

The **fast food** industry has had an important influence on what and how Americans eat. McDonald's, the leader in this industry, is now known throughout the world. McDonald's has made the American hamburger famous. One reason is that in every McDonald's the food is exactly the same and is cooked in exactly the same way. In addition to the nationally known burger chains (McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's), other famous fast food restaurants specialize in chicken (Kentucky Fried Chicken), Mexican food (Taco Bell), donuts (Dunkin' Donuts), and pizza (Pizza Hut, Domino's, Little Caesar's).

Although the fast food industry has restaurants in every American town, there are also local and regional differences in American food that you should look for wherever you live or travel. The differences and specialties are too numerous to mention in this small book, but you can find them. Ask, look, and explore.



1.3 Restaurants

Fast food restaurants are the same everywhere in the United States. Local restaurants offer more variety. Here are some general types to look for. **Family restaurants** are good places to bring children. The food is not very expensive and is probably typically middle-class American. These restaurants may not serve alcohol, so if you like a glass of wine or beer with your meal, ask before you sit down (see section 1.4).

In **cafeterias** you walk through a line, choose your food, put it on a tray, pay at the end of the line, and carry your food to an empty table. The food is usually inexpensive, and it is ready to eat.

Other informal places to eat are called cafes, coffee shops, sandwich shops, delis (a kind of sandwich shop), diners, and truck stops. While driving along America's highways, you may find it interesting to stop at a truck stop and listen to the conversations of the long-distance truck drivers.

Steak houses and seafood restaurants are often more formal and expensive, but they are very common.

Here are a few things you should know about American restaurants:

- Most restaurants do not allow smoking. This varies in different cities and states. Ask before you smoke.
- Many restaurants post menus in the window so you can see the prices before you enter. If they do not, it is acceptable to enter the restaurant and ask for a menu before you sit down. If it is too expensive, it is OK to leave.
- At many restaurants, lunch is less expensive than dinner.
- You can often save money on breakfast by ordering "specials."
- Bread and butter and water are usually served free with the meal.
- If you do not eat all your food you may ask for a "doggie bag." The waiter will put your uneaten food in a bag, and you can take it home.
- To ask for the check, signal the waiter with your eyes or a raised hand. If that doesn't work, you can say, "Excuse me," quietly when the waiter comes near you. Then say, "May we have the check, please?"
- The charge for service, called "the tip," is usually not included in your restaurant bill, usually called "the check." You may ask if the tip is included.
- You must calculate the tip. The normal amount is 15% to 20%. If the service is poor, you may leave less. Waiters are usually paid a low wage, and they need their tips to live on.



- There is usually a meals tax added to your restaurant bill. The amount varies from state to state.
- Waiters or servers will be both men and women.
- In some restaurants, waiters have helpers called bus boys. They set tables, bring bread and water, and clear away used plates, but they cannot take orders.

It is common in the United States to find a sign saying “PLEASE WAIT TO BE SEATED” when you enter a restaurant. This means you must wait near the sign until someone comes to show you to your seat. The wait is usually not very long. If the restaurant is crowded, you may be told there will be a wait and be asked for your name. Then you will be called by name when there is a place for you. If this happens, be sure to ask how long the wait will be before giving your name. You don’t have to stay if you don’t have enough time. If the restaurant is not crowded, you may see a sign that says, “PLEASE SEAT YOURSELF.”

In restaurants, you should be prepared to answer some questions. Here is a list:

- How many in your party?
- Would you like something to drink before you order?
- (*At breakfast*) How do you want your eggs? (soft-boiled, scrambled, poached, fried either sunny-side-up or over-easy, or in an omelet)
- What kind of toast do you want? (white, wheat, or rye)
- What kind of dressing do you want (for your salad)? (see section 1.2)
- How do you want your steak? (rare, medium, or well done)
- Baked, mashed, or fries? (potato)
- Would you like some dessert?
- Regular or decaf (coffee)?
- Do you want your coffee black or with cream and sugar?
- (*In fast food restaurants*) Is that for here or to go?
- How's everything? Is everything all right? (*Waiters usually ask this to see if you need anything and if your food is OK.*)
- How is everything? Are you still working on it? (*Are you still eating?*)

In large cities you can find a wide variety of ethnic restaurants. In small towns you may also find some special ethnic restaurants, depending on the nature of the local population. If there are Thais or Polish people in the community, you may find a Thai or Polish restaurant. All over the United States, from big cities to roadsides in the country, you will find Chinese, Italian, and Mexican restaurants. Indian, Japanese, French, and German are also common in some parts of the country.

Some restaurants have a counter at which customers can sit and eat. Many other restaurants have a bar at which customers can sit while drinking alcohol. There are almost always bottles of alcohol on shelves on the wall behind the bartender at a bar. Often it is possible to get food with alcohol at a bar. Children may always sit at a counter where only food is served, but in most of the country it is not appropriate for children to sit at a bar. Some places specialize in serving locally made beer. These may be called breweries or pubs, and yet they are appropriate for children who sit with adults at a table. However, bars, pubs, or breweries which are mostly for drinking alcohol will usually not allow children to enter, and women who are alone may want to avoid them.

1.4 Drinking and Smoking Laws

There is a law in the United States that prohibits people under the age of 21 from drinking or buying any alcoholic beverage ("drink"). When you buy or order an alcoholic drink, you may be asked to show proof of your age. You must be 21 or over. You will need a photo-ID (identification card), such as a passport or a driver's license. You will not be allowed in bars and discotheques if you are under 21. You may be stopped at the entrance and asked to show your ID. Bar owners can lose their license to serve alcoholic beverages if they serve alcohol to minors (people below the legal drinking age).

You should also be aware that there are very strict laws against drinking just before or while driving a car. In some places it is illegal to have an open can or bottle of alcohol in a car.

2.2 Names and Titles

Titles based on social class are not used in the United States. Some titles based on occupation, such as **Ambassador, Senator, Governor, Father, Rabbi, and Imam**, are used. Other occupations that usually carrying titles are: court judge, military officer, and medical or academic doctor. Individuals in other occupations are usually referred to with **Mr.** (“mister”) and **Ms** (pronounced “mizz”) followed by the last or family name. You will hear the older titles **Miss** for unmarried women and **Mrs.** (“missiz”) for married women, but most professional women usually prefer Ms. Listen. If someone is introduced as Reverend, Professor, or Miss, use that title.

Many people do not like to use titles and last names. If a person is introduced to you as “Doctor Johnson,” do not be surprised if they say “Call me Bob.” In this case, you will be too formal if you continue to say “Doctor Johnson.”

As a general rule, young people should address older people as Mr., Ms, Miss, or Mrs., or a title. This is polite. It is quite normal to say, “Hello, Mrs. Brown” but not “Hello, Mrs.” Using occupation titles alone is generally OK – “Hello, Doctor.”

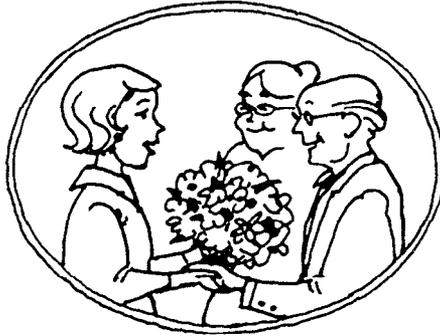
2.3 Conversation Topics

Americans often ask a lot of questions when they first meet someone, and some of these questions may seem quite personal to you. When an American does this, she or he is only looking for a common ground for building a relationship. Perhaps you will discover similar interests or abilities which can then be used as a basis for friendship.

Although Americans ask a lot of questions, until you know a person well, there are some topics that you should avoid in conversation: the person’s age and financial status, the cost of the person’s clothes or personal belongings, their personal religious beliefs, and their love (or sex) life.

2.4 Friendship

Americans are open and friendly to newcomers. Perhaps this is because they are very mobile, and they have learned to make new friends quickly. This easy friendliness does not mean, however, that they will try to develop a long and deep friendship with you. This kind of relationship takes time in the United States, as it does anywhere. Remember, people often move from one town to another, so it is not easy for them to develop long-lasting friendships.



2.5 Invitations

Americans will quickly and easily invite strangers into their homes. You will find that you are treated as “one of the family” almost immediately after you arrive. Do not be surprised at American informality. It is quite common. Your hosts will probably not give you very special guest status. You should “make yourself at home” with them. If you are invited to a home for a meal or a party, you can ask, “**Can I bring anything?**” If you are invited for a stay of one night or more, then it is appropriate to bring a small gift — flowers, candy, or some souvenir from your own country.

If you receive a written invitation, it is important to respond to it as soon as possible. Some invitations will have **R.S.V.P.** or “Please reply” written at the bottom, and these must have a reply. If a telephone number is given, then it is polite to call and accept or decline the invitation. If there is no phone number, then a written note is adequate. If you receive an invitation over the telephone,

make sure that you have correctly understood the date, time, and location. And if for some reason you should realize later that you cannot attend, then be sure to telephone to tell the person inviting you that you will not be there, and explain the reason why.

2.6 Personal Space and Privacy

These notes on personal space are very general. Customs vary in different parts of the country and with ethnic groups. However, in general, Americans don't touch each other very much in public. Touching between two people of the same sex is not common. (Touching between two men is sometimes considered a sign of homosexuality.) Touching between people of different sex is more common, especially if they are young lovers. You may see young men and women holding hands, embracing, and even kissing in public. In the past, this kind of open touching was considered very impolite. But times are changing, and nowadays people are more likely to touch and show affection in public. In fact, it isn't unusual to hug someone if you have not seen them in a long time, or if they or you are going away.



In conversations, Americans stand about 2 to 3 feet apart and often use a lot of gestures. Some gestures involve physical contact. Sympathy is shown by putting a hand on another person's shoulder. Touching the other person's hand or arm shows support, agreement, or thanks.

Americans are not especially private people. They leave the doors to their offices open, and often neighboring homes are not separated by fences or walls. It is also rare to find closed doors in homes. The doors to bathrooms are generally left open except when the room is in use.



2.7 Time

Being on time is important in the United States. A few guidelines are given here.

When you are invited for a meal, you should arrive within 5 to 15 minutes of the time specified in the invitation. Do not arrive earlier, because people usually do their own cooking, and they may be working until the last minute to get things ready for you. If you are going to be late, it is polite to call and inform the people who have invited you. Then they can prepare the meal according to the time you will actually arrive.

When you are invited to a party or dance, you can arrive up to half an hour “late.” For cocktail parties and receptions, a time period is usually specified during which you are expected to arrive and leave. You may arrive at any time during that period, but remember that you are also expected to leave by the ending time indicated.

For movies and theater productions, you will want to arrive at least 10 minutes ahead of time to get your ticket/program and be seated. You should also be at least 10 minutes early for weddings, funerals, lectures, and sports events.

For business appointments, you should arrive exactly on time or a few minutes before your appointment. If the person you are seeing is busy, they may keep you waiting, but you should still be on time.

COUNTRY FACTS



Driven from land given to his people by a U.S. treaty, Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce tried to escape to Canada in the winter of 1877. He was tracked down and surrendered in Montana very near Canada. He said, "It is cold, and we have no blankets; the little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no blankets, no food. No one knows where they are — perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children, and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs! I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."

After the Civil War, from 1870 to 1916, the American economy again grew rapidly, driven by increasing agricultural production (as new farms spread across the Great Plains) and rapid industrial growth (stimulated by the expansion of the railroad system, technological inventions, and immigration). The value of goods produced during this period increased ten times, and the country grew in many ways as a result. In 1917, the United States entered into **World War I** in Europe and played an important role until the war ended on November 11, 1918. This cost many lives but also stimulated the economy. After the war the economic growth continued. The wealthy invested in all kinds of industries and businesses. Speculators invested in the stock market, which went up and up. People of all kinds borrowed money, betting that the boom would continue.

Then in 1929 the stock market collapsed and banks began to fail. **The Great Depression** began. Within a few years, millions of workers lost their jobs. In 1932 the new President, Roosevelt, said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." He was right, but the people had lost confidence; they were frightened. The American Dream was a nightmare. There were many reasons for the collapse. Bad industrial and labor practices in the U.S., revolutions and political instability in Europe, China, India, and Mexico disrupting world trade, and a ten-year drought in the Great Plains starting in 1930. The drought and ignorant farming practices caused an environmental disaster called the The Great Dust Bowl. People starved.

Many other countries had similar problems, and as a result, ruthless nationalist leaders gained power in Germany, Italy, and Japan with promises of changing the economic situation. Adolf Hitler in Germany and a group of military leaders in Japan began conquering neighboring countries. In the Soviet Union (Russia), Stalin, the communist dictator, purged all opposition and built up his secret police and his military.

There are over 7,000 **art museums** in the United States. Many of these museums have special collections of American art. The most important collections can be seen in the Los Angeles County Museum, the Chicago Art Institute, the Butler Institute in Youngstown, Ohio, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and, in New York City, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.



*Louis Armstrong
(1901-1971)
– aka Satchmo*

The African American experience has been the most important influence on **music in America**. In the nineteenth century, African Americans developed religious songs called **spirituals**. These choral songs, based on African call-and-response patterns, led to a variety of musical forms, from gospel music to blues and jazz. The **jazz** of African Americans is a unique contribution to the music of the contemporary world, from pop to rock to classical music.

Throughout the twentieth century, American writers, musicians, dancers, painters, sculptors, craftsmen, and architects continued to find ways to express both the diversity and the unity of the American experience. Two art forms stand out among all others: the cinema and the skyscraper. The cinema, popularly called the **movies**, along with its cousin, television, dominates mass entertainment worldwide. The **skyscraper** dominates the skyline of America's cities as a symbol of America as the most powerful country in the world. As a symbol, the skyscrapers of the World Trade Center in New York City became the target of terrorism.