



Life Skill #22: How to Send A Proper Invitation

Invitations get an unfair diss in this off-the-cuff, come-as-you-are, check-yes-no-maybe age. But, really, a proper invite is by far the most important social lubricant in your party arsenal, more vital than your mother's recipe for smoked bluefish pate or the three bottles of Old Overholt stashed in the liquor cabinet. Simply put: Invitations get the word out so people — *your* friends and family — come to *your* party. That makes your job easier.

"As the host, you want people to have a good time," says Anna Post, co-author of "Emily Post's Etiquette, 18th Edition" and a spokeswoman for the Emily Post Institute, based in Burlington, Vt. "You don't want to have anything stress you out. Planning makes things go more smoothly."

Invitations are part of that planning. Extending an invitation is easy; as with all skills, there are some rules to follow, but they're designed to make the party all the merrier for you and your guests.

Post says invitations give guests an idea of what to expect, whether the party is a backyard barbecue or an important anniversary dinner. Sent out early enough, they help prospective guests arrange their schedules so they can attend. And those all-important RSVPs tell the host who is coming so there's enough food and drink, space and, possibly, staff to accommodate the party.

Weddings and perhaps a swanky black-tie gala are the only occasions these days where a paper invitation sent by mail is still required.

Here are some guidelines for hosts from Post and Nancy R. Mitchell, owner of The Etiquette Advocate (<http://etiquetteadvocate.com>), a company providing etiquette and protocol training and consulting in Washington, D.C.

Degree of difficulty: Easy to medium

Clarify who's invited: Be clear. Adults only? Refer to the grown-ups. A party for everyone? Add the phrase "and family." Mitchell also says hosts need to make sure names, courtesy titles and addresses are correct.

Dress code: Spell out what guests should wear if you want a certain look to your party or if the venue, such as a country club, has a dress code. But be clear. Phrases like "dressy casual" or "patio attire" will deliver the message, Mitchell says.

No panhandling: Do not mention gifts, or the lack thereof, anywhere on the invitation. For weddings, do not include registry or gift information with the invitation. "In poor taste," declares

the website of the Emily Post Institute. The rule is slightly relaxed for bridal or baby showers: Registry information and "color preferences or sizes should be noted on a separate insert." Why the sensitivity?

"Gifts are not obligatory; they are supposed to be from the heart," says Mitchell, who believes that mentioning gifts on invitations makes it appear as though that's your focus. Ditto, she says, for the phrase "no gifts." "You need to spread the word another way," she says.

Pony up: If you are going to host, host, Post says, plan to pay for the event, unless splitting the bill is discussed with those invited in advance.

Skip the third party: Hosts must contact all guests directly with an invitation. "Don't outsource" the task to friends or relatives of prospective guests, Post adds. It implies you don't care enough to extend the invite yourself.

When to send invitations

- Wedding: 6 to 8 weeks
- Bridal shower: 4 weeks
- Anniversary party: 3 to 6 weeks
- Graduation party, baby shower: 3 weeks
- Cocktail party: 1 to 4 weeks
- Casual party: Up to 2 weeks

by Bill Daley

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