



The Rules: Effective Messaging for your Guests

Effective presentation of your inn's rules, history, special features, and area attractions, activities, restaurants, and shops can achieve the following:

- Prevent problems with guests who smoke, eat, make noise, overpopulate and/or otherwise abuse your hospitality
- Increase guest enjoyment of their stay at your B&B
- Help you increase repeat and referral business

If you want guests to accept your "rules," remember that they are entitled to have rules for you too, which can be summarized as the **Three Cs**:

1. **Clutter-free environment:** Keep horizontal spaces clear for guests to spread out their own things; decorate vertical elements with a light touch, to simplify cleaning and to create a serene atmosphere.
2. **Comfort:** Superb beds and linens, lighting for both reading & romance, sound-proofing for privacy and rest.
3. **Convenience:** Within reason, the inn should be run to suit the guests, not the innkeepers.

You may think that a verbal recitation covering your inn's features and requirements are sufficient, but that's rarely true. Studies show that without significant repetition, people rarely retain more than 10 percent of what they hear. More typically, guests are busy looking at your inn, thinking about the fact that they:

- a. Really have to use the bathroom
- b. Really want to jump into bed
- c. Wish you would speak up since their hearing isn't what it used to be
- d. All of the above

Innsitters will appreciate written materials, as will anyone handling late check-ins. Some people will not read anything you give them, but effective messaging can significantly reduce problems and increase positive results. Some suggestions:

Internet & print materials: Wherever your inn's rates are listed, be sure to include your policies on children, smoking, and pets. Positive phrasing is preferable:

"Our buildings and grounds are *entirely smoke-free*. If you smoke, we can recommend alternative accommodation."

"Young children find us boring."

"Your dog may be welcome in our guest cottage; please call us for details."

"Weatherbury Farm B&B (Avella, PA) offers lodging on our working beef and sheep farm. We've hosted many distinguished guests including actors, writers, doctors, lady bugs, and spiders."

Confirmations and telephone conversations: Certain questions and occasions—weddings, family reunions, honeymoons—may alert you to potential problems. Make your policies crystal clear, so that you can avoid misunderstandings later. After several unhappy wedding-related situations, Yelton Manor (South Haven, MI) now has an ironclad policy: *only paying guests are allowed in the inn.*

Check-in: Many inns ask guests to sign a registration form at check-in as a reminder about key policies. Heritage Park Inn (San Diego, CA) requests guest to sign a nicely printed note which explains that “Guests may not smoke, use candles or have any other open flame in their rooms or common areas. In case of violation, a \$100 charge may be added to your bill to cover cleaning costs.” Some B&Bs go further, noting that if policies are violated, guests will be asked to leave without refund. Most B&Bs ask guests to sign a simple guest register, but I have yet to visit one that asks for an email address as well as a postal address.

In-room signs: Although most innkeepers try to avoid signs entirely, nicely printed and framed signs are sometimes needed to alert guests to the need for opening/closing fireplace flues; keeping windows closed when the central AC is on; filling the whirlpool to two inches above the jets; quiet hours; and the limitations of country plumbing. Their simplicity and obvious location make them most likely to be read. *Whenever possible, decorate the inn to minimize the need for signage.* For example, adding glass tops to wooden tables minimizes the need for signs requesting the use of coasters. One innkeeper decorated the guest rooms with off-white carpeting, and thus banned red wine from the guest rooms. Far better to use deep-colored Oriental carpets, so stains won’t show.

In-room welcome letter: Whether prepared personally for each guest, or laminated, welcome letters should be printed on lovely stationery. The letter can be varied for each room (“the thermostat for the Morning Glory Room is set behind the bathroom door), and should cover such key points as when breakfast and afternoon refreshments are served; evening turndown; availability of a guest refrigerator and/or pantry, telephone, data port, toiletries, hair dryer, dinner reservations; coffee/tea; ice; iron and ironing board, and so on. “I have found that an in-room letter is helpful on a number of levels. In it I answer the questions that we get every day, and that guests may not have heard on the check-in tour. Where to find things (us, for example), and the names and ages of our children. The other big plus is that they often take them home with them. I print the letters on my computer on pretty paper, staple it with a nice ribbon at the corner and leave it in each of the rooms. I would not be without them.” *Debbie Mosimann, Swiss Woods B&B, Lititz, PA*

In-room notebook: Purchase looseleaf notebooks, with a clear plastic sleeve on the outside, into which you can slip a lovely picture of your B&B; some inns have theirs imprinted. Get ones with an inside front cover pocket, to insert brochures and other materials that the guests are welcome to take with them. Comment cards should go in the pocket too. These books are not impersonal or “hotelish” because they contain your personal advice and recommendations; their purpose is to make your guests feel cherished and cared for--the feeling that the innkeepers have thought of everything to assure their comfort. Inside pages can either be laminated or inserted into clear plastic sleeves, and might include the following:

4. History of the inn
5. Personal story (what we did in "real life" before we became innkeepers)
6. Recommended sights/activities (induce guests to extend their stay)
7. Recommended restaurants (menus in the parlor)
8. Walking/jogging routes 2/3/5/ miles from the inn's front door.
9. Area dry cleaners/laundromats/service establishments
10. Area houses of worship

“When I stay at an inn without some sort of inn-room information, I feel lost, as there is almost always some question that comes up which I hate to bother the innkeeper with, but would be happy to read about. From the

innkeeper's point of view, it sure saves on the questions, as we have tried to answer all those questions we have been asked over the years. We also tell guests to relax, they don't have to worry about all the things we are telling them at check-in, because it is all written down in the book!" *Joan Wells, Queen Victoria, Cape May, NJ*

If you feel that having both a welcome letter and a notebook is too much, then make your welcome letter the first page of your notebook, and leave the notebook open on the bed, where it can't be missed. Every inn has a different way of handling this information, and there is no way to assure that every guest will read the info you have painstakingly prepared. Some people simply do NOT read. (You know who you are). Last but not least, recycle the area information you've compiled, and add it to your website, so that potential guests will see how much there is to see and do in your area.

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