

RULES OF CIVILITY

51 durable rules, after George Washington — for keeping yourself in check

1. Read the room, and act accordingly — nothing you do is really private.
2. Don't let your face give you away. Control your tells.
3. Be quietly helpful — fix small problems for people without making a show of it.
4. Care about how you look and carry yourself, but never look like you're checking.
5. Never gloat, even over someone who had it coming.
6. Justice can satisfy you. Cruelty in watching it happen shouldn't.
7. Give real courtesy generously, without keeping score of who goes first.
8. Stand up for people, regardless of their rank relative to you.
9. Be brief. Say what's necessary and stop.
10. Treat people below you with warmth, never condescension.
11. Don't fake expertise you don't have, especially with someone vulnerable.
12. Don't lecture people on their own specialty.
13. Don't inflict your good mood on someone who's struggling.
14. Judge people by their effort and intent, not just whether they succeeded.
15. Criticize privately. Choose your moment. Never do it in visible anger.
16. Take correction gracefully in public; if you were right, say so later, privately.
17. Don't joke about serious things. Avoid cruel wit. Don't laugh at your own jokes.
18. Hold yourself to the same standard you'd hold others to. Lead by example.
19. No cursing, no personal attacks — not even at people who deserve it.
20. Don't believe gossip about someone just because it's flying around.
21. Choose your company deliberately. Alone is better than bad company.
22. No malice, no envy. Let reason govern you, especially when you're angry.
23. Hold the same standard of conduct in front of people with less power as anyone else.
24. Don't pressure friends into betraying a confidence.
25. Match what you say to who you're talking to — don't waste people's time or talk over their heads.
26. Don't bring grim or heavy subjects into a happy moment. Keep your unfiltered self for real intimates.
27. Don't take pride in your own achievements, wit, wealth, or name.
28. Read the room before joking. Never mock someone's misfortune.
29. No insults — joking or serious — even when provoked.
30. Be approachable. Don't be visibly withdrawn when people need engagement.
31. Don't tear others down. Don't over-command people.
32. Don't intrude where you're not wanted. Don't give advice unasked — and when asked, be brief.
33. Don't take sides in others' disputes unless you must. Don't be stubborn about your own view.
34. Correcting others is for those who actually have authority over them — not for peers.

- 35.** Don't stare at or interrogate people about their flaws. Keep confidences.
- 36.** Think before you speak. Let reason govern passion.
- 37.** Don't interrupt. Let people finish their own thoughts.
- 38.** Discuss business at the right time. Don't whisper in mixed company — it looks like scheming.
- 39.** Let someone else's credit stand uncontested. Don't one-up their moment.
- 40.** Don't spread news you haven't verified. Be careful naming sources. Keep secrets.
- 41.** Don't drone on. Read whether people are actually interested.
- 42.** Don't pry into other people's business.
- 43.** Don't overcommit — but once you've given your word, keep it.
- 44.** Deliver hard truths calmly and carefully, regardless of who you're speaking to.
- 45.** Don't argue just to win. Let others actually speak. Defer to real expertise and consensus.
- 46.** Be composed. Don't disagree just for the sake of disagreeing.
- 47.** Don't speak badly of people who aren't there to defend themselves.
- 48.** Accept the seat of honor gracefully if it's genuinely offered — false modesty can be its own disruption.
- 49.** Speak of serious things seriously. Honor the people who raised you, whatever they had.
- 50.** Choose recreations that build you up, not ones that wear you down.
- 51.** Guard your conscience above everything else.

Adapted from the 110 Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour, copied by hand by George Washington, age 14.