…Cut my Food?

One bite at a time. Always.

…Pass Food Around the Table?

The whole pass-to-the-right thing is really just to ensure that there is some type of order. Food is always passed in one direction to avoid having someone end up with two dishes at once. You can either hold the platter for the person you are passing to while she takes her food or, if the platter seems easy to hold and serve from, you may simply pass it to the guest next to you once you've taken your share. Remember to take a small enough portion so that there's plenty left for everyone else. When you pass something with a handle, like a gravy boat, pass it with the handle side toward the person you are passing to, so that she can take it easily.

…Deal with an Unpleasant Experience in the Mouth?

If something that tastes funky or foul ends up in your mouth, you can raise your fork to your mouth and subtly use your tongue to remove the object from your mouth and place it on your fork. (Easy rule: if it went in with a utensil, it comes out on a utensil; if it went in with your fingers, it comes out with your fingers.) Then place the item to the side of your plate. Never place the item in your napkin—it's too easy for it to fall out, and stain your clothes or end up on the chair. The idea is to try to keep your actions unnoticed, and let your conversation and company take center stage. And as a former busperson in a restaurant, I can tell you from painful experience that it's gross to clear a table and squeeze someone's chewed up unpleasant experience in your hand as you gather the napkins or have it stain your work clothes when it comes tumbling out.

…Let the Waiter Know There's Something in my Soup?

If you discover an insect or a hair in your food, try not to make a big deal of it (especially if you're eating at someone's house). Instead, put your fork or glass down, and wait to signal the server to get you a fresh plate or glass. If you are in someone's home, simply remove the

foreign object, set it to the side of your plate, and (if you aren't overly grossed out), continue eating. You do not mention to your host in the middle of a dinner party that you found something gross in the food. No siree.

…Signal That I'm Finished?

Imagining your plate as a clock, set your utensils on the plate so that both handles are resting on the numeral 4. Then leave your plate exactly where it is. Pushing it away is not considered polite.