

Yoga Etiquette in Ten Easy Steps

by James K. Weber, M.D.

1. On arriving late (or leaving early):

The main thing here is, try not to do either. However, stuff happens, and the best-laid plans of mice, men, and yogis often go awry. In some private studios the door will be closed and quite possibly locked, thus taking care of what to do about late-comers. Pounding on the door would not be a viable option here. In gym settings, or in studios where walking in late is possible, be respectful of the meditative yearnings of the rest of the class who showed up on time-- open and close the door quietly, tiptoe in, open and lay down your mat as delicately as if you were handling TNT. Better yet, if the class opening meditation is underway, wait until it is finished before making your late entry; in that case, quietly apologize, at least by silently mouthing "sorry" to the teacher. Be as unobtrusive as a pickpocket in Pickadilly Square.

And if you must leave early, best to inform the teacher before class starts, and leave with the utmost quietness. Getting up during *savasana* is a no-no.

2. Avoid wedging your mat in where there is insufficient space

Your teacher can help rearrange the layout of mats. That way you won't have to incur the wrath (wrath is unyoga-like, yet not uncommon in such situations) of participants who are already deep into their own inner as well as outer space.

3. Do not tread on others' mats

This should go without saying, but I am saying it anyway because I see it happening all the time. This is tantamount to inviting yourself into someone else's home. If you can do Warrior poses, you can easily step over a mat!

4. Come to class clean

Body odor is a big distraction. If your routine is to work out vigorously and then come to yoga class, wash off the sweat and use a deodorant. Hand sanitizers should be liberally employed. Offer to share with your neighbors, especially in flu season. If you are ill, stay away from class; others do not need to be exposed any more than is necessary, and your attendance in yoga class is not a necessity.

5. Avoid perfumes and colognes

Many people are sensitive to fragrances.

6. Wear clothing that is appropriate

Don't worry, it's OK if you are not especially noticed. And please, leave your shirt on. I have on two occasions witnessed practitioners strip during class. I suppose that one may ask permission before doing so in an unusually warm setting (no apologies to Bikram).

7. On doing your own thing:

Don't. Even if you have a better practice than the teacher, or anyone else in the room. This kind of thing leads to a free-for-all, which is definitely not conducive to a mind-body-spirit balanced class. If there is a pose that you just have to do, and the teacher is not offering it, wait until the end of class and go do it to your heart's content.

Now, if you are pregnant, that is a whole other matter. You do need to modify poses and avoid certain ones as well. Best to declare your condition to the teacher before or at the beginning of class. Otherwise your twisting to the opposite side and avoiding Cobra and Locust poses, among others, may confuse your neighbors. Besides your teacher may suggest other modifications which had not occurred to you.

8. Breathing too loud

Ujjayi pranayam (ocean-sounding, or victorious breath) is a wonderful practice, even if you have not been invited by the teacher to use it. However, it can be distracting to others. It was never meant to be heard from coast to coast, or even across the room; properly performed, it should be audible only as far as the next mat over. And please, no grunting; if the pose is too strenuous for you, simply back off and pause in Prayer or Child pose.

9. Thank your teacher

Simply repeat *Namaste* after she says it at the end of class, even if you are a bit unsure of exactly what it means (refer back to my previous blog for details). And perhaps you might take a moment to expand upon the sentiment by saying a bit more, in English this time, about how great the class was, etc. Teachers love to get feedback. Constructive criticism and/ or suggestions also should be welcomed.

10. Clean up

That means wiping off your mat, especially if you are using one that belongs to the facility. Put away your props, too-- neatly. Be like a Boy Scout and leave the place a little better than you found it!