

ORANGE-ROCKLAND SCHOOL OF MASONIC INSTRUCTION

DEGREE PLANNING GUIDE

Conductor									
Pronunciation									
Candidate's Name									

Lodge	_____
Degree	_____
Date	_____
Snow Date	_____
Ritual Director	_____
Rehearsal Dates	_____

Introduction

Why a planning guide? Simply put, it can be a useful tool for organizing your upcoming degree and can serve as a checklist to make sure everything goes smoothly for your ritual work. My original intention was to create three booklets but so much of this information is relevant to all three degrees, it seemed to make more sense to create one. That said, I urge you to use a separate copy of this booklet for each degree that you put on. Write on it, make notes, check off the check boxes, additional copies are available!

Please note that I will usually refer to the brothers undergoing the degrees as 'candidates' even though they are only such before they are obligated in their first degree. This is a convention simply to distinguish them in the text, the author is well aware of the difference.

Planning the Degree

A well planned degree is a good degree! Here are some general tips to make sure that everything goes smoothly for you. The first step is to determine who is in overall charge of the degree and make sure he has a list of all of the brothers emails and telephone numbers! In some lodges, this is the brother assigned to serve as Master for the degree, in others there is a ritual director. For some brothers, this may be their first time organizing ritual work and a Past Master should be assigned to shepherd them through the process. Here are some more tips for the overall planning of a degree:

- Set the degree and rehearsal dates well in advance
- Assign coverage of all parts as well as backups
- Assign conductors so that they can attend rehearsals as well
- Assign a prompter who can attend all rehearsals and can do so without a book!
- Consider a meal before the degree so that the candidates can get to know more brothers and to put them at ease. A nice meal will also increase attendance at your degree!
-

Running Rehearsals

Well run rehearsals will make or break your degree. Poorly attended rehearsals with everyone trying to direct lead to frustration and a sense among the brothers that their time is being wasted; they won't return for another. If everyone arrives on time, is prepared with their parts memorized, and ready to work, the rehearsals will go smoothly. The old adage that a bad dress rehearsal means a good performance is simply not true!

- Plan a minimum of two rehearsals.
- Schedule enough time to get through the entire degree with reasonable stopping. This means that you should avoid rehearsing after a Stated Communication where brothers will feel rushed and the temptation to skip parts is greater.

Furnishings & Materials

Officers Aprons & Jewels

Officers Staves

3 Gavels

Compasses or Square for the Senior Deacon

Presentation Bibles

Cleaned and Pressed Candidate Uniforms

Candidate Name Cards (w/Pronunciations)

Leather Aprons

Working Tools

Q&A Proficiency Books

Chairs for the 2nd Section

Floor Cloth or Panels (if used – 2nd Degree)

Corn, Wine, & Oil (if used – 2nd Degree)

Unadorned Staff or Walking Stick (2nd Degree)

Copies of the Masonic Doxology (2nd Degree)

Drama Costumes (3rd Degree)

Ruffians Tools & Canvas (3rd Degree)

Master's Jewel and Hoodwink (3rd Degree)

Low Twelve Chime (3rd Degree)

Trestleboard and Plans (3rd Degree)

Sprig of Acacia and Stand (3rd Degree)

Net or Oar (3rd Degree)

Roll Call Scroll (3rd Degree)

Chains or Ropes (3rd Degree)

Copies of Playl's Hymn (3rd Degree)

The Orange-Rockland School of Masonic Instruction meets on the 2nd Monday of the month at locations throughout the Orange-Rockland Masonic District. For more information about the School and our programs, please contact V.:W.: Joe Leo at jleo@panix.com.

After the Degree

Congratulations on what should be a great degree but the work hasn't ended yet! Remember to:

- Introduce the new brother to his mentor and explain the proficiency process
- Instruct the new brother in the Masonic Development Course between degrees
- Invite him back to business meetings that can be lowered to his degree
- Have all candidate costumes cleaned and pressed
- Inventory and store drama costumes (3rd Degree)
- Stay in touch with the new brother!

Conductors

Conductors are probably the most overlooked participants in degree preparations yet their immediate physical support of the candidates can affect the whole degree for them. They should be assigned to candidates in advance of the degree and should be encouraged to attend rehearsals, if at all possible. If not, a Head Conductor who can attend should do so and provide instruction to the other conductors on the night of the degree. Conductors should help greet their candidates when they arrive, sit with them during dinner if it is held beforehand, and introduce them to other brothers in the lodge.

We can't stress enough that conductors should NOT be an afterthought! The necessary instruction for a conductor should include:

- How to pronounce their candidate's name
- Where to sit prior to the start of the degree
- How to conduct the candidate with a firm grip
- How to help the candidate kneel and rise
- How to get them on the step without touching their feet
- When they can and can not prompt responses
- How and when to remove the hoodwink
- Where to go after the cabletows and hoodwinks are removed

- Confirm attendance in advance and include backups
- Run the rehearsal seriously so that people will not perceive it as a waste of time. Remind the more experienced ritualists that they still need to be there to set the tone and share their experience with new brothers
- Run the final rehearsal as if it were the real thing if possible. Take notes and review them afterward
- If someone isn't there, do NOT skip their part. What would you do if this was the night of the degree? Employ your backups!
- Rehearse with all furniture and paraphernalia (gavels, staves, etc)
- Let everyone rehearse, including the lecturers
- Rehearse using the candidates names so that they will be pronounced properly!
- Rehearse with your prompter present and teach brothers to turn to the prompter and say "Line" if they need one. Nobody else should prompt!

Before the Degree

In the weeks leading up to the degree, there are a few things we should check on to avoid unpleasant last minute surprises:

- Contact the candidates to confirm the degree date and answer any last minute questions. Remind them of how they should dress the night of the degree.
- Obtain the proper pronunciation of all candidate's names
- Present plans for inclement weather and who they should be call to confirm the degree is on
- Order or set aside all necessary candidate materials including:
 - Leather Apron
 - Presentation Bible
 - Q&A Study Book

- Make sure the LSOME materials are available and all equipment necessary is operating properly
- Clean and press candidate costumes. Check the condition of shoes, hoodwinks, and cabletows
- Make sure there is a chair in the preparation room for every candidate
- Make sure there is a hanger and hook for each candidate in the preparation room to hang his suit
- Make sure there are band-aids in the preparation room to cover wedding rings that can't be removed.

The Evening of the Degree

The evening of the degree is often chaotic which is all the more reason to follow a methodical list to ensure that everything that needs to be done is actually done! Individual items on this check list may be assigned to other brothers but the ultimate responsibility to see that everything is covered falls on the degree director. For that reason, he should arrive early and well rested because he will need patience and tact to make the degree the best experience it can possibly be for the candidates. That said, on the evening of the degree, plan to:

- Assign a brother to remain with the candidates while lodge is opened. They should never be left alone!
- Show the candidates the LSOME pre-degree materials prior to preparing them. Have a knowledgeable brother available to answer questions they may have
- Lay out everything on the Furnishings & Materials checklist prior to opening the lodge
- Have the cleaned and pressed costumes as well as the hoodwinks, shoes, and cabletows laid out on the chairs for the candidates in the prepara-

5th Craftsman	6th Craftsman	7th Craftsman	8th Craftsman	9th Craftsman	10th Craftsman	11th Craftsman	12th Craftsman	Offstage Voice	Chaplain	Organist	Prompter	Lights

Role	Primary Ritualist	Backup Ritualist
King Solomon		
Hiram, King of Tyre		
Hiram Abiff		
1st Ruffian		
2nd Ruffian		
3rd Ruffian		
Seafaring Man		
Secretary		
Guard		
1st Craftsman		
2nd Craftsman		
3rd Craftsman		
4th Craftsman		

tion room

- Remind everyone, including the candidates, to turn off their cell phones and pagers. A cell phone ringing in the preparation room is as distracting as one in the lodge room
- Assign brothers sitting in the South and West to receive the grips from the candidates in the latter half of the first section.
- Explain to the brothers present that you have an assigned prompter and that they are NOT to prompt or mumble along from the sidelines.

Time Management Tips

Some of our degrees are long enough without unnecessary delays caused by poor planning and discipline. The candidate's capacity for absorbing the information will decrease as the evening wears on... and on and on. Here are some tips to save time on degree nights:

- Start on time
- Have candidates prepared while the lodge is being opened
- Discourage brothers from scattering throughout the building between the first and second sections. The break should only be for as long as it takes the candidates to dress in their street clothes.
- All drama costumes should be laid out completely (sandals, aprons, etc) and checked by the brothers who will be using them. It shouldn't take brothers participating in the drama longer to change than it takes the newly obligated brothers to dress! (3rd Degree)

Have we mentioned how important it is to practice pronouncing the candidates' names at every rehearsal? How can you call a man your brother and make him believe it when you can't pronounce his name properly??

Role	Primary Ritualist	Backup Ritualist
Master		
Senior Warden		
Junior Warden		
Senior Deacon		
Junior Deacon		
Senior Master of Ceremonies		
Junior Master of Ceremonies		
Senior Steward		
Junior Steward		
Chaplain		
Marshall		
Tyler		
Secretary		
Apron Presentation		
Working Tools		
Bible Presentation		
Demand		
Lecture of Reasons Questions		
Lecture of Reasons Answers		
Q&A Questions		
Q&A Answers		
Historical Lecture		
Charge		
Organist		
Prompter		
Lights		