

# Rules of Civility

**Background Information:** As a teenager, George Washington copied The Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation in the last ten pages of a book of personal notes. The Rules were a series of maxims that he likely copied to practice penmanship. The 110 rules covered many of the proper social graces of the time period. The rules were derived from an original list of maxims originally compiled by French Jesuits in the 1590s that was eventually translated into English by Francis Hawkins in London around 1640.

## Main Ideas:

- George Washington copied the Rules of Civility to practice his penmanship and remind himself of important manners.
- These manners were important for men of his social class and likely guided him the rest of his life.

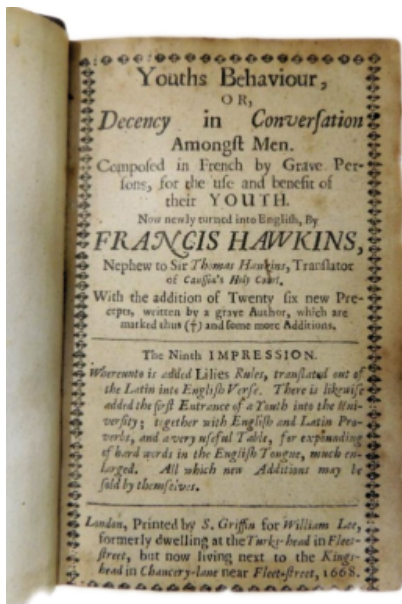
## Skills:

- Change over time
- Reflection
- Writing
- Matching

## Questions to Consider:

- What are social customs we have today?
- What manners are important to you?
- Why are manners important?

Explore the following sources to learn more:



Rules of Civility



Washington as a Young Surveyor



Ferry Farm

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S  
**MOUNT ★ VERNON**

THE MOUNT VERNON LADIES' ASSOCIATION

# Washington's Rules of Civility

When George Washington was a teenager, he wrote a copy of the Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation in his school book. There were 110 rules in total and they covered many eighteenth century manners. These rules helped guide Washington's behavior as he grew up and navigated the life of the Virginia gentry. He used them to better himself.

In the space below, either write or draw something you would like to get better at. This can be a skill, manners, a school subject, or anything else that's important to you!



Depiction of Washington as a young surveyor.

**Turn over the page for a matching activity.**

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**Many of the manners Washington reordered are still around today!  
Match Washington's rule to its modern version:**

**Rule No. 3**

Shew Nothing to your Friend  
that may affright him.

**Rule No. 5**

If You Cough, Sneeze, Sigh, or  
Yawn, do it not Loud but  
Privately; and Speak not in your  
Yawning, but put Your  
handkercheif or Hand before  
your face and turn aside.

**Rule No. 22**

Shew not yourself glad at the  
Misfortune of another though he  
were your enemy.

**Rule No. 50**

Be not hasty to beleive flying  
Reports to the Disparagment of  
any.

**Rule No. 56**

Associate yourself with Men of  
good Quality if you Esteem your  
own Reputation; for 'tis better to  
be alone than in bad Company.

**Rule No. 81**

Be not Curious to Know the  
Affairs of Others neither  
approach those that Speak in  
Private.

**Rule A:**

Do not gloat or laugh at  
another person's problems.

**Rule B:**

Make friends with good people  
because it's better to be alone  
than with bad people.

**Rule C:**

Do not try to scare your friend.

**Rule D:**

Cover your mouth when you  
cough, sneeze, sigh, or yawn.

**Rule E:**

Mind your own business.

**Rule F:**

Do not listen to gossip.