

Restaurant

The First Two Minutes Standard

Five steps from the restaurant door to the first drink. The guest decides how the evening will go before reading a single line of the menu.

Who	When	You need
Host, head waiter and the section server	Every guest, from the door until the first drink is offered	Tonight's bookings with notes, the table plan, menus at the stand
Measured by Acknowledged within 30 seconds of entering · Seated at a laid table within 1 minute · Menus and water on the table in 2 minutes		

1 Acknowledge

Within 30 seconds of a guest stepping in, someone makes eye contact and speaks, even if the host is on the phone or seating another table. A nod and one sentence hold the guest until you are free.

"Good evening. I'll be with you in just a moment."

Common mistake Finishing the phone booking first. The guest at the door is counting the seconds; the caller can hold for ten.

2 Greet by name

Read the booking list before the guest reaches the stand, so the name comes first and the question second. Confirm the party size, take coats, and note any occasion or request already on the booking.

"Good evening, Mrs Laurent. A table for four at eight. Welcome back."

Common mistake "Do you have a reservation?" as the first words, to a guest who booked, confirmed and arrived on time.

3 Seat

Walk the guests to the table at their pace, one step ahead, and pull the chair for each guest who wants it. The table is fully laid and checked before they arrive, never finished while they watch.

"Here is your table, by the window as you asked. Please, take your time."

Common mistake Pointing to the table from the stand. The guest crosses the room alone, past six tables, looking for the right one.

4 Menus and a name

Within the first minute at the table, offer to open each napkin and present the menus open at the first page, guests first and the host last. Then name the server who will look after the table tonight.

"Ms Rossi, this is Marco, who will be looking after you this evening."

Common mistake Stacking the menus at the edge of the table. Four people pass them round while the server is already gone.

5 First offer

Within two minutes of seating, water is on the table and a first drink is offered. Ask before pouring, and name every choice, the house filtered water included, so nobody pays for water they didn't pick.

"Bottled or our filtered water to start? And something to drink while you look at the menu?"

Common mistake Pouring water before anyone is asked. The table has made its first decision without being consulted.

The First 120 Seconds

One table, two minutes, three people. On a busy night, the line that runs over is where your team is short.

Seconds	What happens	Who does it
0–30	Eye contact and a word, whatever else is going on	Host, or the nearest member of staff
30–45	Name, party size and booking notes confirmed	Host
45–60	Coats taken, guests walked to a checked table	Host
60–75	Chairs pulled, napkins offered, menus open	Host or head waiter
75–90	Server introduced by name	Head waiter
90–120	Water choice asked, first drink offered	Section server

How to use this with your team

Brief one row a day at the line-up. On Friday the head waiter times three arrivals with a phone stopwatch and reads the results at the next briefing, without names.

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