

When entertaining dignitaries, such as government or military officials and foreign diplomats, the host or hostess of an official luncheon or dinner seats the guests according to rank. Traditionally, the host and hostess sit at the head and foot of the table. When they are friends with a number of the guests, they may choose instead to sit opposite each other at the middle of the table, where it will be easier for them to converse with more people.

### **When both women and men are attending the event, seating is as follows:**



The highest-ranked male guest sits to the right of the hostess.

- The man next in rank sits to the left of the hostess.
- The wife of the man of highest rank sits to the left of the host. (If the man is unmarried, the woman of highest rank takes this seat.)
- Spouses in attendance who don't hold an official position are seated according to the rank of their husbands or wives.
- Guests who have no protocol ranking are seated according to the unspoken rank the host assigns to them. The host ranks guests as he chooses, basing his decision on age, social prominence, personal accomplishments, and mutual interests shared by seatmates. Proficiency in a foreign language also comes into play when foreigners are among the guests.

### **Other considerations include these:**

- When the guest of honor and second-ranking official have been placed, non-ranking guests may be seated between those of official rank.
- At meals hosted by the U.S. government personnel overseas, foreign guests have preference in seating over Americans of equal rank--except for the American ambassador to the country.
- Men and women should be alternated at the table insofar as possible.