

En Vogue Etiquette, Part I: The Handshake

By *Melanie G. Lammers*

Etiquette is much more about the small things than the big ones. For instance, not only should you stand up when shaking a person's hand, but your handshake should also come across as strong and confident. "Strong," however, is not to be confused with "bone-crushing," and "confident" is not to be confused with "extremity groping." Neither of these approaches makes for a positive first impression.

The strong grip, for example, is less about the tightness of your hand muscles and more about how far into the handshake you reach. Rather than squeezing the life out of another person's fingers, try making sure that you slide your hand all the way in. The area of skin on your palm that stretches from your index finger to your thumb should come into contact with that of your fellow conversationalist. This also wards off any potential for a kiss-the-ring shake, wherein one person only grips the fingers of the other, creating a help-the-lady-out-of-her-carriage image that appears whimsical but unimpressive, to say the least.

However, your handshake should not become so "over-confident" that you go beyond the other person's comfort zone into uncharted territory. Unless initiated or invited by the other party, wrist

gripping, fingertip movement, and bro hugs are unacceptable.

Let me explain. Wrist gripping occurs when a person reaches out for a handshake and the other party comes across horizontally to grab that person's wrist rather than his or her palm, passing the boundaries of our society's accepted personal space by effectively "movin' on up" the arm.

Fingertip movement of any kind is also unacceptable and has the potential to make the other person extremely uncomfortable. It may come across as a sign of nervousness—or even an unwanted hand massage. Also, it can be slightly painful for the other person if you have long fingernails.

Bro hugs are an entirely different breed and are not to be introduced under any circumstance unless the other party is physically compelling you to reciprocate. These greetings are typically used among people who are already very familiar with one another. One hand pulls on the handshake while the other reaches out to tap the other party's shoulder or back in a frontal hug.

Some precautions can be taken to prevent your handshake from becoming a flop in the heat of the moment. Avoid applying lotion or hand cream within 15 minutes of the anticipated meeting. If sweaty or clammy hands

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are bad, what is the person going to think of you if you leave an oily lotion residue on his or her palm? Sometimes, lotion aside, sweaty palms are unavoidable, but this also means that it might be good to discretely wipe your hands on a cloth or handkerchief before the meeting. There is little you can do about your perspiration other than attempt to calm down, but eliminating additional moisture can't hurt.

Lastly, it is extremely crucial that you refrain from concentrating on the handshake itself. After extending your hand, be sure to look up and make eye contact with the other party. This will convey much more confidence and enthusiasm than the perfect grip or hand placement ever could.