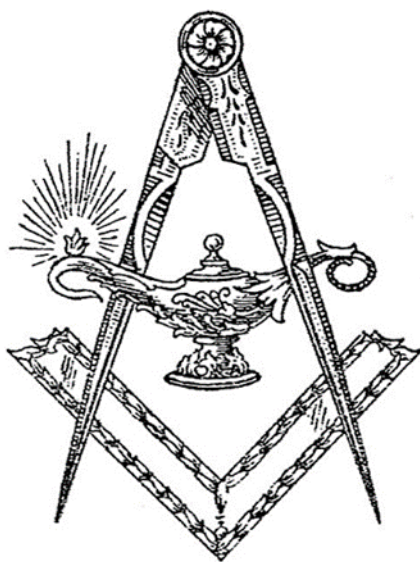


Grand Lodge of Mississippi F. & A. M.



**Promoting a deeper understanding
of Masonic Etiquette in the Practice of Mississippi Masonry**

Grand Lodge of Mississippi Education Committee

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An Educated Mason is a Dedicated Mason

Masonic Etiquette

There is a distinction to be made as to what constitutes etiquette or acceptable behaviors and those behaviors that apply to adherence to the laws of the Grand Lodge of Mississippi F. & A. M. It is the goal of the Education Committee to provide useful information in the practice of Freemasonry in our Grand jurisdiction.

Etiquette is defined in one instance as “the customary code of polite behavior in society or among members of a particular profession or group.”¹ Thus, the following is provided to assist Mississippi Freemasons in the practice of a customary code of polite behavior. In one reference it is stated that if we practice proper etiquette, “you are less likely to offend or annoy people—and you may even charm them.” Making proper Masonic etiquette part of one’s daily habit also ensures that, when we meet our common man outside of the Lodge, we exemplify the most esteemed character traits possible.

A breach of etiquette is **not** a Masonic offense. Rather, a lapse in etiquette is simply a case of bad form or lack of proper manners. By watching and listening to other members of the Lodge over time a new Mason will learn to conform to the proper behaviors and customs. Good Masonic etiquette is displayed by following the proper decorum and behavior in a polite environment.

Masonic etiquette is simply the rules of good manners which make the Lodge room pleasant for everyone. A few summary points will be explained in the following, with explanations as appropriate.

The position of Worshipful Master in the East occupies the most exalted position within the Lodge. A Lodge which does not honor its Master, no matter how they personally feel about the man, himself, lacks basic Masonic courtesy. The honor conveyed by the Brethren in electing him and the historical traditions of the men who have gone before you must be given the utmost respect in order for the traditions of the Fraternity to be observed and proper Masonic etiquette to be maintained.

Masonic etiquette comprises Lodge courtesies and proprieties, indeed, common courtesy and good manners. Good manners imply observance of the formal requirements which govern a man's behavior in a polite society and a sense of what is appropriate for a person of good character, breeding, and upbringing with high morals, virtue, and good taste.

The spirit of Brotherly Love and affection, by which we are all bound together, will be exemplified in our conduct, behavior, deportment, attitude, and general countenance at all times. We will introduce two concepts: first, the authority of the Grand Lodge of Mississippi and the Master of a Subordinate Lodge, and second, the desired characteristics in the performance of Masonic etiquette in a Subordinate Lodge.

First, the Master of the Lodge has the authority during his term in office to perform the following duties:

1. Rule any Brother out of order on any subject at any time.
2. Decide what can and cannot be discussed and when the discussion shall come to an end.

Should a Brother believe that the Master has been arbitrary, unjust, unfair, or is acting in an illegal manner, he can appeal to the Grand Master. If the Grand Master agrees that the appeal is valid, there is a process outlined in Williams Digest of Laws. Absent extreme circumstances, proper etiquette usually requires a Brother to pull the Master aside for a private conversation to address such an issue. If that is unsuccessful,

it is recommended that two or more Brothers repeat the same process prior to escalating the issue to the Grand Master. Often, such discreet, private conversations are more likely to successfully bend the ear than a public accusation.

If, however, a Brother insists on speaking after the Master has ruled that he is out of order, the Brother may be found guilty of committing a Masonic offense and/or removed from the Lodge for a period of time to be determined by the Master. For example, it may be for the remainder of that meeting or until the end of that Masonic year, as the injunction will cease at the end of that term of office.

3. The Master may put or refuse to put forth any motion.

Secondly, the following are examples or explanations of a breach of Masonic Etiquette and are **not** Masonic offenses:

- 1. Always dressed Masonically on entering a tiled Lodge**

Brethren should always enter a tiled Lodge appropriately attired with an apron fully secured. Also, it is a courtesy and sign of respect to not enter while putting the apron on. This is disrespectful to the Worshipful Master, the assembled Brethren, and it is a sign of courtesy to enter fully dressed and ready for labor. It is expected that you will be properly and entirely dressed when you pass by the Tiler and enter the Lodge room.

Lodge access, custom, and tradition should be adhered to when entering the Lodge room. The Tiler should inform a tardy Brother of which door is appropriate to enter, either from the entryway or an alternative anteroom or preparation room.

Under **no** circumstances should the anteroom be used for entering or leaving a Lodge during the conferral of a Degree.

All Brothers should be dressed within the guidelines of acceptable attire in accordance with Williams Digest, and any edicts or guidance issued by the Grand Master of Masons of Mississippi.

- 2. Saluting the Master**

Salute defined is "to greet courteously and respectfully." The true meaning when used as a verb is "to make a formal sign of respect to someone...." In Freemasonry we are respecting the office of the Worshipful Master.

Each of the Brethren shall give a proper salute to the Master upon entering or leaving a tiled Lodge, rising to speak, or if the Master addresses you by name or position.

No Brother will address the Master until he rises and gives the appropriate salute required in a tiled Lodge. The salute should be in the appropriate Degree, for example, the proper salute is dependent upon in which degree the Lodge is tiled.

Saluting the Master shows a courteous respect for all that the Master represents and that you acknowledge his authority in the Lodge.

Salutes should reflect your respect for all which he, as Master of the Lodge, stands for in his office and your respect for the Masonic institution itself.

The Masonic etiquette of saluting the Master publicly displays your renewed pledge of fidelity and service. It is a public display before all other Brothers of your respect for your obligations.

3. Entering the Lodge after the meeting has started

If a Brother should enter the Lodge while labor is underway in the opening ritual, he should not interfere and should salute from just inside the tiled Lodge. If there is no ritual being actively performed (not during the conferral of a Degree), he should go to the Altar to salute the Master.

If a Brother must leave before the meeting is over, the correct Masonic etiquette of his departure is that he should salute the Worshipful Master at the Altar before he departs. However, under no circumstances should this be performed if the Lodge is performing ritual, particularly conferral of a Degree, or if the Master is otherwise engaged.

As a suggested alternative, the Brother may salute the Senior Warden as the exit doors are usually in proximity.

The salute should always be performed properly and not in a careless or perfunctory manner. A lazy, sloppy, or improper salute is impolite, exhibits poor Masonic etiquette, and is disrespectful to both the Worshipful Master and the Grand Lodge of Mississippi F. & A. M.

4. Passing or walking between the Altar and the Worshipful Master

Do not pass between the Master of the Lodge and the Altar when the Lodge is open. The Master is to maintain no obstruction between the three Great Lights, as they assist him in properly governing the Lodge. The Lights should never be in shadow.

5. Sitting in the East

A Brother should never sit in the East without an invitation from the Worshipful Master. It matters not even if all seats are taken in a tiled Lodge. All Brothers are equal, and all officers of the Lodge are serving the Brethren. Therefore, it is the Master's prerogative to recognize distinguished visitors or a special member to share the area and be given honor by being asked to sit in the East.

6. Obedience to the Gavel

You must immediately obey the gavel. Failure to immediately do so is a grave discourtesy and very poor Masonic etiquette. The Master is all powerful and has final authority in a tiled Lodge.

The Master may put forth for a vote or refuse to put forth any motion.

The Master can say what he will or will not permit to be discussed.

The Master can rule any Brother out of order on any subject at any time. Brethren who think him unfair, unjust, or acting illegally have redress, as the Grand Master can be appealed to on any such matters. However, in the Lodge, the Master's gavel and decision is final. The Master's gavel is supreme in authority as it is the emblem of his authority in the Lodge.

Anyone who does not obey the gavel is not only displaying poor manners and a breach of Masonic etiquette, they may be perilously close to the line between what constitutes bad manners and a possible Masonic offense for disturbing the harmony of the Lodge.

7. Stand when addressing the Master

No man sits while speaking in the Lodge room, whether to an officer or another Brother. It is expected that if you wish to address the audience, you will stand so that all in attendance may see who is speaking. This is not unique to Freemasonry, and it is similarly expected in any public forum, whether addressing a local government function, civic club, or stock-holder's meeting.

No Brother may address the Master without first giving the proper salute.

8. Talking in Lodge

Talking during a tiled Lodge, particularly during a Degree, is considered bad manners or poor etiquette. This behavior is considered disrespectful to those engaged in labor and is a distraction to those performing the work. Talking is particularly distracting and disrespectful to a candidate during a Degree.

The Lodge room is symbolic of the Temple of the Great Architect of the Universe. It is impolite to talk as it shows an irreverent attitude and behavior for the sacred proceedings underway. Talking during the proceedings with social conversation interferes with others' attempts to learn the lessons being given for that day's labor.

Unless you have requested permission of the Master to speak, silence is the rule. This includes whispering. Occasionally, a Brother may be hard of hearing and whisper like a bull moose. Kind counseling is encouraged in such situations where there are repeat issues.

9. Speaking in Lodge

If you wish to offer a predetermined topic or matter for discussion, it is a good courtesy to advise the Master before the Lodge is tiled. While this is not required, it is an important courtesy to remember and will allow the Master to determine if it will interfere with the plans for the evening because your topic or proposed motion may not easily fit into the time allotted for the meeting. This also affords an opportunity for both the Master and the Brother to save face and not cause disharmony in the Lodge.

You will likely not be publicly refused the opportunity to speak as he will not desire to seem disagreeable or arrogant in his refusal of your discussion or to make a proper motion.

Any Brother desiring to speak should always rise to salute the Master and receive permission to speak before doing so.

10. Turning your back to the Master

Never turn your back to the Master to address the Lodge without first receiving permission from the Master to speak. One always stands when addressing the Master or another Brother.

When two Brothers are both on their feet discussing an issue or motion and ignoring the Master they are both engaging in unacceptable behavior.

11. Correction of verbal errors

Lodge customs dictate that no one except for the Worshipful Master or his pre-arranged designee, may correct any mistake that may occur while a ceremony or ritual, especially during conferral of a Degree, and only then when the error is a grave or serious one. This is not only discourteous to a Brother in pointing out mistakes in front of the Lodge but in most instances causes more distraction and draws more attention to the error than the solemnity of the event.

If a Brother is so pre-disposed as to feel the need to correct a Brother in open Lodge and possesses an ability to perform flawlessly each and every degree, perfectly, please advise the Master of such so that he may take advantage of your services to mentor others not so fortunate.

Performance of the ritual is not the time nor place to practice the ritual. We Masons are all fragile men and all have had occasion to misspeak or misremember a word or phrase. Let us be reminded that all of us are not yet perfected in the eyes of God and our fellow man.

12. Balloting

Do not enter or leave the Lodge during a ballot. It is discourteous to leave the room during a speech, during a degree, etc. It is within Masonic etiquette that all Brethren are expected to vote when requested to do so. Failure to cast your ballot not only results in a failure to share in your duties, it is in direct disobedience of the Master's request. You should ballot no matter the reason you may privately hold about a particular matter.

When approaching the ballot box, upon stopping in front of the Altar, and facing the East, the ballot box should be saluted.

13. Voting

All voting is not balloting, and there are different rules for the two differing processes. All ballots are votes, but all votes are not required to be by secret ballot in Mississippi. We have specific rules

guiding these different processes and Williams Digest of Laws and it should be consulted in advance so that there are no errors committed. See §19-17.1 VOTING, GENERAL RULES. Williams Digest of Laws, 2022.

When there is an issue that can be put to a vote it may be by a show of hands or by secret ballot. It is by the decision of the Worshipful Master in certain cases.

“In all cases, except in balloting, or as otherwise provided for, a majority of votes shall govern; and in the case of an equality of votes, the presiding officer shall give the deciding vote.”

If there is an issue that can be addressed by voting, it may be by a show of hands. If so, “the Master cannot vote unless there is a tie. If there is a tie, the Master casts the deciding vote.”

If an issue is required to put before the Lodge, all voting members of the Lodge should cast a hand vote, or a secret ballot, whichever the case may be.

A Brother is discourteous because he skews the ballot of the Lodge. No matter the reason, he injures the Lodge’s ballot, its value and its secrecy. Failure to vote can injure a Lodge’s feeling of brotherhood, and by this injury, can injure the Masonic fraternity as it interferes with the Master’s ability to get a “Sense of Lodge to be ascertained... .”

“The duty of voting on ballot and on charges is imperative. It is one of the trusts confided to members alone, and we owe it to each other to see that it is performed.” §19-17.3 RULES RELATED TO BALLOTS, (E) Sense of Lodge to be ascertained; when ballot taken again. Judicial Decisions. 2. (1871-56) (1872-65)

14. No practical jokes or off-color jokes or stories

The great moral lessons of Freemasonry, which are taught by our ritual and ceremonies, should never be demeaned by levity or pranks in the Lodge room. The Lodge room is not a proper location for the telling of jokes, horseplay, off-color stories, or performance of practical jokes.

15. All prayers at Lodge functions should be non-sectarian

Prayers are best directed to the Creator or Great Architect of the Universe and not toward specific religious beliefs, as all religions are allowed in Mississippi Freemasonry. Prayers specifically addressing Jesus Christ, Jehovah, Allah, or Mother Mary are not appropriate. To do so omits the religion of others within the Brethren, which can cause conflict and therefore not be harmonious to the whole body.

It is a matter of courtesy to remember our Creator has many names across the world. It is a matter of courtesy that all prayers, speeches, and discussions at Masonic affairs avoid sectarian, religious dogma, controversial, or political overtones, notwithstanding discussions of morality and virtues, as that is the foundation of our Institution.

16. Cell phone usage

All cell phones and paging devices should be turned off before entering the Lodge room so as not to disrupt the proceedings. Even when silenced they should not be intrusive to the sacredness of the Lodge by blinking lights, warning beeps, or obnoxious ring tones.

17. Social media and digital communications

Many Brethren view their Masonic responsibilities and privileges as extending beyond the four corners of the Lodge room into all Masonically related activities, including social media and group communications, like texting and e-mails.

For this reason, political comments, memes, and off-color jokes should not be shared through channels utilized primarily for the dissemination of Masonic information.

E-mail addresses of Brothers obtained through Masonic networking should not be utilized for the sharing of chain messages unless specifically requested or approved by the recipient. If you have a message to share to all the Brethren of the Lodge, proper protocol dictates that it is transmitted through the Secretary or his assignee. To this end, proper protection of the recipient from spam messages should be utilized by sending group e-mails through blind carbon copy.

Announcements posted through social media should be limited to the smallest group applicable to the message. It should be assumed that all members of your local Lodge Facebook group are also members of the Grand Lodge. Therefore, unless your post implicates different Masonic groups, there is no reason to duplicate postings, which can be an annoyance to the Brethren. Be mindful of the number of recipients in your group communication. If you are a part of a large group texting platform, do not send a communication late at night or early in the morning unless necessary.

Summary: The above examples and explanations are not intended to be exhaustive but are designed to be illuminating for Brothers desiring to have a better, more pleasant Lodge experience.

The explanations provided also represent a minimum of expectations and some Lodges may have more stringent customs and traditions than these being highlighted.

A good point of additional reference would be Andersons Constitutions in the sections highlighting Behaviors in Lodge, et al. and George Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior.

The members of the Education Committee do earnestly pray and beseech each Brother to review and apply the principles of both suggested and required guidelines when in Lodge assembled.

*A number of resources were consulted and referenced while producing this document and we heartily pray forgiveness for not properly citing them as they are too numerous to readily identify what material came from which source. Suffice it to state, we genuinely appreciate the hard work of all who have labored in the quarries conceiving the concepts and have actively participated in sharing their collective knowledge and thoughts.