



Excerpt from... **Afternoon Tea~Tips, Terms and Traditions**  
By Ellen Easton©2004 All Rights Reserved

In preface to my article *Etiquette Faux Pas and Other Misconceptions About Afternoon Tea*, I would like to clarify the distinctions between the classification of class status, etiquette, social protocols, morals and ethics as per the dining/afternoon tea experience.

Etiquette and social protocols are not synonymous with morals or ethics. One has nothing to do with the other. A perfectly well mannered person may not have any morals, whilst, in reverse, a highly ethical person may not have the command of any social graces.

In addition, the term *high class* or *upper class* is often confused with one's economic/financial status.

In particular, during the Victorian Era, the upper class was not a social state one could achieve by economic measures. One was born into the upper class. The Victorian upper class represented a status of birthright that included ancestral lineage, where one received one's education and how one behaved and was received within a certain social circle. Many a famous author has chronicled the trials and tribulations of the "*impoverished upper class*".

Perhaps in today's modern times of the twenty-first century, the term upper class has transformed to become an identifying marker associated with one's economic/financial status. For the purpose of relating the protocols and etiquette of afternoon tea, all references apply to the Victorian era from whence afternoon tea was born.

Please note, the etiquette and protocols explained are not the rules of Ellen Easton, but the rules of foundation as created and passed down from the Victorian era.

As an example, the term "*pinkies up*" is just that, terminology. It does not mean that one should hold one's pinkie up in the air. If one reads the explanation carefully, one will learn the correct manner in which one holds one's teacup.

If one were to ask me my definition of the term class, I would have every hope that true class transcends one's economic status, race, creed and color. My definition of class is to be well mannered, considerate and to treat all others with dignity.

Afternoon tea was created to foster friendship. May all of your afternoons always be filled with good tea and good friends.

*Ellen Easton*



After reviewing a copy of *Etiquette Faux Pas and Other Misconceptions About Afternoon Tea* by Ellen Easton, sources in the British Royal Household confirm the information as correct with the comments: "We would not make any amendments to the text" and "What a good article." - September, 2004

*Etiquette Faux Pas and Other Misconceptions About Afternoon Tea*  
By Ellen Easton ©2004 All Rights Reserved

Due to the new popularity of Afternoon Tea many people have jumped on the bandwagon, including hotels, caterers, party planners and protocol & etiquette "experts". While their enthusiasm is well intended, unfortunately a great deal of misinformation is being perpetuated by these "experts".

While etiquette and customs do evolve over time, some issues are not negotiable. Just because some customs are practiced does not validate the behavior.

Of course the tea police will not be lurking behind your kettles, but if one is going to embrace such a lovely and genteel genre I would like to set the record straight. I feel privileged to be able to share with you the protocols that have been passed down from century to century.

**1. Pinkies Up!** Originally, all porcelain teacups were made in China, starting around 620 A.D. These small cups had no handles. In order for one not to spill the hot liquid onto oneself, the proper way to hold the vessel was to place one's thumb at the six o'clock position and one's index and middle fingers at the twelve o'clock position, while gently raising one's pinkie up for balance.

In Europe, when the Meissen Porcelain Company, in 1710, introduced the handle to the teacup, the tradition continued. By placing one's fingers to the front and back of the handle with one's pinkie up again allows balance. It is not an affectation, but a graceful way to avoid spills.

Never loop your fingers through the handle, nor grasp the vessel bowl with the palm of your hand.

**2. Napkins-Placement and Protocol:** A truly formal table has only one correct placement for a napkin, to the left side of the place setting. The napkin should be folded with the closed edge to the left and the open edge to the right. There are no exceptions. This rule applies for rectangular, triangular and square shape folds. Note, that originally less formal affairs allowed a fancy folded napkin to be placed in the center of the place setting. Today, formal affairs permit a center placed napkin.

Contrary to recent “*experts*” advice, there is never a proper moment for one to place one’s napkin on a chair. The proper protocol, when excusing oneself from the table, whether during or after a dining experience, is to gently place one’s napkin to the left side of your place setting. This rule is not negotiable for the simple reason if one’s napkin were soiled it could damage the seat covering, damage that may be either costly to repair or irreplaceable. While the risk for soiling a cloth or one’s garment also exists, they can be laundered with relative ease.

Upon completion of a dining experience, a napkin folded with a crease and placed to the left side of your place setting indicates to your host or hostess that you wish to be invited back.

The expression, “*to make ends meet*”, derives from the 1729 French Court. The dress code for men included decorative stiff ruffled collars. When dining, a napkin was tied around the neck to protect their collars, hence the expression.

*Twelve- inch napkins are used for Afternoon Tea service.*

**3. How to eat a scone:** Again, contrary to recent “*experts*” advice {*now I understand how rumors get started!*} it is not only improper to slice a scone, in its ENTIRETY, horizontally to be slathered in jam and cream, it is very common behavior. Although some establishments will serve a sliced scone pre-prepared with jam and cream, this is merely a gimmick introduced to save time. It may now be “*acceptable*” but it will never be correct. A hostess should instruct and insist that the scones, for large functions or buffets, be made smaller into bite size, “*standing room*” size.

The correct manner in which one eats a scone is the same manner in which one eats a dinner roll. Simply break off a bite size only piece, place it on your plate and then apply, with your bread and butter knife, the jam and cream. A fork is not used to eat a scone. Please, no dipping!

**4. Afternoon Tea food placement for a three-tier curate stand:**

Top Tier = Scones  
Middle Tier = Savories and Tea sandwiches  
Bottom Tier = Sweets

The protocol of placing the scones on the top tier is due to the fact that during the 1800s when the genre of Afternoon Tea first became popular, and modern kitchen conveniences did not exist, a warming dome was placed over the scones. The dome would only fit on the top tier. The savories and tea sandwiches, followed by the sweets, were placed on the middle and bottom tiers, respectively. At the progression of each course, service would be provided to remove each tier.

**5. No Smoking.** Aside from the health issues, the smoke will be absorbed into the tea and ruin the flavor.

**6. Stirring Tea and Spoon Placement:** Do not stir your tea, with your teaspoon, in sweeping circular motions. Place your teaspoon at the six o'clock position and softly fold the liquid towards the twelve o'clock position two or three times. Never leave your teaspoon in your teacup. When not in use, place your teaspoon on the right side of the tea saucer. Never wave or hold your teacup in the air. When not in use, place the teacup back in the tea saucer. If you are at a buffet tea hold the tea saucer in your lap with your left hand and hold the teacup in your right hand. When not in use, place the teacup back in the tea saucer and hold in your lap.

**7. Drinking Tea:** Do not use your tea to wash down food. Sip, don't slurp, your tea and swallow before eating.

Milk...before or after? Originally all teacups in Europe were made from soft paste porcelain. The milk was added first to temper the cups from cracking. Once, hard paste porcelain was discovered in Europe, by Bottger, in 1710, for the Meissen Porcelain factory, it was no longer necessary to temper the cups. Hence, it makes more sense to add milk after the tea has brewed.

As we are all aware, the correct brewing of tea cannot be judged by its color, therefore milk after is a wiser choice, but either choice is correct. Note, China did have hard paste porcelain before Europe, however, they did not use milk in their tea, as the blends were white, oolong & green. The reason the West calls porcelain china is because China was the country of origin for hard paste porcelain.

**8. Place settings:** When in doubt, use the utensils from the outside towards the inside of the place setting. A petit knife and fork may be used together for use on an open face sandwich, preferably not on a closed sandwich. If savories are properly made, nothing will be dripping or gooey. However, with the fun of nontraditional foods now served on Afternoon Tea menus, this is not always the case. A petit knife and fork is proper for use with one's pastries.

Never place used utensils on a cloth or table. When not in use rest the utensil on the right side of the corresponding plate.

Sugar Tongs (3 1/4" to 6 1/2 ". The longer versions are called sugar cutters or sugar nips): The word tong derives from the European-Indonesian word *denk*, which means "to bite".

Sugar tongs were first introduced, in Europe, in 1780 to be used with compressed sugar. The compressed sugar was sold in cone shapes resembling the hat of a witch. They were called a hat. This is where the expression "I'll eat my hat" comes from.

Sugar tongs = always. It is not about "old" -to use tongs versus "young-to use one's fingers." It is about sanitary conditions and respect for those you are serving. It is unhygienic to touch another's food...full stop, plain and simple. What if one had rubbed their nose, run their fingers through their hair, used the facilities and not washed their hands or has a skin condition need I say more? I wouldn't want this person to be touching my food. Certainly in a public food establishment it would, in fact, be against the law.

When not in use, sugar tongs are placed either beside the sugar bowl or draped over the handle of the sugar bowl.

*Sugar artists were once as revered as goldsmiths.  
One who possessed sugar was considered powerful.*

**9. Afternoon Tea or Low Tea vs. High Tea:** Please do not refer to your afternoon tea as a high tea. Remember, a high tea is served in the late afternoon or early evening {5 PM to 7 PM} taking the place of dinner. Served at a “high” table with seated place settings. The foods are heartier and consist of salads, one or two hot dishes, pot pies, cold chicken, sliced meats, cakes, fruit tarts, custards and fresh fruits. The tea may be served hot or iced. The addition of any supper dish would be appropriate.

**10. Proper Service of Lemon Slice vs. Lemon Wedge:** A lemon slice can float in the teacup. Traditionally, the lemon slice would also contain a clove in the center of the lemon slice. The floating lemon slice continues to enhance the flavor of the tea. If one is serving a wedge of lemon, traditionally the wedge is covered in gauze or tied in a cheesecloth. This is to avoid the seeds and juice from squirting when squeezed. If one does not have a lemon press or squeezer, it is proper to use your fingers to gently squeeze the juice of the wedge into your teacup and then place the used wedge on either the side of your tea saucer or any service plate provided on the table.

**11. \*Health Benefits-Green vs. Oolong vs. Black Tea:** All tea blends are created from the Camellia Sinensis plant. The only difference is in the fermenting-oxidation process, which cause the enzyme changes. While fermented is the customary term used, it is actually oxidation, not fermentation that is occurring.

Green = unoxidized - unfermented  
Oolong = partially oxidized - partially fermented  
Black = fully oxidized - fully fermented

\*You will benefit from the health properties regardless of the fermentation process. It is the interaction of the natural flavonoids, fluorides and polyphenols, rich in antioxidants, which determine the free radicals defusing in one’s cells. This process stimulates the immune system and is said to inhibit the spread of disease.

\*It has been reported drinking only two cups of tea per day reduces the rate of heart disease & blood pressure, inhibits the production of platelets leading to blood clots and the growth of tumors. The natural fluorides help to prevent tooth decay. Best of all, while not proven, it has been reported that tea drinking helps to stimulate the decrease in excess body fat! **Note: tea does not cure disease. Always check with your doctor before beginning any health program.**

**TEA TRAVELS™, TEA IS THE LUXURY EVERYONE CAN AFFORD™, Wishing You Happy TEA TRAVELS!™ are the trade marked property of Ellen Easton/RED WAGON PRESS. None of the aforementioned ©materials may be printed or posted in any devise, electronic, social network or otherwise to be invented, nor may the ©materials be used in any commercial manner. The ©mataterials may be used for personal use only. All Rights Reserved.**

**ELLEN EASTON**, an afternoon tea, etiquette and lifestyle authority author of **AFTERNOON TEA... TIPS, TERMS and TRADITIONS, A TEA PARTY PLANNER ,The Gift of Good Manners™ and Good Sense For Success™ (RED WAGON PRESS)**, is a consultant to the hospitality and retail industries, **including The Waldorf=Astoria, The Plaza, Lady Mendl's**

Tea Salon, The Pierre & The Mark, believes **TEA IS THE LUXURY EVERYONE CAN AFFORD™**.



Excerpt from... **Afternoon Tea~Tips, Terms and Traditions**  
By Ellen Easton©2004 All Rights Reserved

### *FAQ about AFTERNOON TEA*

#### **1. Does one drink tea or take tea?**

One drinks tea. During the Victorian era, the term to take tea was used by the lower classes and considered a vulgar expression by the upper classes.

#### **2. Why is the shape of a teapot different from a coffee or chocolate pot?**

The teapot is designed with a lower rounded body to insure the tealeaves have the proper room for expansion during the infusion process. The lower placement of the spout on the vessel allows for the tea to be poured without interfering with the leaves.

#### **3. What is the correct placement of the teapot on the table?**

The spout of the teapot and the teakettle faces the hostess or pourer.

#### **4. Are tea urns used for brewing or infusing tea?**

No. Tea urns were designed to heat and hold hot water for larger quantities of water. Their function was the same as a teakettle. Ideally, one would dispense the hot water from the urn into the teapot. *“Bring the pot to the kettle, not the kettle to the pot.”*

#### **5. How does a teacup differ from a coffee or chocolate cup?**

Traditionally a cup equals four ounces. However, the time of day and the beverage served will dictate the proper size of the service piece. Except for demitasse cups, which are served half full, all other cups are served three quarters full. A teacup is 3 1/4” to 3 3/4” in diameter and 2” to 2 1/2” in height. The companion saucer ranges from 5 1/4” to 5 5/8” across. A teacup is shallow and wider than a coffee or chocolate cup, giving the beverage a chance to temper before drinking.

#### **6. What is a moustache cup?**

A moustache cup is a nineteenth century variation of the teacup created in England by Harvey Adams. It is designed with a slit ledge projecting from the front side of the rim, allowing the tea to flow through while a gentleman's moustache remains dry resting on the top lip.

### **7. Why in older pictures of tea settings are spoons placed across the top of a teacup?**

Tea was very expensive during the early years of its popularity. As such, the actual tea wares were small in size. There was no room for a teaspoon to rest on the saucer. A guest rested their teaspoon on top of their teacup as an indication they had had sufficient tea. This was a signal to the hostess to stop pouring tea. Today, to indicate the same signal, due to the larger size of the teacup and saucer, the proper placement of the spoon would be across the top of your saucer, not the cup.

### **8. When drinking tea does one lift the teacup and saucer or just the teacup?**

If one is seated at a table, the proper manner to drink tea is to raise the teacup only, placing it back into the saucer in between sips.

If you are at a buffet tea, hold the tea saucer in your lap with your left hand and hold the teacup in your right hand. When not in use, place the teacup back in the tea saucer and hold in your lap.

In either event, never wave or hold your teacup in the air.

### **9. What is a tea plate?**

Native to England and Europe, tea plates were customized to hold a teacup without a saucer. The plate was embedded with a shallow well to secure the teacup. The foods and tea were served together on one plate. When one is using separate tea service- pieces the customary size today is either a salad/dessert plate of seven to eight inches or a bread and butter plate of six to seven inches.

### **10. Where does the expression "not my cup of tea" come from?**

To refer to one as "*not my cup of tea*" derives from the fifteenth century Japanese Teatism. "*No tea to him.*" As one "*insusceptible to the seriocomic interests of the personal drama.*" It is used to describe those one does not care for.

### **11. How is a traditional English trifle made?**

Ruth Darley's advice, whether made from scratch or not, for an easy and quick English trifle recipe. Preferably set in a large footed bowl, alternate layers of the following ingredients: sponge or pound cake moistened with Sherry, egg custard or pudding, sliced strawberries, whipped cream and slivered almonds, repeat layers until bowl is filled. Fruit juice may be substituted for Sherry. Custard and pudding flavors may be changed to taste as well as seasonal berries.

### **12. What are the proper protocols for wearing gloves at an afternoon tea?**

The protocols for wearing gloves are the same, whether one is attending an afternoon tea or any other event where foods and beverages are served.

While gloves are often highly designed with decorations and adornments, their sole purpose is to cover and protect ones hands from the elements.

When greeting another, remove the glove from the right hand; place the removed glove in your left hand and shake hands skin to skin.

It is improper to dine with ones gloves on. Remove your gloves before sitting down to dine.

The exception is for long, formal gloves with buttons at the wrist. It is acceptable to unbutton, remove ones fingers and hands and fold back, to the wrist, the lower portion of the glove without removing the upper portion from your arm.

If the gloves have no wrist buttons, the gloves should be removed in their entirety before dining. {Gloves were left on when dancing to prevent the perspiration from one's hands from soiling the clothing of the other.}

**13. *Is it improper to turn over the China or tea wares to see where they were manufactured?***

While one's desire to learn about the origins of the china wares set on the tea table can be of great curiosity, it is improper to turn these objects over for inspection, especially in view of one's host or hostess.

**14. *Is it OK to set a table with the teacup turned upside down inside the saucer?***

Contrary to the recent advice of some of the etiquette and protocol classes, *never* does one set a tea table, or any table, with the tea cup upside down in the saucer. To set a table in this manner is not only incorrect, it is gauche behavior.

**15. *Who pours the first cup of tea?***

It is customary for the hostess to pour the first cup of tea. If in a public setting, it is customary for the wait staff to pour the first cup of tea. Prior to pouring the tea, one is asked if they prefer their tea weak or strong, with or without milk, sugar, honey or lemon.

**16. *What do I do with my tea bag once the tea is brewed?*** Remove the tea bag from the cup and place it on a side saucer or in a slop bowl. Do not use the string to wrap around or squeeze the tea bag.

**17. *What is the difference between Clotted Cream and Devon Cream?*** Clotted Cream contains a minimum of 55% milk fat, while Devon Cream's fat content is lower at 48% milk fat. Devon Cream comes from the cows of Devon, England.

**18. *What do I do with my iced teaspoon if no saucer has been placed under the glass?*** Either place the iced teaspoon on the side of another plate or ask the server or hostess to remove the spoon from the table. Never leave the spoon in the glass especially when actually drinking your tea.

**Rules, rules and more rules...the best etiquette of all is to relax and have a good time without noticing the Faux Pas of others!**

**WISHING YOU HAPPY TEA TRAVELS!™ Ellen Easton**

**TEA TRAVELS™, TEA IS THE LUXURY EVERYONE CAN AFFORD!™, Wishing You Happy TEA TRAVELS!™, are the trade marked property of Ellen Easton/RED WAGON PRESS. None of the aforementioned ©materials may be printed or posted in any devise, electronic, social network or otherwise to be invented, nor may the ©materials be used in any commercial manner. The ©materials may be used for personal use only.**

**Ellen Easton's** interest in tea is ancestral. Ellen's family can trace its tea roots to the early 1800s, when European ancestors, in 1834-41, introduced tea plants from Assam, India and China, to the Colony of Ceylon, greatly contributing to the development of the Colony of Ceylon by building one of the largest and best cultivated tea plantations on the island.

*"Ellen Easton's book is packed with great tea tips. The book's very essence is to help its readers feel comfortable and familiar with the experience of afternoon tea. Enjoy!"* **Peggy Post-Director, The Emily Post Institute.**

After reviewing a copy of *Etiquette Faux Pas and Other Misconceptions About Afternoon Tea* by

Ellen Easton, sources in the **British Royal Household** confirm the information as correct with the comments: "*We would not make any amendments to the text*" and "*What a good article.*"

*"It has been a pleasure working with you in regard to the Plaza's tea service. Your suggestions and helpful hints concerning tea etiquette are being implemented in order to better our guest's dining experience. You have been a great help to The Plaza. Thank you."* **The Plaza, NYC, NY**

*"We knew that to create a successful program we required the expertise of a true professional. It is clear that your wealth of knowledge and your passion for the world of tea made this new endeavor a true success story. Your relentless efforts to seek perfection through education and training made a tremendous impact, and was received with praises by both line professionals and guests. Thank you....you have taught us that there are no limits to the rites of afternoon tea."* **Waldorf = Astoria Hotel, NYC, NY**