



The Basics

Here's a tip: 20% is the new 15%

The standard has increased, making it simpler to figure out how much to add to your check. But the culture of tipping is as complex as ever.

By [Liz Pulliam Weston](#)

I used to feel generous because I tipped 20% in restaurants. It was a shout-out, I thought, to my brothers and sisters on the wait staff: Been there, done that, so glad I don't have to anymore.

But it's not just my imagination that 20% isn't considered all that generous anymore. It's become standard.

"When I talk to groups of people, I ask them, 'How much do you tip, 15% or 20%?' And I'd say 90% to 95% are now tipping 20%," said Peter Post, of the Emily Post Institute. "And it's for the most basic of reasons: It's simpler."

On the fly, it's easier to figure out 20% than 15%. You simply round up, move the decimal point one place and double the result.

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If your pre-tax bill is \$34.85, for example, you round up to \$35, move the decimal place one notch left to get \$3.50 and double that to get the tip: \$7. If you get great service, you leave a little more.

While the calculations may have gotten simpler, the culture of tipping has not. I've worked in restaurants, and now I travel a fair amount, so I've seen a big shift over the years:

Guidelines used to be simple. Now, gray areas abound.

Tips are handled much more sensibly in other countries, but the prospects for reform here at home are pretty dim.

The ground rules seem to change frequently, so you never seem to feel as if you've tipped the right person or the right amount.

Some guidelines

Whom, how much and when to tip

Staff	Appropriate tip
Waiter/waitress	15% to 20% of pretax bill
Bartender	\$1 to \$2 per round or 15% to 20% of tab
Wine steward	15% of bottle's cost (less as price rises), clearly earmarked on bill
Room service	15% to 20% of pretax bill (if not already included)
Valet parking	\$2 to \$3 when car is returned
Taxi driver	15% plus \$1 to \$2 per bag
Hotel doorman	\$1 to \$2 to hail cab; \$1 to \$2 per bag for help with luggage
Hotel bellhop	\$1 to \$2 per bag
Hotel maid	\$2 per night, paid daily, clearly marked 'Housekeeping'
Skycap	\$1 to \$2 per bag, \$2 minimum, in addition to any fee
Hairdresser	15% to 20%
Manicurist	15% to 20%
Spa services	15% to 20%
Food delivery	10% to 15% with \$2 minimum
Golf caddy	\$20 or 50% of the caddy fee, whichever is greater

But what if you get lousy service? Post says he caps his tip at 15%, then talks to the manager or maitre d' about the problem. "Not tipping doesn't correct bad service," Post said.

Stiffing is also a bad idea because:

The poor service you got may have been beyond the wait staff's control, such as problems in the kitchen or management's failure to have enough workers on the floor.

The federal minimum wage for tipped employees is \$2.13 per hour, so wait staff depend on tips to earn a living wage.

Wait staff often must divide their tips with other workers, such as bussers, bartenders and head waiters, so stiffing a bad waitress can end up hurting innocent parties.

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Like me, Post would like to see the U.S. adopt the European system of paying wait staff living wages so that tips return to their original intent: rewards for really good service.

Until then, though, we're stuck with what we've got.

(And by the way, if you don't want to tip because you *consistently* get poor service at restaurants, consider whether the problem might be you. I know I used to give friendly, polite folks a heck of a lot better service than grumpy, condescending or demanding ones.)

Video on MSN Money



[▶ Holiday tipping: How much?](#)

During the holidays, you're expected to be generous toward everyone from your barber to your mailman. But how much do you give, and to whom?

Bless these angels in blue hats: They're often the only pleasant service experience available at airports anymore.

They check you in at the curb, helping you avoid the long lines at the counter and speeding you on your way. And they used to be such a bargain: \$2 a bag was considered a good tip.

These days, though, many airlines have muscled in by charging a mandatory \$2 fee per bag. That's money the airline gets, not the skycap. Post recommends tacking on another \$2 for the first bag and \$1 for each additional bag.

Sure, that means checking a couple of bags can cost \$7. If you'd rather wait at the counter for 20 minutes, before the 30-minute line through security, you still have that option.

