BEFORE THE DEGREES

The Prospective Masons Guide

Meeting a lodge and deciding whether to petition

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What brings you to the Craft?

Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest fraternities. We call it the Craft. For centuries, men have gathered in lodges to share a meal, learn from one another, and lend a hand when a Brother or a neighbor needs one. A good man who comes with an honest question will always find a welcome at our table.

Our traditions owe much to the stonemason's trade. A builder takes up a square to see whether a corner is true. We have kept that tool as a reminder to deal squarely with others. Its lesson comes home when a man asks himself whether he has been as fair to someone else as he would want that man to be to him.

The men who meet in your community are what we mean by a lodge. If you come to visit, ask one of them what first drew him to the Craft and what has kept him there. His answers may be years apart. We would be glad to hear what brought you to our door, too.

Getting to know a lodge

You can make the first approach yourself, even if no one in your family has been a Mason. Look for a lodge you could reasonably visit on a working evening. Its secretary can tell you about an open house or a supper where guests are welcome.

“Hello, my name is _____. I live nearby and I’m curious about Freemasonry. Is there a good evening to visit? Whom should I ask for when I arrive?”

Once you have a date, ask where to enter, what people usually wear, and whether supper needs a reservation. If stairs, hearing, or another practical concern could affect your visit, mention it to your host. Some lodges welcome visitors for a meal and then hold a meeting for members. Knowing when the public part ends makes the evening easier.

At the table, try asking, “What have the men here worked on together lately?” A story about an ordinary evening can tell you a good deal about the lodge.

Belief, time, and cost

In the traditions these guides describe, we ask a man to come of his own free will, to be of good character, and to believe in a Supreme Being. Men of different faiths can share a lodge. If you wonder how membership would sit with your convictions, ask the lodge to explain its expectations in plain words. Age, residency, and reference requirements depend on the jurisdiction.

Before you petition, ask two practical questions. “What would I pay in the first year, and what would I pay each year after that?” gives you a chance to distinguish initiation fees, dues, and optional expenses. “What did a new member’s last month actually look like?” gives you a picture of meetings, study, and travel.

Take those answers home. A partner or family member may have a question you haven’t thought of. Ask which occasions they could attend with you. If your household already has more commitments than it can keep, you are welcome to stay in touch and revisit the question later.

If you decide to petition

Visiting gives you time to get acquainted. A petition is the step you take when you have decided to ask a particular lodge for membership. Its secretary can explain the form, the fee, and who may recommend you. If signatures are required and you have only just met the members, ask how they normally get to know a prospective petitioner.

Once the lodge receives your petition, it generally appoints members to speak with you. You may hear this called an investigation. Be ready to talk about what draws you to the Craft and what you understand the commitment to be. Bring along the questions still on your mind. The lodge then considers your petition by ballot under its own rules.

Ask the secretary how and when you can expect to hear from him. If you are accepted, let the lodge guide your preparation for the first degree, called Entered Apprentice. You can arrive ready to learn by knowing when to come, whom to meet, and what to bring.

Further Reading

If you are ready to meet someone, use our Lodge Finder to choose a lodge within reach. Confirm the next public occasion with its secretary before you travel.

If you would rather read first, our guide to becoming a Freemason walks through the steps. For a different introduction, visit our museum and choose an apron or a photograph that catches your eye. “Can you tell me how this was used?” is a fine question to bring to a Mason.

Find a lodge

How to become a Freemason

Explore the museum

A word to the man considering the Craft

Dear Friend,

I am glad you have taken the time to learn something of our fraternity. The men you meet will give you a better sense of lodge life than any book can. Hear what they have to say, tell them what matters to you, and give yourself time to form your own judgment.

If you find men whose company you value and work you would be proud to share, I hope you will feel at ease taking the next step. Whatever you decide, may the acquaintance be a good one.

Sincerely,

John Piccone