

Restaurant

The Mise en Place Standard

Five steps for setting a restaurant table before anyone sees it. A guest notices a crooked knife before they taste the sauce it was laid for.

Who	When	You need
Servers and commis, checked by the head waiter	Before every service, finished 30 minutes before opening	Pressed linen, polished cutlery and glasses, the table plan, a ruler
Measured by Every table checked against the plan · Cutlery 2 cm from the table edge · Station stocked 30 minutes before service		

1 Linen

Lay the cloth so the centre crease runs straight down the table and the drop is even on every side, about 30 cm. A stain, burn or hole means a fresh cloth, never a plate placed over the mark.

"Table 14: cloth replaced, coffee stain under the flowers. 18:05."

Common mistake Hiding the stain under the bread plate. The guest moves the plate in the first minute and finds it.

2 Cutlery

Polish each piece with a clean cloth and hold it by the handle, never the blade or bowl. Set it 2 cm from the table edge, parallel, blades facing the plate, laid from the outside in by course.

"Section 3 laid: 40 covers, every piece checked against the light and set at 2 cm."

Common mistake Polishing at the station, then setting the spoon by its bowl. The fingerprints go straight back on.

3 Glasses

Carry glasses on a tray or by the stem, never by the rim. Polish them over steam, check each one against the light, and set the water glass above the tip of the main knife, any others in a line beside it.

"Glasses checked: 48 set, 3 sent back for marks."

Common mistake Carrying four glasses upside down between the fingers. Every rim has now been touched.

4 The station

Stock the side station with spare cutlery, napkins, crumber, side plates, condiments and a pen, and count it against the station list. A server who leaves to fetch a spoon has left the whole section.

"Station 2 stocked and counted, 18:25. Short two steak knives, requested."

Common mistake Stocking for an average night. The table of ten at nine finds the station empty.

5 Sit and look

Thirty minutes before opening, the head waiter sits at three tables chosen at random and looks from the guest's chair: wobble, light, chair height, crumbs, alignment. Faults are fixed before doors open.

"Table 6 rocked, leg adjusted. Table 9 lamp too bright, dimmed. 18:32."

Common mistake Checking from standing height. Half of what a seated guest sees is only visible from the chair.

The Table Before the Guest

Thirteen checks for every table before service. Print it and keep it at the side station.

- ☐ Cloth crease centred, even drop on all sides
- ☐ No stain, burn or hole in the linen
- ☐ Cutlery 2 cm from the edge, parallel
- ☐ Knife blades turned towards the plate
- ☐ Water glass above the tip of the main knife
- ☐ Glasses polished, no marks against the light
- ☐ Side plate on the left, knife on it
- ☐ Napkins folded the same way at every cover
- ☐ Chairs just touching the cloth, in line
- ☐ Table does not rock
- ☐ Salt, pepper and flowers clean and full
- ☐ Station stocked and counted
- ☐ Table number matches the plan

How to use this with your team

Each server checks their own section with it; the head waiter repeats it at three random tables. Brief the two items most often missed at the line-up each day for a week.

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