

How to Be Polite in America: Written on the Plane as a Reminder to Self

1. When you need to get past a stranger in a narrow aisle, do not physically ram into them and jerk your way past as you say, "Excuse me." You have to wait until there is enough room to pass without making physical contact; Americans are very inefficient about space like this.
2. No matter how close the trashcan is to the toilet, you're not supposed to put your used TP there. The nice thing is that this rule is universal, so you don't have to memorize exceptions.
3. If you tell your friend you can give her a ride somewhere, she expects that to mean you have an entire seat of your car reserved for her that she won't have to share with anybody. She also expects that seat to be *inside" the vehicle.
4. Americans love shoes, so make sure you wear them every time you leave the house. They love it even more when you keep your shoes on the entire time you are gone from the house, because Americans dislike your bare feet as much as they like your shoes.
5. Don't greet your friend by saying, "I've missed you; it's been a while!! You know, you are definitely getting fatter."
6. Ripping into your meat and then reaching into your mouth to pull out bits of cartilage and gristle is a no-go. It's better to be delicate about eating, even if that means you waste a bit of meat that was hard to get off the bone, because wasting meat is not a sin here.
7. Your neighbors will not get excited if you put up a volleyball net over the street and play your game right in the road, even if you invite them to play.
8. Use cold words, like "sir" or "miss," when addressing strangers. Stay away from "brother" for a man, "dear little sister" for an elderly woman, and "beautiful" or "my queen" for a female you want to sell something to. However, you can make up for these colder words by giving great big smiles to everyone you talk to, and they won't think you're asking them out, so that's cool.
9. Driving is not like coloring. Going outside of the lines is considered illegal, not creative.
10. Don't kiss people when you say hello. Just don't do it. You missed your guy friends-- but you didn't miss them like that.

I know it's a hard list to keep; I'm particularly struggling with rules 1, 2, and 4 right now. But whenever the cultural brain fog kicks in, just remind yourself it's all worth it: they have tacos in America.