

Masonic Principles Proficiency for the Master Mason Degree

Developed 2017 by Steven Hessler



A Candidate's Guide to the "Principles Proficiency":

Congratulations, you are a Freemason.

But what exactly does that *mean*?

You came to our organization of your own free will and accord. You asked a friend who was also a Freemason to sponsor your petition. You took your oath, and were declared, "*Brother*".

Now what?

The following pages contain what has become known as the Masonic "Principles Proficiency". It is one of several alternatives available to our degree candidates who aspire to continue in their Masonic progress, advancing to the next degree by proving their knowledge in the "Gentle Craft" of Freemasonry.

If we are to call ourselves Freemasons, we should understand exactly what that means. That was the genesis for the document that now lies before you.

The follow pages offer an alternative for the aspiring Candidate to prove his proficiency and allows a Brother to demonstrate Masonic knowledge without explicitly memorizing his answers, which is more common method employed by other proficiency standards available to advance to the next degree.

The exam is divided into two parts:

Part 1: Contained in this document, provides short reading excerpts from your initiation ceremony as well as Educational materials provided by the Grand Lodge of Ohio. Following each selection are a series of short questions to assure your comprehension of the reading material. You should complete this material with the help of your Masonic mentor (termed "Master Craftsman"), but it is entirely possible to complete this section working independently on your own time.

Part 2: You will learn to read a Masonic Cipher and review the Obligation you took as part of the degree. You will need to schedule a meeting (or two) your Master Craftsman to complete this section.

Part 3: This constitutes the "Philosophical" portion of the exam. These are the questions you must answer in front of your Lodge brothers to progress to the next degree. These questions require some personal reflection of what you have learned throughout your study. It is highly recommended that you review and practice your responses with your Master Craftsman. You will also need to demonstrate the grip, due-guard, and sign of this degree, so extra consultation with your Master Craftsman will be necessary.

The following pages compose Part One for the Fellow Craft Exam. Following the satisfactory completion of these questions, you will, with the assistance of your Master Craftsman, complete the remaining two sections.

Welcome to the Fraternity—we wish you well as you embark on your studies.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THIRD DEGREE

This Degree is the crown of the Symbolic Lodge. It is the culmination of all that has been taught to the Candidate in the two preceding ceremonies.

At this point the Candidate has symbolically, if not actually, balanced his inner natures and has shaped them into the proper relationship with the higher, more spiritual parts of him. His physical nature has been purified and developed to a high degree. He has developed stability and a sure footing. His mental faculties have sharpened and his horizons have been expanded. The Candidate is now ready to approach the portal of the Sublime Degree of Master Mason.

The above would be the ideal scenario, but is rarely carried out so seriously. However, regardless of the Candidate's pace through the Degrees, he should always review his personal progress and take action to improve himself in Masonry. He should not be satisfied with taking the Degrees halfheartedly and then consider himself a Master Mason. Very few of us are truly Masters of our Craft, and we should maintain a healthy deference for this exalted status. For the designation Master Mason should always be before us in our journey toward the Light as the ideal of our Fraternity.

Being "Raised to the Sublime Degree" is the appropriate terminology. Sublime is defined as being exalted or elevated so as to inspire awe and wonder. And it also means to undergo sublimation that, like distillation, requires a volatilization of a substance that rises and reforms at a higher level. The significance of this Degree is the portrayal of the removal of everything that keeps us from rising to that state where the soul communes with the Supreme Light.

---MM Basic Education Course, pg 3

1. Throughout our Masonic degrees, the idea is that the candidate has symbolically _____ his inner natures.
2. Regardless of how successful or how seriously a candidate has taken the lessons of the degrees to heart, he should always review his personal progress and take action to _____ himself in _____.
3. What is the definition of "Sublime"?

The Working Tools of a Master Mason

"...which are all the implements of Masonry appertaining to the first three degrees indiscriminately, but more especially the trowel.

The Trowel is an instrument made use of by Operative Masons to spread the cement which unites the building into one common mass. But we, as Free and Accepted Masons, are taught to use it for the more noble and glorious purpose of spreading the cement of Brotherly Love and Affection; that cement which unites us into one sacred band, or society of friends and Brothers, among whom no contention should ever exist, but that noble contention—or rather, emulation---of who best can work and best agree."

--Ritual of the Third Degree, Grand Lodge of Ohio

1. The working tools of a Master Mason are "All the implements of Masonry appertaining to the first three degrees...", plus one more. List all the Working Tools that you have been invested with during the course of your degrees, including Master Mason:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
2. An Operative Mason spreads cement to unite the parts of a building. The Cement you spread as a Speculative Mason is the cement of _____ and _____.
3. What is the sole point of contention that should exist between Brother Masons?

SYMBOLISM OF THE DEGREE

The Candidate enters the Lodge of the Master Mason in darkness, for he has not witnessed the light of this Degree before. But the difference of this entrance from that of the others is that he is now in a state of equilibrium...The initiate is given full use of every working tool, but the one tool exalted above the others from this point on is the one that symbolizes the spreading of Brotherly love.

After ceremonies in the first section which seem quite familiar, the Candidate partakes of the central Mystery Drama of our Fraternity. The very nature of participating in this rite and assuming the role of the Grand Master Hiram Abiff is to forge a link with the inner soul of our Fraternity. And as our legend is completely and absolutely consistent with some of the august Mystery Schools of antiquity, we are communing with the archetypal forces that are the foundation of our tradition. And at least in some small way, we may momentarily forget who we were when we entered the Holy of Holies and realize who we really are.

The symbolism that we encounter in this Degree can be traced back for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Some of it is almost identical with very ancient usage, but most of it has taken on the cultural flavor of its successive conveyors.

--Master Mason Basic Education Course, pg 3

1. In the Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft degrees, you entered the Lodge unevenly dressed—one side of your body was uncovered. As a Master Mason, both sides were uncovered, representing you arriving at a state of _____.
2. According to the passage above, what other organizations employed similar rites to our Legend of GMHA?
3. According to the passage above, part of the effect of the degree in assuming the character of Hiram Abiff is that it helps us forget who we _____, in hopes that that we may realize who we really _____.

THE THREE RUFFIANS

There are many symbolic explanations for the appearance of these three ruffians in our ritualistic work. Their attempt to obtain the secrets not rightfully theirs, and the dire consequences of their actions, are symbolic of many things. Trying to obtain knowledge of Divine Truth by some means other than a reward for faithfulness makes the culprit both a thief and a murderer. Each of us is reminded that rewards must be earned, rather than obtained by violence or devious means. The Ruffians are also symbolic of the enemies we have within us: our own ignorance, passions and attitudes, which we have "come here to control and subdue.

--Master Mason Basic Education Course, pg 4

1. List three possible interpretations for the Symbolism of the Ruffians:

THE LOST WORD

In the search for "That Which Was Lost," we are not actually searching for a particular word. Our search is a symbol for our "feeling of loss" or "exile" from the Source of Life. What we are searching for is Divine Truth, which should be the ultimate goal of all men and Masons.

The Book of Genesis gives us a clue to the power of speech. In it, we learn that the first Act of Creation occurred when "God said." The utterance of the Word is also closely connected with the idea of Light, and therefore knowledge.

Having the power of speech is perhaps the noblest attribute of man, because he can communicate his thoughts to his fellows. Thus, The Word has been carried down through the ages as synonymous with every manifestation of Divine Power and Truth. We must always search diligently for truth, and never permit prejudice, passions, or conflicts of interest, to hinder us in our search. We must keep our minds open to receiving truth from any source.

Thus, Masons are devoted to freedom of thought, speech and action. In our Craft Lodges, we have but a substitute for the True Word. Each person must ultimately seek out and find the True Word for himself, through his own individual efforts.

--Master Mason Basic Education Course, pg 5

1. According to the passage above, what are two symbolic interpretations for the Lost Word?

2. In Freemasonry, the Word is closely connected with the idea of _____ and therefore represents _____

3. List three things that can hinder our search for Truth:

4. When we consider the symbolic lesson of the Lost Word, we realize that Masons are devoted to freedom of _____, _____ and _____.

RAISING OF A CANDIDATE

Most people do not understand what being “raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason” means. However, if one examines its several parts, it becomes quite clear what is meant.

One of the definitions of the word sublime is “not to be excelled.” The Master Mason Degree is the pinnacle of Symbolic Freemasonry.

The use of the term “raised” stems from our operative origins. In operative Masonry, most stonemasons were journeymen and only very few were elevated to the status of Master Craftsman or Master of Mason, which enabled them to take on apprentices and employ journeymen.

Early in the history of our fraternity, only the presiding officer of a Lodge was a Master Mason. However, as the fraternity developed, its system of initiation came to be divided into three parts, Entered Apprentice, Fellow (of the) Craft, and Master Masons.

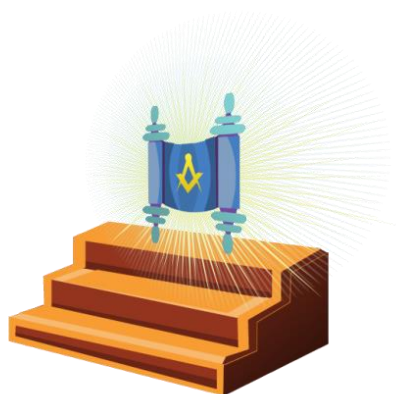
Being raised to the sublime Degree of Master Mason simply means that a new member has attained full membership within a Symbolic Lodge.

---Master Mason Basic Education Course

1. What were the privileges of an Operative Mason who had been elevated to the status of Master Mason?

2. Early in our history only the _____ of a Lodge was considered a Master Mason. Over time, this practice changed as our three-degree structure developed.

3. In the current practice of our Fraternity, what does it mean to have been “Raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason”?



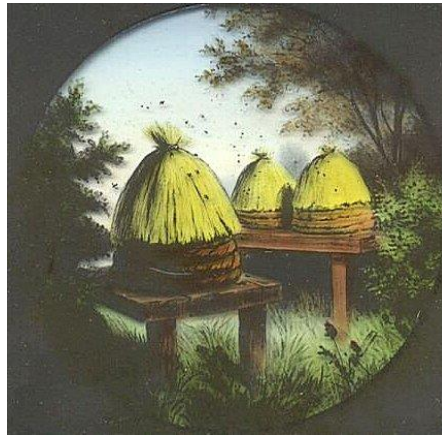
The Three Steps

"...are emblematic of the three principal stages of human life: namely Youth, Manhood, and Age.

In Youth, as Entered Apprentices, we ought industriously to occupy our minds in the attainment of useful knowledge; in manhood, as Fellowcrafts, we should apply our knowledge in the discharge of our respective duties to God, our neighbor, and ourselves; so that in Age, as Master Masons, we may enjoy the happy reflections consequent on a well-spent life, and die in the hope of a glorious immortality

--Ritual of the Third Degree, Grand Lodge of Ohio

1. The Three Steps carry symbolic meanings; what else do the three steps symbolize, besides the three degrees of Freemasonry?
2. What is the duty of an Entered Apprentice?
3. What is the duty of a Fellowcraft?
4. What is the reward a Master Mason obtains when he faithfully discharges these duties?



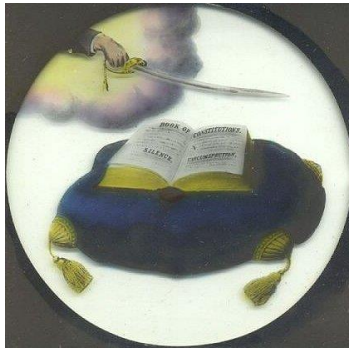
The Beehive

"...is an emblem of Industry, and recommends the practice of that virtue to all created beings, from the highest seraph of the heavens, to the lowest reptile of the dust. It teaches us that as we came into the world rational and intelligent beings, so should we ever be industrious ones; never sitting down contented while our fellow-creatures around us are in want, when it is in our power to relieve them without inconvenience to ourselves.

...Thus was man formed for a social, and active life—the noblest part of the work of God. And he that will so demean himself as not to be endeavoring to add to the common stock of knowledge and understanding, may be deemed a Drone in the hive of nature, a useless member of society, and unworthy of our protection as Masons

--Ritual of the Third Degree, Grand Lodge of Ohio

1. The Beehive is an emblem, or symbol, for what trait?
2. What does Masonic ritual regard as "the noblest part of the Work of God"?
3. A Drone is a male honeybee. As winter approaches, these bees are seen as a drain on the resources of the hive and are forcibly removed, and often killed, by the worker bees. Similarly Masonry is not meant to provide its benefits for everyone. According to the Ritual above, who should be excluded from Masonic membership?



The Sword

“The Book of Constitutions guarded by the Tyler’s Sword, reminds us that we should be ever watchful and guarded in our thoughts, words, and actions, particularly when before the Enemies of Masonry, ever bearing in remembrance those truly Masonic virtues, Silence and Circumspection.

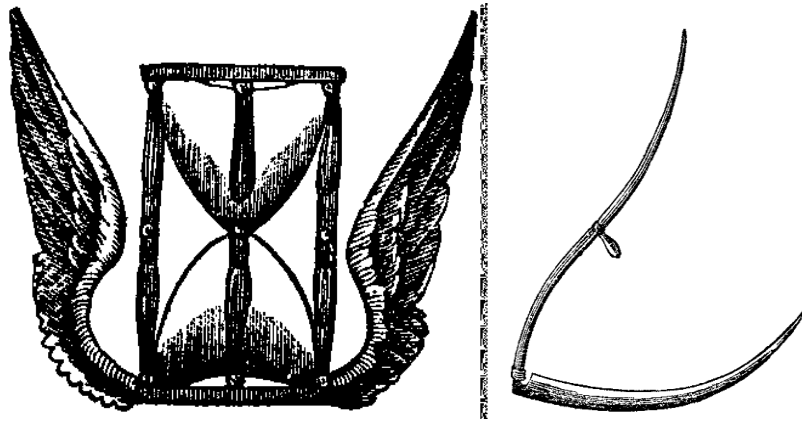
The Sword pointing at the Naked Heart demonstrates the Justice will sooner or later overtake us; and that although our thoughts, words, and actions may be hidden from the eyes of men, yet that All-seeing Eye—whom the Sun, Moon, and Stars obey, and under whose watchful care even comets perform their stupendous revolutions—pervades the inmost recesses of the human heart, and will reward us according to our merit.”

--Ritual of the Third Degree, Grand Lodge of Ohio

1. The Book of Constitutions guarded by the Tyler’s Sword reminds Master Masons that they should carefully observe what three things?

2. What does the explanation above list as “those truly Masonic virtues”?

3. The Sword pointing at the naked heart reminds us that even if we are good stewards of our thoughts, words, and actions in the public eye--Who will be the final Judge of our character?



The Hourglass and the Scythe

"The Hourglass is an emblem of Human Life. Behold, how swiftly the sands run, and how rapidly our lives are drawing to a close!

We cannot, without astonishment, look upon the little particles contained in this machine. How they pass away almost imperceptibly, and yet...in the short space of an hour, they are all exhausted! Thus wastes man!"

The Scythe is an emblem of Time, which cuts the brittle thread of life, and launches us into eternity. Behold, what havoc the Scythe of Time makes among the human race! If by chance we escape the numerous evils incident to childhood and youth, and with health and vigor arrive to the years of Manhood, yet withal, we must soon be cut down by that all-devouring Scythe of Time, and be gathered into the land where our fathers have gone before us.

--Ritual of the Third Degree, Grand Lodge of Ohio

1. Taken together, the Hourglass and Scythe are both symbols of what process in human life?

The Master Mason Charge

Your zeal for the institution, the progress you have made in our mysteries, and your steady conformity to our useful regulations, have pointed you out as a proper person for the peculiar mark of our favor.

Duty and Honor now alike bind you to be faithful to every trust, and strenuously to enforce, by precept and example, a steadfast obedience to the tenets of Freemasonry.

...In this respectable character you are authorized to correct the irregularities of your less-informed Brethren, to fortify their minds with resolution against the snares of the insidious, and to guard them against every allurements to viscous practices.

To preserve...the reputation of the Fraternity ought to be your constant care. It, therefore, becomes your province to caution the inexperienced against a breach of fidelity; to recommend to your inferiors in rank or office obedience and submission; to your equals, courtesy and affability; to your superiors, kindness and condescension.

Universal benevolence you are zealously to inculcate, and by the regularity of your own conduct, endeavor to remove every aspersion against this venerable institution.

...Your honor and reputation are concerned in supporting with dignity the respectable character you now bear. Let no motive...make you swerve from your duty, violate your vows, or betray your trust. Be true and faithful, and imitate the example of the celebrated artist whom you have just represented.

---Ritual of the Third Degree, Grand Lodge of Ohio

1. What two virtues now bind you to be steadfast in your obedience to the tenets of Freemasonry?

2. List three things you are authorized to do when interacting with less-informed Brethren?

3. What does the Charge instruct you to be your “constant care”?

4. Who do you think is the “celebrated artist” referred to in the final sentence of the passage?

Congratulations! You are now finished with Part One and, with the consultation of your Master Craftsman, are ready to complete the final “philosophical” portion of the exam, which will be answered to your Brothers in Open Lodge.

Part 2: Reading the Masonic Cipher and Understanding your Obligation

With the help of your Master Craftsman, decipher this page of Masonic Cipher to Review your Obligation:

8. WM. (Aphs t Alt) Sa I, p y n i f
 9. a r a m, ———, o m o f w a a, i t
 10. p o A G a t w L, e t G a d t t H S J,
 11. d h a h, m s a s p a s, t I w n t e t
 12. s o t d, o a p t, t a p i t w, e i b
 13. t a t a l f b o t d, o i a l g l L o M M,
 14. a n u n t h o t u n t a s t, d e o l f i,
 15. I s h f h o t a j e t t s a I a m

1. I f u r m r e p a s, t I w n t c h t, w g, o
 2. d e f a L o M M o a b o t d F u r m r e,
 3. I w n t h v i l e t c a r i n t c w a M M w,
 4. h m, s o d t r, k n g h r t b s c h F u r m r e,
 5. I w n g t s u b f t M M w d i a o m a n
 6. o f m t h n t t i w c h I s h l r e c i t F u r m r e,
 7. I w n t b p r e s a t i n t n g, p s g o r s g, o
 8. a w, a n o l m i d o t, a y n m u n d a g,
 9. a a t h, m d m o a f l, k h r o h m t b e s c h.
 10. F u r m r e, I w l a n s a d o b a l l f l s n s a
 11. s u m s s t m f m a L o M M, o g v n m
 12. b a b r o o t h s d e g, i f w t l t h o m c - t.
 13. F u r m r e, I w l a d a a s t a l w o r, d i s M M,
 14. t h r w d s a o r s, s f r a I c w m a t i n j
 15. t m o f a m F u r m r e, I w i l l k p t s e c s
 16. o a M M, w h n r e c b m e a s c h, m u r, t r e
 17. a o t h r f e l n s e x
 18. F u r m r e, I w m a n t a s u p t l s, r l s a
 19. r e g s o t, o a o t h L o M M o w c h I m
 20. b e c a m e b, t h c o n, l s a e d c o t G r
 21. L g e u n w c h t h s m s h l b h l d n, s f a
 22. t m c t m k
 23. T a l o f w I d s o l a s i n p a s, b d
 24. m u n d n l s a p e n t t t o h g m b o d
 25. s e v i t w, m b w l s t k n t h e e a b r d t a s h,

1. a n d t h o s a s h s e t t t 4 w d s o h, t t n
 2. m r e r e m c e m a b h d o m a m g m o M s
 3. f, s h I e b g o w i l v i t m s o l o o o o
 4. a M M, s h m G a k m s

Questions to Discuss with your Masonic Mentor:

1. What are some things that you promise to do in taking your Obligation?
2. What, if anything, do you promise not to do in taking your Obligation?
3. What is the Penalty for this degree? How does that relate to the Due-Guard and Sign of this degree

Addendum to Master Mason Cipher Study:

As a Master Mason, you are now entitled to sit in any Lodge throughout the world that is Recognized by the Grand Lodge of Ohio. Before visiting a new Lodge, it is always advisable to contact the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Ohio to ensure the Lodge you are visiting is a Regular Lodge that is in good Fraternal Relations with the Grand Lodge of Ohio.

It is always a good idea to contact the Master and/or Secretary of the Lodge you plan to visit. You will learn their agenda for the evening, regular dress code, and any other local customs you should be aware of before entering the door.

You may be asked to "repeat the Test Oath" when proving your Masonic Membership to the Lodge Officers. With the Assistance of your Master Craftsman, read and translate the following page of Masonic Cipher. It is recommended that you commit this phrase to memory whenever you are visiting a Lodge outside of Ohio.

15. B. Rép th tst O
16. C. I _____ d h-b a hron sol s, tt I
17. h bn reg i p a r t th sub deg o MM i a
18. jst a lfl man, a tt I a nt nw und sen
19. o sus o exp, a k o n reas wh I sh be
20. Frthmr, I am nt a mem of, no do I hd
21. algne to bods clmg to b Masc wch hv
22. bn dcld by th Gr L o O to be clan
23. s h m G

Directions for the Candidate:

Congratulations on your perseverance and completing Parts One and Two of your examination. You are now provided with the final set of questions, which will ask you some questions about what you learned in the course of your studies. A few points to consider:

1. These are open-ended questions, and in many cases there is more than one right answer. Discuss your answer with your Masonic Mentor, and refer back to the reading as often as you need to while forming your answer.
2. This is NOT a “Grade-School Test”. Do not worry about “passing” or “failing”, as much as demonstrating an understanding what you have read and studied.
3. You will answer these questions in Open Lodge—meaning, with members present. Do rehearse your answers until you feel comfortable speaking on the question at hand. There is no prohibition against writing short notes to refer to during your Lodge examination. Under no circumstances should a Mentor force you to go before the Lodge until you feel ready.
4. At the conclusion of the questions, you will be asked to demonstrate the step, due guard, and sign of the degree. As Part of the Master Mason Exam, you will also be asked to communicate the Substitute to your Master Craftsman. ***Work with your Masonic Mentor on this during several occasions before demonstrating this to the Lodge.***

Principles Proficiency Exam Questions:

Exam pages have been provided to help you refresh your memory on the material, and help you develop your answer.

1. How do you believe a Brother would “improve himself in Masonry”? (*Exam Page 3*)
2. Why is the Trowel an appropriate tool for a Master Mason? Why not in the lower degrees? (*Exam Page 4*)
3. How are the Ruffians an appropriate symbol for our Ignorance, Passions, and Attitudes? (*Exam Page 6*)
4. Why is a Master Mason entrusted with only a Substitute Word? (*Exam page 7*)

5. Sublime means “not to be excelled”. Why do you think the Master Mason degree is considered “the pinnacle of all Masonry”? (*Exam page 7*)
6. In the symbolism of the Three Steps, why do you think it is appropriate to combine the Degrees Of Masonry with the 3 principle stages of Human life? (*Exam page 9*)
7. Why do you think leading a social and active life is considered “the noblest part of the work of God”? (*Exam page 10*)
8. Why do you think it is important to pair the symbolic lesson of the Tyler’s Sword guarding the Book of Constitutions, with the symbolism of the Sword pointing at the Naked Heart? (*Exam Page 11*)
9. Why do you think it is important for Masons to contemplate their mortality? (*Exam Page 12*)
10. How can a Mason demonstrate the “Universal Benevolence”? (*Exam Page 13*)

Final test:

Demonstrate the Step, Due Guard, and Sign of this Degree.

With the assistance of your Master Craftsman, demonstrate the Grip of a Master Mason

Communicate the Substitute for the Master Mason’s Word