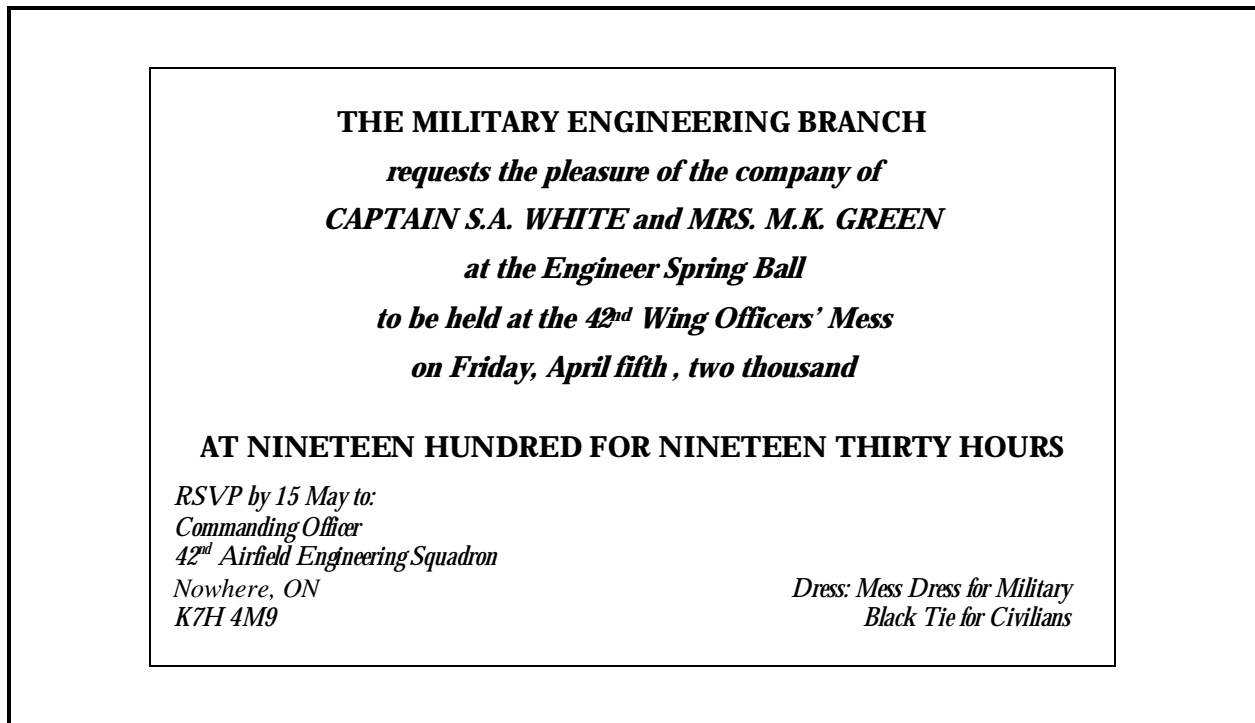


Figure 9-1 Formal Invitation

8. Spouses do not always share the same surname. Most unit administrative sections have social lists with the names of member's spouses and they should be checked to ensure that the correct name appears on the invitation. In the case of a married service couple, the spouse's rank should be included in lieu of any other title; for example, "*Captain E.G. White and Lieutenant J.K. White*." The member who would normally be invited is always placed first and the spouse second, regardless of whom holds the higher rank. If an unmarried member is invited to a mixed function, it is acceptable to say "*Captain Smith and Guest*."

9. Replies. To enable the host to make the necessary arrangements, etiquette demands a reply as soon as possible. Replies are required to all invitations, whether the response is positive or negative. An invitation, once accepted, must not be subsequently declined except for such reasons as illness or unavoidable absence on duty. Certain invitations are considered official and should normally be accepted, for example: parties organized by a superior, official receptions requiring uniform, functions honouring an important visitor to the unit, and meet-and-greet functions.

10. Replies are made in the form in which the invitation is received unless otherwise indicated. RSVP (*répondez s'il vous plaît*) on a written invitation followed by a telephone number suggests a telephoned response is appropriate. If a formal reply card is given, it should be returned and, if unable to attend, a hand-written apology should be added. If no reply card is included, a hand-written note is appropriate. Replies should always be written in the present tense and in the same format as the invitations, with the address and date of reply in the bottom left hand corner. When accepting, the day and hour should always be restated to catch any errors and, when declining, a brief reason for the decline should be given.

11. Dress. The dress for the function should be clearly stated on the invitation and should not be confusing to the guests. When uniform is to be worn, it should be clearly stated if permission has been granted for Reserve Force and retired members to wear uniform (see QR&O 17.06). One of the categories below should be used on all invitations, not ambiguous expressions like "*Festive Attire*." It is important that the clothing chosen for the function is appropriate. Members who are dressed too formally or too informally will feel out-of-place and ill-at-ease. Dress should normally fall into one of the following categories:

- a. Formal. This includes black tie or mess dress. If there is any doubt about whether a uniform is appropriate, it should be clearly stated. For some functions, such as mess dinners, uniforms are required for all military. For other functions, such as a New Year's Ball, uniform may be optional. If black tie or formal is stated, civilian men wear a tuxedo while ladies wear a floor-length evening gown.
- b. Business Suit. For men, this requires that the slacks and the jacket are a matching set. Ladies wear a business suit or dress for daytime functions and a cocktail dress or pantsuit for evening functions. The uniform equivalent to this order of dress is service dress.
- c. Jacket and Tie. Men normally wear a shirt, tie, sports jacket, and slacks. On some occasions, it is permissible to wear a sweater in place of the shirt and tie. Ladies wear a suit or dress that is slightly less formal than what is appropriate for business suit. A dressy blouse and skirt/slacks may also be suitable for a jacket and tie function.
- d. Casual or Relaxed. Men wear casual slacks and a shirt with a collar but golf or polo shirts are sometimes permitted. Ladies wear a blouse and skirt/slacks. Shorts may be worn to outdoor events, such as barbecues or golf tournaments. However, they should be walking shorts, not athletic shorts. Jeans are not generally permitted for any official social functions.
- e. Other. For some functions, other modes of dress may be authorized, such as costumes for Halloween dances or other theme parties. Costumes should be tasteful and reflect positively upon the individual.

PUNCTUALITY

12. Punctuality is a virtue but fanatical punctuality is not always so. For most social functions, it is impolite to arrive early since hosts may still be preparing. It is correct to arrive within five minutes of the stated time. In some instances, the invitation may indicate that guests are to arrive early, perhaps before the arrival of an honoured guest. In this case, the invitation will state 1900 hrs for 1915 hrs, indicating that guests are expected to arrive by 1900 hrs to await the guest of honour who arrives at 1915 hrs. Usually, the more formal the function the closer one follows stated times.

13. Guests should abide by the time limit shown on an invitation. Should one have to leave before the guest of honour, apologies should be first offered.. Guests should be adept at distinguishing between polite requests not to hurry away and genuine requests to remain after the main body of guests has left. In any event, having made a move to go, guests should express appropriate thanks and leave. A guest who does not know when to leave is a burden to any host.

INTRODUCTIONS

14. When making an introduction, the names of persons being introduced should be spoken clearly and the introduction should be polite and informative. For instance, *"Major Black, I would like you to meet Lieutenant Anne White, our new Liaison Officer. Anne, this is our Operations Officer Major Black."* Introductions are always made as follows:

- a. a gentleman is always introduced to a lady;
- b. a young woman to an older woman;
- c. a young man to an older man; and
- d. a junior member to a senior.

15. Gentlemen and military members should rise for an introduction. It is acceptable for civilian ladies to remain seated. In replying to an introduction, it is sufficient to say, *“How do you do?”* Strive to remember the names of those introduced and use them occasionally afterwards. A favourable impression is created when enough interest is taken to remember names. Introducing oneself to a former acquaintance is polite. However, remind the acquaintance of the prior meeting if there is a possibility of it having been forgotten.

RECEIVING LINE

16. A receiving line is simply a very formal presentation and it is good manners to arrive in time to proceed through the line. Special customs apply where royalty is in attendance and specific protocol advice should be sought for such occasions. Receiving lines are an excellent way to meet the senior people attending the function. The military member always goes first and introduces his or her guest to the adjutant or aide. The member should state their names clearly no matter how well they may know the aide (*“Chief Warrant Officer and Mrs. Jones”*); the aide then introduces each to the host and any guests of honour. The host shakes hands, greets the person or persons (ladies may leave their gloves on), and introduces them to the next individual in the receiving line, and so on. A brief greeting, accompanied by a firm, cordial handshake and a smile are all that is expected.

SEATING PLANS

17. Seating plans are generally only used at formal functions to ensure that all diners are distributed to encourage conversation with new acquaintances. Spouses, members of the same unit, and members of the same rank are usually not seated next to each other. When arriving at a function, the seating plan should be checked immediately. Where spouses are not sitting next to each other, the members should introduce their spouse or guest to the member who will escort them to the table. When dinner is called, a male host should escort the guest seated to his right and a female host escorts the guest sitting to her left. Once at the table, it is correct to remain standing behind the chair until the guest of honour has been seated. When it is time to be seated, it is polite for a gentleman to assist the lady to his right with her chair.

18. In a banquet setting, there is usually a head table that is organized so the sponsoring host and guest of honour are in the centre. Each guest should have a host with guests and hosts seated alternately along the table and with the most senior guests closest to the centre. Generally, guests are seated to the right of their hosts and two guests should not be seated next to each other, if it can be avoided.

19. At a formal dinner party, the host and hostess are usually seated at opposite ends of the table. The lady guest of honour, or senior lady, sits on the host’s right and the lady next in precedence is seated on the left. Similarly, the male guest of honour and the next ranking gentleman are seated respectively to the right and left of the hostess. Other guests normally alternate male-female around the table with juniors in the middle. Couples are not generally seated together to encourage conversation with other guests.

DURING THE DINNER

20. If the dinner is a buffet, it is polite for the host/hostess to lead the way through the buffet. For served meals, it is customary to await the host’s start of each course or direction to begin. At large banquets or buffets it is appropriate to commence eating when those around you have been served.

- a. The correct use of cutlery and glasses is a mark of good manners and guidance can be found in any book on etiquette. At a multiple course meal, each place setting consists of a setting of cutlery and several glasses, one filled with water. While a large, formal place setting may appear intimidating the first time, if in doubt, follow the lead of the head table or a nearby experienced colleague. For cutlery, begin at the outside and work inward. For glasses, start at the bottom and work upwards.

- b. Hold long-stemmed water glasses or wineglasses with your thumb and first two fingers at the base of the bowl of the glass or on the stem. Do not place your fingers around the bowl of the glass.
- c. Food is served from the left and removals are made from their right. The signal that a diner is finished with a course is the placement of the knife and fork side by side on the right side of the plate. Although it is not good practice to move or stack china for the servers, they can be helped by moving aside slightly to allow better access. It is good manners not to ignore the servers but to politely compliment them on the meal, wine or service while being served.
- d. If a band plays during dinner, applause at the end of each piece is customary.
- e. If toasts are part of the dinner activities, follow the toastmaster's lead. Toasts are sipped - if you do not care for wine, simply raise your glass to your lips or sip water. Never drink to yourself. For example, ladies do not drink when the toast "To the Ladies" is given.

EXPRESSING THANKS

21. When invited to a private home, it is appropriate to bring a small gift. This is traditionally flowers, chocolates, or wine. However, home-made preserves or handcrafts are becoming more popular. An expression of thanks for hospitality received is appropriate, although the form may vary depending upon the type of hospitality or entertainment. A telephoned thank-you is acceptable for informal entertainment, but a written note or letter is more appropriate after a formal invitation. When staying overnight with friends, it is polite to bring a gift and a written letter of thanks is essential.

BUSINESS CARDS

22. Engineers frequently use business cards when meeting representatives of industry, other government departments or the public. They are not intended for use as calling cards on social occasions. The cards are printed on 3½ inch x 2 inch, white, double-weight paper, in a bilingual format, English on one side, French on the other. An example is shown at Figure 9-2.

23. Perforated cardstock, pre-printed with the Department of National Defence logo, is available through the supply system. Cards should be printed as required using the Microsoft Word Template available from unit administrative sections. Official Department of National Defence business cards shall not bear watermarks or the CME Branch badge.



Figure 9-2 CME Business Card

A SUMMARY OF SOME GENERAL SOCIAL ETIQUETTE GUIDELINES

- Sometimes it is better to do the wrong thing graciously than the proper thing rudely.
- Include your partner when learning the etiquette for a new type of event.
- If you have doubts over any details of an event, seek the advice of a more experienced individual, the organizer or host.
- Respond promptly to any invitation requesting “RSVP”, a “regrets only”, or “respond by....”
- Dress appropriately.
- Arrive on time.
- At an event involving military personnel, unless specifically told to use first names by seniors or their spouse, it is proper to address seniors by their rank and last name. You should address the spouse as Mrs./Mr. ____.
- In a receiving line, a brief greeting, accompanied by a handshake and a smile are all that is expected.
- For events without a receiving line, seek out the host, hostess and any guest of honor before you start socializing.
- Never hesitate to introduce yourself, even if you think you have met a person before.
- For formal dinners, find your seats on the seating chart.
- Upon entering the dining area, remain standing behind your seat until any preliminary activities are concluded and a sign is given to be seated.
- At small dinner parties you should not start eating until the hostess has started or invited you to begin. At large events, it is appropriate to commence eating when those around you have been served.
- Follow the toastmaster’s lead, and never drink when you are being toasted.. If you do not care for wine, simply raise your glass to your lips or sip water.
- Smoking is permitted only if ashtrays are provided, but, even then, do not smoke while others are eating and wait until the host signals permission.
- Be sure to include everyone at the table in conversation and do not monopolize the conversation.
- If you must depart a function before the senior person, pay your respects by bidding farewell to the senior member, the host, and their spouses.
- Note the end time of a function and do not overstay your welcome.
- If you received a personal invitation to a function, write a note of thanks the next day.