

Restaurant

The Table Maintenance Standard

Five steps for the minutes between courses. When they are done well nobody notices them, and when one is missed it is what the guest remembers.

Who	When	You need
Section servers, commis and the head waiter	Between every course, and whenever a guest leaves the table	Crumber, clean side plates, spare cutlery and napkins at the station
Measured by Plates cleared within 3 min of finishing · Cutlery set before every course arrives · No guest has to ask for water or bread		

1 Clear together

Clear only when every guest at the table has finished, within 3 minutes of the last fork going down. Clear from the right, the host last, and never scrape or stack plates in front of the guests.

"May I take your plate, Mr Moreau?"

Common mistake Taking the first empty plate while others are still eating. The slowest eater now finishes alone, and in a hurry.

2 Crumb

After the main course and before dessert, remove salt, pepper, bread plates and anything not needed for the next course, then crumb the cloth with a crumber onto a small plate, never onto the floor.

"Excuse me, may I?"

Common mistake Brushing crumbs into a hand or down beside the chair. The guest watches it happen at eye level.

3 Reset cutlery

Set the cutlery for the next course before the plate arrives, carried on a plate lined with a napkin, never in the hand. The order tells you what is needed: fish knife for fish, steak knife for steak.

"I'll just set your knife for the beef, Mrs Kowalski."

Common mistake Setting cutlery after the plate lands. The guest sits with a hot dish in front of them and nothing to eat it with.

4 Top up unasked

Water glasses never fall below one third, and bread is offered again before the basket is half empty. Refill from the right without breaking into a conversation, and check condiments on every pass.

"Shall I bring a little more of the olive bread?"

Common mistake Refilling only the glass of the guest who looked up. The table learns it has to signal to be served.

5 Guest away

When a guest leaves mid-meal, refold the napkin within a minute and lay it to the left of the setting, straighten the chair, and pull it out again as the guest comes back to the table.

"Welcome back, Mr Silva."

Common mistake Leaving the napkin crumpled on the seat for ten minutes. The table looks abandoned to everyone who walks past.

Between Every Course

Twelve things an inspector checks on every course,
and a guest only notices when one is missing.

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|---|--|
| ☐ Every guest finished before any plate goes | ☐ Next cutlery set before the plate arrives |
| ☐ Plates cleared from the right, host last | ☐ Cutlery carried on a lined plate |
| ☐ No scraping or stacking at the table | ☐ Water above one third in every glass |
| ☐ Side plates and bread cleared after the main | ☐ Bread offered again before the basket empties |
| ☐ Salt and pepper removed before dessert | ☐ Napkin refolded within a minute |
| ☐ Cloth crumbed onto a plate, not the floor | ☐ Chair pulled out as the guest returns |

How to use this with your team

Brief three items a day for four days. On the fifth day the head waiter walks the floor mid-service with the card, ticks each item at two tables and shares the misses, not the names.

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