

Provincial Grand Lodge of Antrim



Masonic Etiquette

The purpose of this booklet is to offer advice and guidance for younger Masons and to serve as a source of reference for those who are more experienced. Masonic Etiquette is, for the most part, merely good manners and respect for your Lodge, its members, its Worshipful Master and the conventions of Freemasonry in general.

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FOREWORD

By observing proper etiquette, Freemasons acknowledge and express their respect for the Craft.

As Freemasons we are proud of our behaviour, dress, moral standards, communication, forms of address and our general demeanour. We set our standards above those of society in general and we expect those who join our order to assimilate and observe those standards. Adherence to correct Masonic etiquette will enable us to pass on those standards to future generations.

The information set out in this booklet is for guidance only and is not in any way at variance with the Laws and Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Ireland or the Provincial Grand Lodge of Antrim.

Always remember that your Lodge enjoys a high reputation within the Province. As a member of it you will always be seen to reflect that reputation. Be proud that you are a member and be loyal to its precepts, not just good at ritual. Your conduct both inside and outside your Lodge and the practice of common etiquette are of equal importance. Thoughtful etiquette is the unwritten code of our brotherhood.

CONFORMING TO MASONIC ETIQUETTE

For recently initiated members, our ritual and the manner in which we conduct business may create some anxiety, and concern lest they might, inadvertently, cause embarrassment or appear to be disrespectful. We trust that the contents of this booklet will assist all new members to the Order to gain confidence and encourage them to participate fully in Lodge meetings.

One of the best ways to learn is to observe more experienced Brethren in the various aspects of Lodge business and other Masonic activities.

The various sections below will assist new members – who are always encouraged to ask a more senior Mason for advice or to explain a particular point. No question is too trivial or unimportant – for every answer helps to build confidence.

A GUIDE TO MASONIC ETIQUETTE

1 Dress

Brethren should dress appropriately when attending meetings of their Lodge or other Masonic functions. The generally accepted dress code is a suit or jacket and tie; some Lodges require formal attire at Installation Meetings and the By-Laws of a few Lodges require a dinner suit at all meetings.

When attending Lodge meetings Brethren should wear the regalia appropriate to their status and should be properly dressed before taking their places in the Lodge room.

2 Speaking in open Lodge

If you wish to speak in open lodge you must stand and, in the first instance, address the Worshipful Master. The WM will acknowledge you and indicate that you may proceed.

- You may be asking a question, seeking information.
- You may be replying to a question from the WM or another Brother who will have addressed his query through the WM.
- You may be contributing to debate on a particular issue.

Whatever the reason, always address the WM and always face the WM when speaking. To look elsewhere in the Lodge room could be construed as discourteous.

3 Respect for others during Lodge business

It is disrespectful to engage in private conversation during the transaction of Lodge business and particularly when a debate is taking place. You should not whisper or, in any way, distract your fellow Brethren from the business in hand. You would expect Brethren to listen to your point of view if the WM permits you to address the Lodge.

It is equally important that, during the conferral of a degree, strict attention should be paid to the working and, above all, the candidate should receive a good impression, not only of the degree, but the manner in which it is received by those sitting around the Lodge room.

When the Lodge welcomes distinguished guests they should leave at the conclusion of their visit with the positive experience of having been in a Lodge which sets high standards in its working.

4 Mobile Phones

Before entering the Lodge room mobile phones should be turned off. They may be switched to silent mode but this is not always satisfactory as a phone can vibrate and a Brother may be tempted to check it. Mobile phones **must not be used** in open Lodge and to do so, even covertly, is a serious matter, apart from the extreme discourtesy afforded to the other members of the Lodge.

5 Preparation

If you wish to offer a topic for discussion, it is courteous to discuss the matter with the WM beforehand. He will advise on its place in the agenda for the meeting; he may suggest that you defer its introduction to a subsequent meeting; he may be disinclined to allow any debate and will explain why.

It is equally important that you broach such matters with the Lodge Secretary as he will be a Mason of considerable experience and knowledgeable about a wide range of issues in Freemasonry.

6 Accepting Responsibilities

It is good Masonic etiquette to play your part in the workings of the Lodge and should you, as a young Mason, be asked to undertake a particular task on behalf of, or for the good of, the Lodge, you should accept the responsibility and undertake it to the best of your ability. Of course, there may be genuine restraints (personal, work commitments) which will **prevent you** from accepting a task - but you can always indicate how and when you can render service to the Lodge (**your** Lodge) and possibly to Freemasonry in general.

However, remember that asking you in the first place indicates the trust and confidence the Lodge has placed in you as a valued and respected member.

7 The Worshipful Master

Each year the Lodge elects a Brother to the office of Worshipful Master and during his term in office the WM is the most powerful member of the Lodge – but he also shoulders many of its responsibilities.

The WM has the authority to rule and govern the Lodge according to the Laws and Constitution of the Order and the By-Laws of the Lodge. For example:

- The WM must be obeyed at all times.
- He can, and sometimes must, decide what can be discussed and what cannot.
- He can refuse to accept a notice of motion.
- He can rule any Brother out of order on any subject at any time and the said Brother must accept that ruling.
- During a debate he must ensure that only one Brother at a time speaks and is standing as **required**.
- Only the WM may correct an error that **occurs** during a ceremony, and do so with respect.
- It is the responsibility of the WM to ensure that during a ballot all who are entitled to vote have done so.
- The WM must ensure that proper Masonic titles are used during the conduct of all business
- Once the Lodge has opened, only the WM can permit a Brother to withdraw or allow a Brother to enter and he must ensure that the correct **protocols** are observed.
- It is the duty of the WM to ensure nothing is allowed to infringe the high standards of behaviour and etiquette which are expected in the Lodge **room**.

There are, of course, appropriate safeguards in place to ensure that the WM does not exceed his authority, just as in any other organisation the person at the top is subject to the constraints of his office.

8 Installation Meeting & Festive Board

The Meeting

Every year, each Lodge holds an Installation Ceremony, when a new Worshipful Master takes up his role and installs his Officers for the year ahead. It is a significant event in the Lodge's calendar, as it is an opportunity to give thanks to the outgoing WM for all his hard work, to give best wishes to his successor, and to pledge the support of the Brethren to the new team of Officers. As it is such an important event, much preparation is needed, particularly by the WM, Secretary and Director of Ceremonies. As a younger mason you will also have an important part to play. You represent the future of the Lodge and, as the event is largely about looking forward, your presence will certainly add to the sense of occasion.

Before the date of the Installation meeting, check with the Secretary regarding dress code, starting time and venue as some Lodges vary arrangements for this special meeting. On the evening itself, make sure you arrive in good time as Installation meetings often attract larger attendances and you do not want to find yourself caught up in a last minute rush to get ready.

At an appropriate point during the meeting, you will be asked to retire from the Lodge Room for a period of time whilst the Worshipful Master elect is installed.

The Festive Board

At the conclusion of the Installation meeting a Festive Board takes place either in the Hall or in an external establishment, according to Lodge custom and practice.

Common sense dictates the etiquette for these occasions and the following points reflect the standard of behaviour expected of Freemasons.

- Enjoy the meal, enjoy the company, and enjoy the entertainment.
- Refrain from excess.
- Listen politely to the speeches and remember it is discourteous to talk or whisper whilst a speech is in progress.
- Do not remove your jacket unless permission is given by the WM.
- Musical brethren should receive your courteous attention whilst they perform.
- Do not exchange stories or express sentiments which may be distasteful or offensive to others.

As your Masonic career progresses you may be called upon in future years to respond to a toast or provide some form of entertainment. Observing the best practice at Festive Boards as a young mason will assist you in developing your particular style, along with the advice of senior members.

When you leave the Hall or other venue at the end of the evening, do so with dignity and decorum, having enjoyed a pleasant evening in the company of your Brethren and friends.

9 Your role in Society

Freemasons are expected to maintain high standards both inside and outside the Order. Your friends in the community where you live should know you are a Freemason and that you are proud of your membership. They should see in you what they would like to be – and you might play a part in introducing them to Masonry.

At home, in your workplace and at leisure, be kind and courteous, displaying moderation and tolerance.

You are an ambassador for your Lodge in particular and Freemasonry in general – a serious responsibility which your fellow Lodge members will help you to fulfil.