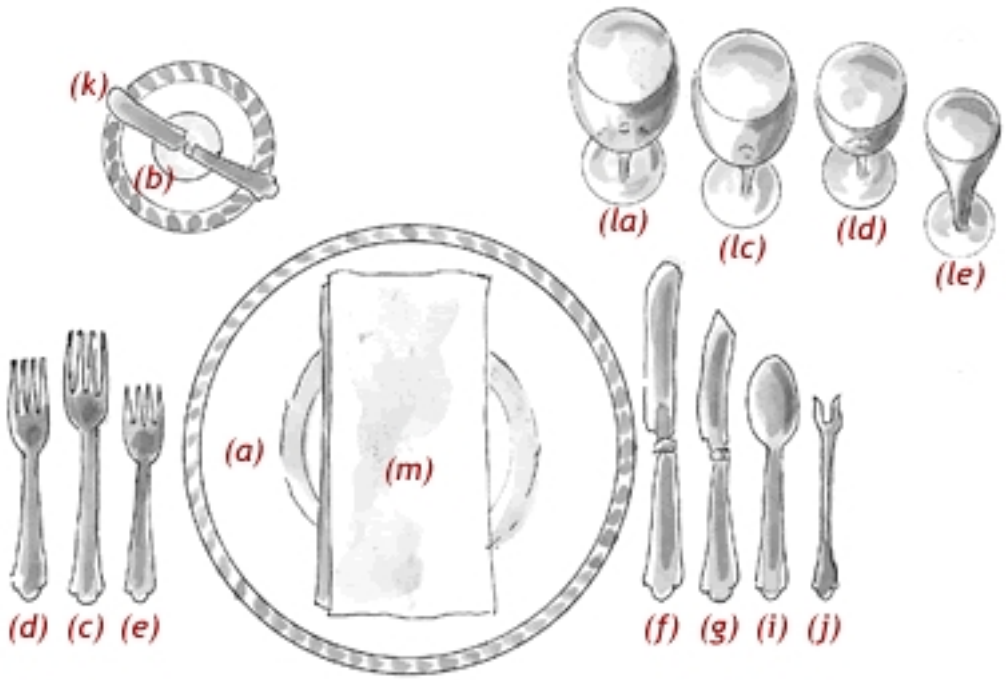
The one rule for a formal table is for everything to be geometrically spaced: the centerpiece at the exact center; the place settings at equal distances; and the utensils balanced. Beyond these placements, you can vary flower arrangements and decorations as you like.



The placement of utensils is guided by the menu, the idea being that you use utensils in an "outside in" order. For the illustrated place setting here, the order of the menu is:

- Appetizer: Shellfish
- First Course: Soup or fruit
- Fish Course
- Entree
- Salad

(a) Service Plate: This large plate, also called a charger, serves as an underplate for the plate holding the first course, which will be brought to the table. When the first course is cleared, the service plate remains until the plate holding the entree is served, at which point the two plates are exhcnaged. The charger may serve as the underplate for several courses which precede the entree.

(b) Butter Plate: The small butter plate is placed above the forks at the left of the place setting.

(c) Dinner Fork: The largest of the forks, also called the place fork, is placed on the left of the plate. Other smaller forks for other courses are arranged to the left or right of the dinner fork, according to when they will be used.

(d) Fish Fork: If there is a fish course, this small fork is placed farthest to the left of the dinner fork because it is the first fork used.

(e) Salad Fork: If the salad is served after the entree, the small salad fork is placed to the right of the dinner fork, next to the plate. If the salad is to be served first, and fish second, then the forks would be arranged (left to right): salad fork, fish fork, dinner fork.

(f) Dinner Knife: The large dinner knife is placed to the right of the dinner plate.

(g) Fish Knife: The specially shaped fish knife goes to the right of the dinner knife.

(h) Salad Knife (Note: there is no salad knife in the illustration): If used, according to the above menu, it would be placed to the left of the dinner knife, next to the dinner plate. If the salad is to be served first, and fish second, then the knives would be arranged (left to right): dinner knife, fish knife, salad knife.

(i) Soup Spoon or Fruit Spoon: If soup or fruit is served as a first course, then the accompanying spoon goes to the right of the knives.

(j) Oyster Fork: If shellfish are to be served, the oyster fork goes to the right of the spoons. *Note : It is the*
only

fork ever placed on the right of the plate.

(k) Butter Knife: The small spreader is paced diagonally on top of the butter plate, handle on the right and blade down.

(l) Glasses: These can number up to five and are placed so that the smaller ones are up front. The water goblet (*la*) is placed directly above the knives. Just to the right goes a champagne flute (*lb*); in front of these are placed a red (*lc*) or white (*ld*) wine glass and a sherry glass (*le*).

(m) Napkin: The napkin is placed on top of the charger (if one is used) or in the space for the plate.

In General:

- Knife blades are always placed with the cutting edge toward the plate.
- No more than three of any implement are ever placed on the table, except when an oyster fork is used in addition to three other forks. If more than three courses are served before dessert, then the utensil for the fourth course is brought in with the food; likewise the salad fork and knife may be brought in when the salad course is served.
- Dessert spoons and forks are brought in on the dessert plate just before dessert is served.

To see basic and informal place settings, click here to go back to the main Table Setting page