

Guidance on Writing and Reading Masonic Papers

Prepared by

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General

Writing and reading a talk has to be carefully planned. These notes offer guidance on the following essential points.

1. Choosing the subject matter.
2. Finding the source material.
3. Preparing a skeletal version (or synopsis) of the paper.
4. Adding flesh to the bones (or writing the paper).
5. Revising the paper, using the scalpel ruthlessly where necessary.
6. Giving the paper a final groom.
7. Delivering the paper.
8. Dealing with questions, and
9. Up-dating the paper.

Subject matter

Choosing the subject matter is probably the most difficult part of the job. It must have a Masonic connection; mystical and philosophical subjects should be avoided unless a request has been specifically made and the speaker is well qualified to deal with such subjects; symbolism should be handled with great care; it should not be treated as definitive, but rather as one possible interpretation.

What subjects are you best able to deal with? Is it something to do with the ritual? the historical side?, the symbolic aspect?, is there any particular part of the furniture or furnishings of the lodge on which you could write a paper? There are a wide variety of subjects from which you can choose, but the matter needs very careful consideration. The greater your interest in the subject chosen, the more likely you will produce a good paper.

Once you have decided on the subject matter, consider a provisional title for your paper.

Source material

The source material will depend on the subject matter of the paper. Here are a few general pointers.

- a) *The Book of Constitutions and Regulations of Supreme Grand Chapter.*
- b) *The Masonic Year Book Historical Supplement.*
- c) *AQC*, the Transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge, No. 2076.
- d) *The Freemason at Work*, (Harry Carr).
- e) *Freemasons' Guide and Compendium*. (Bernard Jones).
- f) *Freemasons' Book of the Royal Arch*. (Bernard Jones).
- g) *The Craft*. (John Hamill).
- h) *Symbolism in Craft Freemasonry*. (Colin Dyer).
- i) *The Freemason's Pocket Reference Book*. (Pick and Knight).
- j) *The Pocket History of Freemasonry*. (Pick and Knight).
- k) *Books of ritual*.

All the items listed are easily obtainable. Much other information can be obtained from the Librarian of Grand Lodge.

To the list given should be added other source material relating to the subject matter of your choice.

On questions of historical fact it is advisable, wherever practicable, to consult original records, not someone else's summary or digest of them. There are some books, which are now generally regarded as being

unreliable on questions of fact, or at least controversial in their interpretation of the accepted facts. Advice on such matters can be obtained from the Librarian at Grand Lodge.

Length of paper

The length of the paper should never exceed forty minutes. An interesting well-delivered paper lasting about ten minutes can give more enlightenment and enjoyment than a forty-minute paper full of facts but badly delivered.

As a guide it is suggested that 'novices' should limit their papers to about fifteen minutes; the average good speaker to about twenty-five minutes and the experienced speaker to about thirty-five minutes.

These times can be better expressed in pages. A sheet of A4 paper takes about thirty lines if the typing is double-spaced, assuming about ten words to a line. The time taken to deliver such a page should be about two-and-a-half minutes. So a fifteen-minute talk means no more than six such pages; a twenty-five minute talk no more than ten pages and a thirty-five minute talk, no more than fourteen pages.

If you are asked to give a talk lasting 'about' a stated time, take the word 'about' as meaning a margin of approximately ten per cent of the time; thus 'about twenty minutes' would mean between eighteen and twenty-two minutes, and 'about thirty minutes' would mean between twenty-seven and thirty-three minutes.

The synopsis

List the main points you want to include in your paper under 'chapter headings' and then put them in the order in which you will be dealing with them. The first might be an Introduction in which you might, for example, state the purpose of your paper, its scope, such as the period of time and the Grand Lodges or jurisdictions to be covered.

Under each of the 'chapter headings' list the relevant information that is to be included. Aim for a logical step-by-step approach towards the climax of your paper, which can then be summarized in a conclusion. You should be satisfied that you have achieved the purpose of your paper whether or not it is stated in the Introduction.

Allocate to the Introduction and to each of the 'chapter headings' the number of pages you are likely to need; this will help you plan and properly balance your paper. Make sure the total does not exceed the time you have for the talk.

Writing the paper

Having got some idea of the length of each section you can now start writing the full paper. The bulk of your information is likely to come from the source material. Care should be taken to ensure that facts you give are accurate; opinions should be recorded as such, and acknowledgements made when somebody else's material is used. Verbosity should be avoided.

Revise

When the paper has been completed, put it on one side for a week or so and then re-read it carefully and critically. Re-check your facts; make sure that the paragraphs are not too long and that they are in sequential order so that you reach your conclusion in a logical and orderly manner. Satisfy yourself that the purpose of the paper *has* been achieved, cut out all unnecessary words, phrases or sentences. Read the paper aloud as you would do in lodge and time it, making whatever adjustments may be necessary. This will help to make you familiar with the paper and will show up any possible weaknesses that might cause you to stumble when delivering it.

Review the title of your paper; aim for something short and appealing which will accurately reflect what you want to say and that will whet the appetites of those coming to hear the paper read.

Final grooming

Prepare the delivery version with double spaced typing, using a type that can be read easily. Make sure that there is a good margin both left and right. Limit lines to thirty each page. Ensure pages are properly numbered and in proper sequence before firmly binding or stapling them together.

See that proper information has been given to the right person for the appropriate item on the Agenda; that the title is the one that you have finally decided on; that it is spelt correctly. Try to keep the entry short, for example 'A talk entitled..... by W.Bro.....

Delivering the paper

If you are going to use a lectern, make arrangements beforehand to ensure that one is readily to hand.

Discuss with the Director of Ceremonies where you will be seated and the place from which you are to give the paper.

Make sure that the Master; Secretary and Director of Ceremonies are aware of the fact if any part of the paper is unsuitable for Entered Apprentices and Fellowcrafts.

Papers referring to the Royal Arch may be given in a lodge so long as the relevant esoteric matter is not mentioned. Remember, the Royal Arch is included in Pure Antient Masonry, and we should do all we can to encourage brethren to be exalted.

Don't waste time with unnecessary preliminaries; get on with the paper.

Speak up; 'throw' your voice to the audience, don't keep your head down, mumbling to the paper, look at the audience, not just in one fixed spot but round and about them all. This is not easy when you also have to read from the paper, but it comes with practice.

Vary the pitch of your voice and so avoid a monotone; and be careful not to let the last few words of each sentence drop in what might be described as 'a downward curve'. Don't fidget; avoid mannerisms. Enunciate clearly; check the speed of your delivery. If possible get an experienced speaker to listen to a 'dummy run' and offer constructive criticism and then act on his advice.

Dealing with questions

Before giving the paper try to anticipate some of the questions that might be raised; make a note of them, together with the answers and keep them attached to your paper for reference.

Answer all questions succinctly; keep to the point.

If you don't know the answer to a question, say so and promise to try to find the answer and that if you do you will write to the Secretary of the lodge and advise him so that he can pass the information on to the brethren at the next meeting; be sure to keep your promise! If you cannot find a satisfactory answer, write and say so.

Dealing with questions after reading your paper is a valuable exercise; it puts you on your mettle and helps to test the knowledge of your subject; if handled properly it can be a very useful means of extending your own Masonic knowledge. Further, it often leads you to a topic for another paper.

Up-dating the paper

There will inevitably be occasions when you feel that some additional information can be usefully included in your paper; this may be knowledge acquired since writing it or arising from questions that have been asked. Up-date your paper, but be careful about the time limit. There should be no problem of increasing the length from say fifteen to twenty-five minutes, but if you are required to keep to the original time, don't forget to take out of the paper about as much material as you are putting in. This is important if the paper already takes about thirty-five minutes to deliver, because the brethren would have had enough by then!

GOOD LUCK, AND EVERY SUCCESS IN YOUR VENTURE!