Don’t Bite Off More Than You Can Chew (and other tips for surviving job interviews during meals)

Interviewing for a job—whether the position is full time, part time, or an internship—is stressful enough, but when the employer interviews you during a meal, the stress level doubles or triples.

Because we live in a “fast food world,” many people often have not experienced “fine dining” and the etiquette that goes along with it. When your food comes wrapped in paper, you don’t think about which utensils to use.

Why do employers interview applicants during meals? There are several reasons for doing so. First of all, if you’re spending all day with the interviewer(s), you need to eat, which brings us to . . .

**Tip #1:** Even though you’re eating, you’re still interviewing. Sometimes candidates seem to forget that they’re still being interviewed, and they become too relaxed and casual. Keep the conversation and your behavior professional. Refrain from drinking alcohol and avoid discussions that are too personally revealing.

One employer told us about a dinner interview in which a student complained about his girlfriend. This is not the appropriate occasion for airing your dirty laundry. This doesn’t mean that the only thing that you can discuss is work, but you need to be wise with your words.

Another reason employers interview candidates during meals is to see how well the applicants handle pressure.

**Tip #2:** Learn and practice dining etiquette. The best way to overcome anxiety of a stressful situation is to practice that situation. This is why individuals in high-stress occupations practice and practice and practice until they could almost do their job in their sleep. While you don’t need to rehearse dining etiquette to that extreme level, some practice definitely will help you feel more at ease.

How can you get practice? Each semester, the Career Center hosts an Etiquette Dinner ([http://careercenter.missouristate.edu/EtiquetteDinner.htm](http://careercenter.missouristate.edu/EtiquetteDinner.htm). For fall 2015, the Etiquette
Dinner is Tuesday, November 3, in the JQH Prime Overtime Club. The price to attend the event is $10.00. Contact the Career Center for more information.

Meal interviews enable employers to evaluate candidates’ social, communication, and interpersonal skills.

**Tip #3**: Take small bites. Don’t shovel the food into your mouth, and don’t feel like you need to eat every single thing on the plate. The employer is likely to ask you a question immediately after you have taken a bite of food, so small bites make it easier for you to talk.

**Tip #4**: Order food that is easy to eat, and don’t order the most expensive item on the menu. Steer away from food that could be messy (like spaghetti or barbecue). If you have to wear a bib while eating the food, then it’s not an appropriate choice. If possible, check the menu ahead of time, so you will know the choices.

**Tip #5**: Avoid adding too many specialized requests to your order, and taste your food before adding salt and pepper. It’s one thing to request your meat be cooked well done or rare, or to make a special request because of a food allergy, but if you’re putting in so many extra requests that your server has to write an entire book just for your order, then you risk giving the impression that you’re inflexible, high maintenance, or difficult to please.

**Tip #6**: Remember not to talk with food in your mouth! Also remember to mind your manners by chewing with your mouth closed, keeping your elbows off the table, and saying thank you and please.

**Tip #7**: Be polite to everyone. Treat everyone with respect. If the server brings you an incorrect order, what will you do? How do you solve problems? Do you keep the order or send it back? Whatever your decision, do not be rude to the server or obnoxious in your complaint.

These are just a few tips for interviewing during meals. Get more tips by attending the Etiquette Dinner and by visiting the Career Center’s website: [http://careercenter.missouristate.edu/MealInterviewEtiquette.htm](http://careercenter.missouristate.edu/MealInterviewEtiquette.htm)