

Air travel etiquette starts before you board your flight. Some simple courtesy rules apply while waiting in the airport. The most annoying offender is the obnoxious character sitting next to you yakking at full voice on the cell phone just two inches away from your ear. These days, almost every traveler needs a handy cell phone to keep up with the latest at home, office and friends. However, for the sake of everyone around you in the waiting area, when using your cell phone, go find yourself to a quiet corner. Then you can yell, squawk and scream as loud as you want, as long as you're away from other people's ears.



We're all familiar with airport delays and long waits these days and nights of inflated prices and deflated flight schedules. But if you must get some lay-down sleep in the terminal, instead of denying other tired travelers of seats in the waiting area, have the courtesy to go stretch out on the floor against a wall in a quiet peacefu area. Spread some newspapers out and snooze away.

I'd suggest GIs, students and other travelers who must do long and frequent airport waits to take backpacks containing blankets, eye shades and quick-blow-up little mattresses and pillows to get as much comfort as possible in those long hours on the floor. And for your own peace and quiet, try to do it without blocking foot traffic and otherwise bothering other travelers.

For extending common consideration and etiquette once you've gone aboard, the same general rules apply. Look to your own comfort, but also be aware of the rights of others. I fly frequently,

and although bad things happen infrequently, I often get the feeling that somehow Murphy's Law is always about to strike me after I sit down to await take off.

It's the big bulky, often grossly fat, person who becomes my seatmate. On a one-hour flight the squeeze is bearable, but for those cross-country or overseas trips, it becomes pure torture. Although the law doesn't force you to do it, if you're very oversized, book yourself into first class. If you're a candidate for "The Biggest Loser", pay for two seats.

There's the obvious smoker who plops down next to you, who's suffering greatly by being denied his poison during the flight. His clothing, hair and body still smell ... make that stink ... strongly of old tobacco. Unable to light up, he turns into a nervous, fidgeting seatmate with a never-ending, irritating cough. If it gets too bad, don't try to open the window and push him out. Just ask to change your seat.

I raised my own and love kids with all my heart. But not screaming, misbehaving, incontinent and/or barfing little ones on the airplane seat next to me. I know it would be cruel to yell at the harried mother to solve the problem immediately. But there are ways of toning down disruptions by kids.

When my kids were very little, we tried to schedule red-eye (late night) flights, and with proper preparation, and after an active day, we were usually successful in lulling them to sleep throughout the trip. We did that for the comfort of our kids and ourselves, as well as out of courtesy for other passengers. The results were happy people all around.

Etiquette is a fancy way of describing the practice of simple consideration for others in airports and on flights. Or even more basic, it's the application of the Golden Rule on the ground, as well as at 30,000 feet in the air.