Let’s Go To Lodge

You have gone through the initiations and are now a member of the Fraternity.

This was quite an experience, but you were blindfolded for most of it.

Now that you are a member, what is expected of you when you show up and go to your Lodge meeting?

First, the Lodge meeting, called Stated Communications, is not like the ritual of initiation, but a business meeting.

Let’s go through the Code of Conduct and protocols to help you feel comfortable.

Before you go, you should ask someone if there is a dress code at the Lodge.

This will be different for each Lodge.

Some Lodges believe that to show proper respect, you should wear a tuxedo or black suit.

Others want coat and tie.

Others are more concerned with you being there rather than what you wear.

Please check the dress code so that you avoid embarrassment.

The first thing that I recommend is that you show up for the meeting early.

One of the most important activities that you will do is getting to know your Lodge brothers.

You are a member of the Fraternity and are welcome in Lodges throughout the world.

Nevertheless, your home Lodge brothers are family now.

Take the time to get know them.

When you go through the door of the building you will probably be greeted by some of the officers of the Lodge.

If some of the brothers do not greet you, go and introduce yourself.

Overcome your shyness and reach out to them.

At this time you will form your friendships and establish your connections.

It is these brothers that will help you get through your first few meetings.

Lodges have a sign-in book to note who is present.

This book will be at the Outer Door before you go into the Lodge.

During the pandemic, rather than the registration book, the Secretary will call role as the first order of business.

To take part in a Lodge meeting you must be properly clothed.

This isn’t referring to the dress code but rather how you wear your apron.

If you forgot to bring the apron that you received when you were made a Master Mason, the Lodge will provide a spare just outside of the Outer Door.

The manner in which you wear your apron is appropriate to the degree that you have attained.

Any brother available will happily assist you with your apron.

Like your initiation rituals, the Stated Communications has a set ritual for opening and closing the Lodge.

We will talk about the Closing differences later.  
  
The officers will perform the ritual for the Opening.

It is a solemn ritual that will help the brethren shed their daily problems, calm their minds, and refocus themselves for participating in the meeting.

One of the first questions is, “where do I sit?”

The simple answer is not in an officer’s chair.

You don’t want to be responsible for their part of the ritual do you?

You should find someone to sit near to help you through the first few meetings and answer some questions you may have about what is going on.

There is a point in the opening that the Worshipful Master will call on the brethren to give the signs.

Be sure to practice with someone during the “Meet and Greet” period.

Gavel Raps: The Lodge is controlled by the Worshipful Master through gavel raps.   
  
When the Worshipful Master addresses someone, he raps once.

The person will then arise. If the Three Great Lights are displayed, the person will address the Worshipful Master, by giving the Due Guard, saying “Worshipful Master” and then giving the Sign of the degree.  
  
When the Worshipful Master addresses his officers, he will rap twice. All officers will arise.  
  
When the Worshipful Master addresses the Lodge, he will rap three times. All brothers will arise.  
  
When the Worshipful Master wants the brother or brothers to sit, he will rap once.

What to do if you arrive late?

You are welcome to join the meeting, even if you are late.

The Tiler will alert the Lodge that a Brother properly vouched for is waiting to enter.

The Worshipful Master will allow this if you are properly clothed, which means that you are wearing your apron in the proper manner.

You walk in and approach the area west of the altar facing the Worshipful Master.

Both you and the Worshipful Master salute in unison with the Due Guard and Sign of the Degree that the Lodge was opened.

When the Worshipful Master says you may sit, you can choose a seat with the Brethren.

Now let us talk about the business of the Lodge and how you participate.

You are a member and as such everyone wants you to participate. Your questions, opinions or comments are important.

Here is how to speak up during the business part of the meeting.

You should stand to be recognized by the Worshipful Master. When he calls on you, you should address the Worshipful Master, by giving the Due Guard, saying “Worshipful Master” and then giving the Sign of the degree.

If you need to address someone other than the Worshipful Master, you will ask the Worshipful Master if you can address your question or comment to the brother.

Most things are accomplished by consent of the Lodge, in other words voted on by the Master Masons of that Lodge.

So, how are votes conducted? There are three different types of votes: 1) show of hands, 2) paper ballot, and 3) ballot box.

Most votes are straightforward, such as should we pay this bill, or how much for a scholarship.

The Worshipful Master will simply call for the show of hands.

When what you are voting on is sensitive and requires a secret ballot, such as the vote on the principle officers, the Worshipful Master will have the Deacons distribute paper and pen and collect the vote.

The secretary will count the vote and let the Worshipful Master know the outcome.

The most secret ballot is for a petition. This vote is done by ritual.

The Senior Deacon will travel around the Lodge carrying a ballot box.

When he stops in front of you, you should pick either a white ball or black cube and put your vote into the hidden slot within the box.

The term “black ball” is derived from this form of balloting as a petition is turned down with one black ball.

To avoid error, we have switched to black cubes but the term still applies.

What does it mean when the Lodge goes informal?

The Worshipful Master may want the Lodge to take a break while the Lodge is set up for a presentation, or his messenger (the Senior Deacon) is sent on business outside of the Lodge room.

He will then rap the Lodge informal.

That means that you can get up, move around and talk with one another.

Be aware that there is still a restricted area that you cannot walk through, and that is between the Worshipful Master and the alter.

The Worshipful Master will give warning and then rap the Lodge formal when the meeting will proceed with the proper protocols.

Closing of the Lodge

What are the differences between opening and closing: The Closing ritual is almost identical to the Opening.   
  
You should be aware of what to do when the Worshipful Master asks the Wardens, “How shall Masons meet? How Act? And Part?”, so let’s go through what you and everyone else does during this part of the Closing Ritual.

“How shall Masons meet?” His answer, “on the Level.”

At this point all brethren will arise and start to move to the floor of the Lodge.

“How act Brother Junior Warden?” His answer, “by the Plumb.”

At this point all the brethren will move to a line that will square the Lodge, with the officers standing in their places at the corners.

Remember, if your side is quite full and you want to move to the other side of the Lodge to balance the lines, **do not walk between the Alter and the Worshipful Master.**

“And part upon the square.” At this point everyone should be in their place.

The Worshipful Master and officers will finish the closing ritual and the Worshipful Master will declare the Lodge closed with a final rap.

At this time you are free to take off your apron and move about.

Can you visit other Lodges?

Of course you can.

If you are a Master Mason, be sure to bring your dues card.

If you are an Entered Apprentice or Fellowcraft, be sure to bring a Master Mason that can vouch for you.

When you arrive, be sure to find the Tiler, Senior Warden or Senior Deacon to let them know that you would like to join their meeting or degree.

They will verify that you are a Mason and take your information so that they can introduce you to the Lodge after it has been opened.

Know that everyone will help you through this.

They want you there and want you to feel welcome.

Everyone here is you friend and brother.