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When to tip? And how much?

By Angela Self
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Tipping isn't always necessary, says one etiquette expert

After picking up takeout for dinner last week, I automatically left a tip for the server, who'd only had to ring up and hand us our order. According to Vancouver-based etiquette expert Kimberly Law, my action wasn't entirely necessary.

My tendency to over-tip stems from years working in the service industry. Like many bartenders, baristas and bellhops, I really needed the extra cash I made serving beer to thirsty golfers - it helped finance my university education.

The point: Tipping counts. To help decide when and how much to tip, Ms. Law offers these guidelines for the most common scenarios:

At the salon

Getting your locks washed, coloured, cut and styled at a salon often means having your hair handled by several different employees. It's easiest to leave 15 to 20 per cent on the total and ask the receptionist to disperse it among the staff.

At a hotel

If a doorman carries your luggage to your room, tip \$1 to \$2 per bag. Ditto each time you ask him or her to hail a cab. To make things easy, Ms. Law suggests keeping small change or bills on hand throughout your stay.

Housekeeping is another hotel service that's often neglected. Because these members of staff turn over daily, leave \$1 to \$2 in a prominent place (with a note saying "Thank you," for example) each morning of your stay.

At a restaurant

Fifteen per cent is standard at family-style eateries, but the more formal the fare the fatter the tip - 20 per cent or higher to cover multiple staff in a fine-dining establishment. If you don't feel the service you've received warrants a tip, speak to the management. Don't just leave zero. It's tacky and doesn't solve anything. Everyone can have an off day, and in the end you may receive compensation for a supper gone sour.

One last tip

Always base your tip on the subtotal before taxes. Your cellphone probably includes a calculator feature or a tip app that will quickly tell you how much money to leave on the table. Use it and you won't be caught leaving too little or too much.

Angela Self is one of the founders of the Smart Cookies money group. Read her bi-weekly column on managing debt and saving money at [globeinvestor.com](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-investor/personal-finance/smart-cookies) [<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-investor/personal-finance/smart-cookies>]. CTVglobemedia Publishing, Inc