

# American Manners and Customs-1

(A Guide for Newcomers)

Revised and updated



The Best of  
Easy English  
NEWS  
#1

**Elizabeth Claire**

**Eardley Publications**

# CONTENTS

A Letter from Elizabeth Claire	5
Introduction: What do I say? What do I do?	6
1. Please. Thank You. You're Welcome. Excuse Me. I'm Sorry.	8
2. American Names, Part I	12
3. American Names, Part II	16
4. Meeting People	20
5. "Small Talk"	24
6. Smile!	28
7. Body Language	32
8. Manners Around Doors	36
9. COVID-19, Coughs, and Colds	40
10. Table Manners, Part I	44
11. Table Manners, Part II	48
12. Restaurant Manners	52
13. Manners Between Men and Women	56
14. Visiting Someone in the Hospital	60
15. How Clean Can You Get?	64
16. Giving a Gift, Getting a Gift	68
17. Sexual Harassment	72
18. Showing Emotions	76
19. Telephone Manners	80
20. Road Manners	84
Answers	88
Glossary	91

---

## What do I say? What do I do?

Welcome to the United States!

Have you noticed that Americans behave differently from people in your country?

Do you wonder about this? *Are these Americans being **rude**\**? You worry about it too—Are *you* being rude? What is the **polite**\* way to do things? Do you feel a language **barrier**\* and a culture barrier? Do you want to feel a part of your new country? Do you wonder if that will ever happen?

Manners are different in different countries. This short book was written to explain the **invisible**\* things Americans expect from each other. It will open doors so you can feel fully a part of your new country.

The U.S. is a large nation, with people from all over the world. In this book, we'll explain the most common manners and customs you might find among many Americans. But remember, there are differences in each part of the country. There are differences between men and women and between younger people and older people. There are differences between educated and less educated, between city and country, and between rich and poor.

Take time to **observe**\* the people around you. Ask your teachers, or your American friends and neighbors, to explain manners in the **situations**\* you find yourself in.

### What are manners?

Manners are the things we do and say that help us get along with other people. Having good manners means you think about the needs and feelings of people around you. Good manners tell other

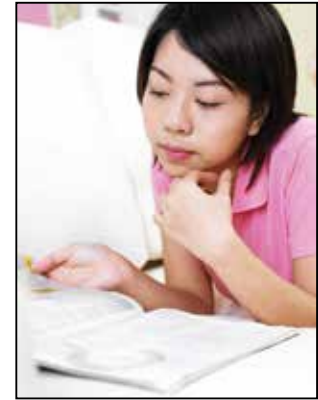
people that we are trying to be friendly and helpful. Good manners make life easy.

Where do American manners come from? Some of our manners and customs are hundreds of years old. Some manners began more **recently**\*. In 1922, Emily Post wrote a 687-page book called ***Etiquette**\* for Society and Business*.

It was very popular then. It became the guide for American middle-class and upper-class manners. People still read it and follow some of the rules she wrote about.

However, American manners have changed since 1922. The **publishers**\* of Emily Post have had to change her book many times to keep up-to-date.

Americans are generally very **informal**\*. It's part of the American belief that everyone is equal. We hope you will feel more comfortable and **at ease**\* after reading this book. Talk about the ideas here with your teachers and friends.



## Let's talk about it.

1. How do children learn manners in your home country?
2. Are there books about manners in your home country?
3. Does it seem that American manners are different from manners in your home country?
4. Are there American behaviors that confuse you?
5. Do you feel comfortable when you are with Americans? Why or why not?

## Using new words:

Match the word with its meaning.

- |  |              |
|--|--------------|
| _____ 6. not polite                      | A. etiquette |
| _____ 7. cannot be seen                  | B. rude      |
| _____ 8. comfortable and without worries | C. at ease   |
| _____ 9. rules for manners               | D. invisible |

**Write the correct word in each sentence. Choose from this list:**

**equals      different      barrier**

10. Until a person learns English, there is a language \_\_\_\_\_.
11. In different parts of the country, there are \_\_\_\_\_ manners and customs.
12. Americans believe that all people should be treated as \_\_\_\_\_.

# 1.

## Please. Thank You. You're Welcome. Excuse Me. I'm Sorry.

These are among the first words a child learns in English. They will be the most useful words for you in English, too.

You have to learn when to say them, and how much to say them.

The word *please* can go at the beginning or at the end of a sentence. *Please pass the salt.* Or, *Pass the salt, please.*

“*May I*” or “*could you*” are often used, with or without *please*: “*Could you pass the salt, please?*”



“*Give me a pencil, please,*” sounds too direct, like a **command\***. “*May I have a pencil?*” seems softer, and less direct.

“*Could you close the window?*” sounds more polite than “*Close the window, please.*”

The words alone do not make the sentence polite. A lot of the feeling of politeness is in your **tone of voice\*** when you ask for something.

Americans like to be **appreciated\***. The size of the “thank you” depends on the size of the gift or favor:

*Thanks.* (Someone **lent\*** you a pencil, or held a door for you.)

*Thanks a lot.*  
(Someone gave you a pencil, or held a very heavy door for you.)

*Thank you.*  
(Someone **paid you a compliment\***, or gave you a seat on a bus.)



*Thank you very, very much.* (Someone did you a favor that was very helpful. Someone found your keys and returned them.)

*Thank you so much.* (Someone did a favor that surprised you and made your life easier. They gave you a gift. If it was a large gift send a thank-you note as well as personally thanking the person.)

*I really appreciate this so much. How can I ever thank you enough? You are a saint\*.*  
(Someone has stopped on the road and repaired your **flat tire\***.)

*This is so wonderful. I couldn't have done this without you.*  
*Thank you so much. I'll never forget it.*

Don't **overdo\*** it. For a *small* favor, one “please” and one “thank you” are enough.



When someone says “*Thank you*” the normal **response\*** is “*You're welcome.*”

We can also say “*It was [or is] my pleasure.*” “*Think nothing of it.*” Or “*No problem.*”

If we were very happy to do a favor for someone, we might say, “*You're very welcome.*” Or “*There's no need to thank me;*”

*the pleasure\* was mine.*” “*Don’t mention\* it.*”

Americans say *excuse me* or *pardon me* in many **situations\***:

- to **apologize\*** for making an unpleasant noise, **burp\***, **belch\***, hiccup, cough, or passing gas (flatulence)
- to apologize for **disturbing\*** someone
- to apologize for bumping into a person accidentally
- to apologize for walking between two people who are speaking
- to **interrupt\*** a conversation
- to get someone’s attention so we can ask a question
- to ask a person to repeat something we didn’t understand
- to correct ourselves when we said something that was a mistake
- to leave a conversation to go do something else

A person might say “*Excuse ME!*” **sarcastically\*** when another person says something that the first person didn’t like.

“*I beg your pardon?*” may mean “*I didn’t hear you.*”

“*I’m sorry*” is used when you feel bad that



another person was hurt in some way, or if a person tells you of a sadness or loss.

“*I’m sorry.*” (You apologize for accidents that you caused, or for rudeness.)

“*I’m sorry.*” (You ate the last cookie, and your friend wanted one.)

“*I’m sorry. I was wrong.*” (You want to make up after a disagreement you had with your neighbor.)

“*I’m terribly sorry. Are you OK?*” (You ran over someone’s foot with your shopping cart at the supermarket.)

“*I’m truly sorry. I didn’t want to hurt you.*” (You are ending a relationship..)

“*I’m dreadfully\* sorry.*” (You have spilled ink on someone’s jacket.)

Sometimes “*I’m sorry*” is not enough. Offer to fix the problem you caused. “*Please let me pay for your cleaning bill.*”

Respond to the person who says “*I’m sorry*”:

“*That’s OK. No harm done.*”

“*That did hurt. But don’t worry about it. I’ll be OK in a minute.*”

“*Thanks for offering to pay the bill. I’ll let you know how much it is.*”

## Let's talk about it.

1. What are the most common polite words in English? What are the most common polite words in your native language?
2. How would you make these requests more polite?
  - a. Give me a cup of coffee.
  - b. Close the door.
  - c. Lend me a pen.
  - d. Help me do this.
3. Tell how you would thank a person who has:
  - a. helped open a door for you.
  - b. found your eyeglasses and returned them to you.
  - c. given you a new winter coat.
  - d. worked for an hour to help fix a problem you had with your computer.
4. An elderly lady has thanked you for finding her lost dog. What will you say to her?
5. You received an expensive silver picture frame for a gift. What will you write on a thank-you card?
6. What are some reasons for you to say "Excuse me"? When would you say "I'm sorry"?

## Using new words:

Match the word with its meaning.

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| _____ 7. to break into other people's conversation   | A. compliment |
| _____ 8. to do more than is needed   | B. pleasure   |
| _____ 9. to say the name of a person or object during a conversation or speech                                 | C. interrupt  |
| _____ 10. to be thankful for a gift or favor   | D. overdo     |
| _____ 11. to say something nice about a person   | E. sarcastic  |
| _____ 12. a good and happy feeling   | F. apologize  |
| _____ 13. to tell someone that you are sorry   | G. mention    |
| _____ 14. If you say the opposite of what you mean in order to show that you are annoyed, you are being _____. | H. appreciate |

**Write the correct word in each sentence. Choose from this list:**

**compliment**

**appreciate**

**end**

**overdo**

15. You can use the word "please" at the beginning or at the \_\_\_\_\_ of a sentence.
16. It's polite to show that you \_\_\_\_\_ a gift or a favor.
17. If someone pays you a \_\_\_\_\_, you can say "thank you."
18. One "thank you" is enough for a small favor. It's not necessary to \_\_\_\_\_ the thank you's.