

How to Go to Confession

1. BEFORE you go into the confessional, make a good examination of conscience. That is, seriously meditate on your sins and try to remember them so you can confess them. The Ten Commandments are a handy guide.
2. When it's your turn, enter the confessional. You'll either kneel or sit to do your confession. If you are going anonymously, or "behind the screen," as we say, you'll almost always kneel, and there will typically be a kneeler right next to the screen. If you go face-to-face, sitting in a chair is probably more common. Just march in and kneel or sit down.
3. After sitting or kneeling, you make the sign of the cross and say, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. This is my first confession." In subsequent confessions, you'll say, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been x amount of time since my last confession."
4. The priest may greet you or otherwise say a few words. If he doesn't, or when he's finished, you just launch in. Mortal sins must be confessed specifically and by number; venial sins can be confessed more generally. Example: "Well, Father, my biggest problem is my temper. I lose my temper and say unkind things to my spouse probably a couple of times a week, and to my kids probably more often than that. I've taken the Lord's name in anger a couple of time, and I have used other vulgar and obscene language probably several times a week. I have also engaged in gossip at work and made insulting comments about my co-workers behind their back a few times. I've been careless about filling out timesheets at work a few times, which may have resulted in clients' getting overbilled or my employer's getting short-changed. I've worked on Sunday several times when I could have avoided it by working harder during the week or on Saturday. And that's all I can remember. I am sorry for these and all my sins"
5. The priest may engage you in conversation, either during your confession or at the end. He may ask questions to clarify things, or make suggestions. He should ask you to recite an Act of Contrition, but he may just launch right into the prayer of absolution without your saying anything else. There's no one definitive form of the Act of Contrition, but this one works: **"O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, because of Thy just punishment, but most of all because I have offended You, my God, Who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen."**
- 5a. At some point along in here, the priest will assign you your penance. As per legend, it is often a prescribed number of Our Fathers, Hail Marys, or the like. I've been told to look up a particular Psalm in the Bible and pray it. Once a priest even told me to take a pro bono case for my penance, when it was obvious from my confession that I was a lawyer.
6. You'll probably realize when the priest is saying the prayer of absolution because he'll be pretty obviously reciting something from memory. His prayer concludes something like, ". . . and I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." (Make the sign of the cross at the end.) I think he often adds, "Go in peace." Always say, "Thank you, Father," before you exit the confessional, and then go do your penance.