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Lifeskills: Tipping for services

A guide to when and how much to tip

By Alexia Elejalde-Ruiz, Tribune newspapers

May 13, 2010

Tipping is a favorite pastime in America, where nothing says "thank you" like a few dollar bills. But there is often a moment, after you get your car washed, or your furniture delivered, or your flat tire changed, when suddenly a wave of anxiety strikes. Are you supposed to tip? And if so, how much?

Here's a guide to what's customary for tipping in the U.S., compiled using information from the Emily Post Institute (emilypost.com), The Original Tipping Page (tipping.org) and "The New Rules of Etiquette," by Curtrise Garner.

And remember: "The whole point is to thank the person," said Peggy Post, great-granddaughter-in-law of etiquette maven Emily Post and director of the Emily Post Institute. "Instead of just throwing a dollar bill at someone, the key thing is to say 'thank you.'"



Restaurants

Waiter: 15 percent to 20 percent (pre-tax)

Buffet: 10 percent

Bartender: \$1 per drink or 15 percent to 20 percent of the bar tab

Takeout: No need, but 10 percent for special favors

Host or maitre d': No need, but \$10-\$20 on occasion if you're a regular patron

Sommelier: 15 percent of the cost of the wine

Restroom attendant: 50 cents-\$3, depending on the service

Cloakroom attendant: \$1 per coat

Food delivery person: 10 percent of bill (pre-tax); \$2 minimum

Valet: \$2-\$5

Hotels

Doorman: \$1-\$2 for carrying luggage; \$1-\$2 for hailing a cab; \$1-\$4 for going beyond the call of duty

Bellhop: \$2 first bag, \$1 per additional bag

Housekeeper: \$2-\$5 per day, left daily in an envelope or with a note clearly marked for the maid

Concierge: \$5 for tickets or reservations, \$10 if they're hard to get

Room service: Check the bill to see if gratuity is included (delivery charge doesn't count); if not, tip 15 percent to 20 percent

Travel

Taxi driver: 15 percent, plus an extra \$1-2 if he/she helps with bags

Airport sky cap: \$2 first bag, \$1 per additional bag

Tour guide: 10 percent to 15 percent of tour cost

Salon

Hair dresser: 15 percent to 20 percent

Shampoo assistant: \$2.

Manicurist/Masseuse/Waxer: 15 percent to 20 percent

Miscellaneous

Car washer: \$2-\$5

Gas station attendant: \$1-\$2 (if they pump your gas), \$5 if they clean windshield and check fluids

Movers: Head mover is tipped \$25-\$50; crew members tipped \$15-\$30. Can do a lump sum to be split among the crew

Furniture delivery: \$5-\$20

Dog groomer: \$2-\$5

Shoe shiner: \$2-\$3

Tow truck operators (jump-start, tire change, tow): \$3-\$10

Grocery store bag loader: \$1-\$5

Annual tips

For people with whom you have a regular and personal relationship

Babysitter: One evening's pay and a small gift from your child

Live-in nanny: One week's pay and a gift from child

Doorman: \$15-\$80

Building superintendent: \$20-\$80

Yard/garden workers: \$20-\$50 each

Housecleaner: 1 week's pay

Dog walker: 1 week's pay

Mail carrier: Non-cash gift up to \$20 (Postal Service policy)

Hairdresser: Cost of one session

Personal trainer: Cost of one session

Newspaper delivery person: \$10-\$30 or a small gift

Caveats

Peggy Post's additional tips on tipping:

If the service is bad...

You tip based on quality of service – more if it's exceptional, less if it's terrible – but giving nothing is extreme. Especially at a restaurant, consider if it was really the server's fault.

If you don't have the right amount on you...

It's OK to ask the person for change to break a big bill. If you're not carrying enough cash, give what you have and assure them you'll tip them more later. If there will be no later, just thank profusely.

If you can't afford much...

Tip what you can, or give a non-monetary gift, such as a nice card or homemade cookies.

Going abroad?

Read up on tipping customs outside the U.S. Conde Nast Traveler published an excellent tipping guide at conciierge.com/cntraveler/articles/500117

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