



NEWS for September 2026
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Greetings Sir Knights!

By age 16, Washington had copied out, by hand, 110 Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation. They are based on a set of rules composed by French Jesuits in 1595. Presumably they were copied out as part of an exercise in penmanship assigned by young Washington's schoolmaster. The first English translation of the French rules appeared in 1640, and are ascribed to Francis Hawkins the 12-year-old son of a doctor. Today many, if not all of these rules, sound a little fussy if not downright silly. It would be easy to dismiss them as outdated and appropriate to a time of powdered wigs and quills, but they reflect a focus that is increasingly difficult to find. They all have, in common, a focus on other people rather than the narrow focus of our own self-interests that we find so prevalent today. Fussy or not, they represent more than just manners. They are the small sacrifices that we should all be willing to make for the good of all and the sake of living together. These rules proclaim our respect for others and in turn give us the gift of self-respect and heightened self-esteem.

Richard Brookhiser, in his book on Washington wrote that "all modern manners in the western world were originally aristocratic. Courtesy meant behavior appropriate to a court; chivalry comes from chevalier – a knight. Yet Washington was to dedicate himself to freeing America from a court's control. Could manners survive the operation? Without realizing it, the Jesuits who wrote them, and the young man who copied them, were

outlining and absorbing a system of courtesy appropriate to equals and near-equals. When the company for whom the decent behavior was to be performed expanded to the nation, Washington was ready. Parson Weems got this right, when he wrote that it was 'no wonder every body honoured him who honoured every body.'"

The Rules

- 1. Every action done in company, ought to be with some sign of respect, to those that are present.**
- 2. When in company, put not your hands to any part of the body, not usually discovered.**
- 3. Show nothing to your friend that may affright him.**
- 4. In the presence of others sing not to yourself with a humming noise, nor drum with your fingers or feet.**
- 5. If you cough, sneeze, sigh, or yawn, do it not loud but privately; and speak not in your yawning, but put your handkerchief or hand before your face and turn aside.**
- 6. Sleep not when others speak, sit not when others stand, speak not when you should hold your peace, walk not on when others stop.**
- 7. Put not off your clothes in the presence of others, nor go out of your chamber half dressed.**
- 8. At play and at fire it is good manners to give place to the last comer, and affect not to speak louder than ordinary.**
- 9. Spit not in the fire, nor stoop low before it, neither put your hands into the flames to warm them, nor set your feet upon the fire especially if there be meat before it.**
- 10. When you sit down, keep your feet firm and even, without putting one on the other or crossing them.**
- 11. Shift not yourself in the sight of others nor gnaw your nails.**
- 12. Shake not the head, feet, or legs, roll not the eyes lift not one eyebrow higher than the other, wry not the mouth, and bedew no mans face with your spittle, by approaching too near him when you speak.**
- 13. Kill no vermin as fleas, lice, or ticks in the sight of others, if you see any filth or thick spittle put your foot dexterously upon it. If it be upon the clothes of your companions, put it off privately, and if it be upon your own clothes return thanks to him who puts it off.**
- 14. Turn not your back to others especially in speaking, jog not the table or desk on which another reads or writes, lean not upon any one.**

15. Keep your nails clean and short, also your hands and teeth clean yet without showing any great concern for them.

I challenge each of us to explore these virtues and exemplify them through our deeds and actions.

In His Name,

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Grand Commandery of Knights Templar in Washington**