

How to Order Food in English at a Restaurant

Order with confidence, not panic

EPISODE 16 • LEVEL B1-B2

Episode summary

- The restaurant is not a test — it is a conversation. The waiter is your helper, not your examiner. Nothing to prove, just dinner.
- Getting a table: “A table for two, please.” Reservation booked ahead: “We have a reservation under the name Kumar.”
- The menu in four words: starter, main course, side, dessert. When lost, ask: “What do you recommend?” or “What is the specialty here?”
- The ordering frames: “Could I have...?” (safest), “I will have...” (confident), “I will go with...” (casual). Never “Give me...” — in English it sounds rude.
- Customizing is normal: “Without onions, please.” Allergies are a must-say: “Does this contain peanuts?” Substitutions: “Could I swap the fries for a salad?”
- During the meal: “Excuse me” summons any waiter politely. Wrong order: “Sorry, I asked for the chicken.” Water: “Still, please.” Bill: “Could we have the bill, please?” Check for the service charge before you tip.

What's inside this PDF

20 key words • the ordering phrase bank • Say It Better upgrades • 3 practice exercises

Key Vocabulary

20 words from this episode — learn them, then use them this week

1. reservation

a table you book before you arrive.

> We have a reservation under the name Kumar.

2. starter

the small dish you eat before the main course.

> The soup is a perfect starter.

3. main course

the biggest and most important dish of the meal.

> I will have the chicken as my main course.

4. substitute

to replace one thing with another.

> Could I substitute the fries for a salad?

5. bill

the paper listing everything you ordered and what you must pay.

> Could we have the bill, please?

6. service charge

an extra fee on the bill that pays for the service.

> The bill has a ten percent service charge, so the tip is included.

7. waiter

the person who takes your order and brings your food.

> Catch the waiter's eye and say "Excuse me."

8. recommend

to say something is good and worth trying.

> What do you recommend?

9. specialty

the dish a restaurant is most proud of.

> What is the specialty here?

10. still

flat water, no bubbles.

> "Still, please" — or ask if the still water is tap water.

11. sparkling

fizzy water with bubbles.

> Still or sparkling? Sparkling has the bubbles.

12. allergy

a bad reaction your body has to certain foods.

> I have a peanut allergy — always say it early and clearly.

13. swap

to trade one thing for another.

> Could I swap the fries for a salad?

14. excuse me

the polite way to get someone's attention.

> "Excuse me, could we have some water, please?"

15. check

the American word for the bill.

> In America: "Could we have the check, please?"

16. dressing

the sauce you pour over a salad.

> Could I get the dressing on the side, please?

17. rare

steak cooked very little, red inside.

> Rare, medium rare, medium, well done — four steps on the ladder.

18. medium

cooked in the middle — the safe choice.

> If you have no idea: "Medium, please."

19. well done

steak cooked all the way through.

> Well done is brown all the way inside.

20. tip

extra money you give for good service.

> Check for a service charge before you tip.

The Confident Customer's Toolkit

table, menu, order, customize, fix, pay

Get the table

"A table for two, please." Four words, and you sound like a regular.

Read the menu

Starter, main course, side, dessert. "What do you recommend?" turns the waiter into your guide.

Order politely

"Could I have the pasta, please?" Soft beats direct every time.

Customize freely

"Without onions, please." "Is it possible to...?" "Could I swap the fries for a salad?"

Handle the middle and the end

Wrong dish: "Sorry, I asked for the chicken." Bill: "Could we have the bill, please?"

Say It Better — 10 upgrades

☐ "Give me the pasta."	☐ "Could I have the pasta, please?"
☐ "I want a table."	☐ "A table for two, please."
☐ Snapping your fingers at the waiter.	☐ Catch their eye, raise your hand, and say "Excuse me."
☐ "This is wrong. Take it back."	☐ "Sorry, I asked for the chicken."
☐ Shouting "Bill!" across the room.	☐ "Excuse me, could we have the bill, please?"
☐ Freezing when you do not understand the waiter.	☐ "Sorry, could you say that again, please?"
☐ "No onions."	☐ "Without the onions, please — is that possible?"
☐ Suffering in silence with the wrong dish.	☐ "Sorry, I asked for this without onions."
☐ Waving money to pay.	☐ "Excuse me, could we have the bill, please?"
☐ Skipping dessert to escape faster.	☐ "Could we have the menu again, please?"

Practice Time

3 exercises — do them today, not “someday”

Exercise 1 — Fill in the blank

Word bank: reservation • starter • substitute • sparkling • service charge

1. We have a _____ under the name Kumar.
2. The soup is a perfect _____ before the main course.
3. Could I _____ the fries for a salad?
4. Still or _____? Sparkling water has the bubbles.
5. The bill has a ten percent _____, so the tip is included.

Exercise 2 — Say it better

Upgrade each weak ordering habit (answers below):

1. “Give me the pasta.” > Say it better:
2. “This is wrong. Take it back.” > Say it better:
3. “No onions.” > Say it better:

Exercise 3 — Write your order

Build one full polite order for your favorite dish, using “Could I have” and one customization with “without” or “instead of.” Say it out loud. Then imagine the waiter asks “Still or sparkling?” and answer.

- Your favorite dish, one customization.
- A full meal: starter, main course, dessert.
- Fix a wrong order: “Sorry, I asked for...”

Answer key

Ex 1: 1 reservation • 2 starter • 3 substitute • 4 sparkling • 5 service charge

Ex 2: 1 “Could I have the pasta, please?” 2 “Sorry, I asked for the chicken.” 3 “Without the onions, please — is that possible?”