

An Introduction to Introductions

I am frequently asked questions regarding proper introductions. Most questions make the subject seem more difficult than it actually is. This misconception can be attributed to a lack of information or overwhelming information. Some form of discussion regarding introductions can be found in most period etiquette guides. Magazines also carried the advice sporadically. With all this information, proper introductions can seem challenging or even confusing. But, I assure you it is not that difficult. There are two basic components to introductions, the proper way to address a person and the proper order of introductions. After these two components, all the little rules fall into place.

TWO BASIC COMPONENTS

The first step is to learn how to address a person. In addressing a person during an introduction, use a person's title and proper name. Each person has a title either by nature, occupation or election. For women, this is most frequently Miss, Mrs., Mistress or Lady. For men, this can include Mister, Reverend, Doctor, Professor, Senator, Governor and military rank in some situations. A person's proper name is their full last name, such as "Mr. Alexander" or "Mrs. Alexander". Married couples are addressed by their titles followed by their last name, such as Mr. and Mrs. Curtis. Eldest sons and unmarried daughters are addressed by Miss or Mr. and the family last name. Younger daughters are addressed as Miss, their first name and their last name, such as Miss Elizabeth Williams. You would address only your closest family and friends with a familiar first name or abbreviated name. In an introduction, this would not be used.

There are three basic rules to the order of introduction in the nineteenth century. Each rule is based on the idea that the lesser is always introduced to the greater.

1st – Gentlemen are always introduced to Ladies. A woman is never introduced to a man.

2nd – Younger people are introduced to older people.

3rd – A person of lower social status is introduced to a person of higher social status.

The first rule is clear cut and not to be broken or bent. Gender outranks age and social status. The second and third rules can blur somewhat. Age outranks social status except where the difference of age is minimal or the difference in social status is significant. For example: If a farmer's daughter and a governor's daughter, who are both in their 20's, are introduced, the farmer's daughter would be introduced to the governor's daughter. Apply these three rules to any introduction and you will be assured propriety in your actions.

THE INTRODUCTION

First obtain permission from the parties to be introduced for the introduction.

After obtaining permission for the introduction, speak first to the introducee:

“Miss -----, allow me to introduce Mr. -----”

Then turn to the introduced:

“Mr. -----, Miss -----”

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ADDITIONAL RULES

Obtain permission for the introduction prior to making the introduction. A woman has the right to refuse an introduction.

Children and teenagers do not have the social authority to make introductions. They also do not have the authority to agree to an introduction. Permission must be obtained from a child's parent or guardian to make an introduction.

When introducing a group, say each person's name only once.

When strangers to an area are introduced, it is appropriate to include their place of residence or in the case of a recent traveler, where they have come from. Some examples include:

Miss ----, of Gloucester, or

Mr. -----, recently of Paris, or

Mrs. -----, recently returned from London.

This practice gives those being introduced a topic of conversation if one lacks.

An introduction at a public social or ball is for the duration of the social or ball only. The individuals introduced are not required to acknowledge each other afterwards. It is in the power of the lady to acknowledge the introduction later. (The socials at the majority of events would be considered public.) An introduction at a private ball is considered unnecessary since all attendees are considered respectable enough to attend.

There appears to be mixed advice on the bow versus the hand-shake. The earlier books lean towards only a bow, reserving a handshake for closer acquaintances. Some books forbid it for unmarried ladies.

Final thought – Remember, when you make an introduction you are speaking for the character of those you are introducing. Be wise in the introductions you are making.

Resources consulted can be found here:

<http://www.geocities.com/shadowofthesundial/etiquette.html>