

The main course

Suneeta Sodhi Kanga encourages you to enjoy your entrée with panache

IN formal dining, a well-planned main course can function as a sort of gastronomic apex or climax. In such a situation, the preceding courses are designed to prepare for and lead up to the main course in such a way that the main course is anticipated and, when the scheme is successful, increased in its ability to satisfy and delight the diner.

An entrée (pronounced *ahn-tray*) is usually the heaviest, heartiest, and most complex or substantive dish on a menu. It is most often preceded by an appetiser, soup and/or salad, and followed by a dessert.

Course by course

If you are attending a formal dinner, you may expect it to consist of seven courses, mostly but not necessarily in this order: salad, soup, *hors d'oeuvres*, sorbet (palate cleanser), entrée, dessert (often served with cheese), coffee and chocolates.

Once again, the number of pieces of silverware will indicate the number of courses you can expect, and the general rule is to start from the outside.

Courses are served from the left, removed from the right of the diner. Wine is poured from the right.

The main course may be eaten with a fork and knife.

The American style: After the portion of food has been cut, the knife is laid down and the fork is transferred to the right hand. The food is then carried to the mouth with the fork, prongs up.

When the knife is not in use, place it with the cutting edge in, on the upper right arc of the plate; keep both the blade and handle on the plate.

English or continental style: According to the English or continental method, after the portion of food is cut, the knife is still held in the right hand and the food is carried to the mouth with the fork in the left hand, prongs down.

Some dos and don'ts

- Put only one kind of food on the fork at a time.

- Always eat a small portion at a time.
- If you have to cut the food served, do not clean the knife by rubbing it against the fork or a piece of bread. However, you must keep the knife as clean as possible.
- The dinner knife may be used to spread butter on bread if a butter knife has not been provided.
- Always place the silverware quietly on the china. Don't drop it!
- Never let the knife and fork hang from your plate like a pair of oars.
- When serving yourself with a serving spoon and fork, hold the spoon in the right hand and the fork in the left, using the spoon to lift the food from the dish or platter and the fork to hold the food in place while serving it.
- Try to finish each course at about the same time as others around you.
- If you are halfway through your entrée, and you realise that you're using the wrong fork, don't panic. Don't do anything just then. Go ahead and finish the course with that same fork. When the next course comes around, ask the server for a replacement with words to the effect of: "May I have a new fork for this, please?"
- Hoist out the I-am-resting pennant when you want to pause during a course and don't want the server to snatch your plate away. In this case, the knife and fork are crossed on the plate with the fork over the knife and the prongs pointing down forming an inverted V. It is also correct to form the inverted V without crossing fork over knife.

At the end

Servers in fine-dining restaurants are usually trained to recognise the I-am-finished and the I-am-resting signals and may not clear your plate till you have put the cutlery in the correct positions.

When you are finished with a course, indicate this with the I-am-finished pennant. Here's how...visualise a clock face on your plate. Place both the knife and fork in about the 6 o'clock position with the points at 12 and the handles at 6.

The prongs of the fork should be up, and the blade of the knife should facing inwards. If you have been eating the course with the fork only, place it prongs up in the same position. 

