

Proficiency

This anecdote for discussion from the Grand Lodge Committee on Education and Information is based on an actual event that occurred at a Lodge in the 17th Masonic District in 2018.

An EA was sitting outside the Lodge waiting to go in and present his Work before the Lodge and nervously reviewing the words to himself. As he sat there, the Tyler approached him.

“Nervous, huh?” said the Tyler, “Don’t be. I’m sure you’ll be fine.”

“I hope so”, said the EA, “Y’know, ever since my injury in Iraq, my memory just isn’t what it used to be. I study it and study it and I think I have a section down; but the next day I come back and it is all jumbled.”

“Did you tell your Master Craftsman about this? I mean, we have options.”

“No. My issues are my issues. I am not going to use it an excuse. I need to be worthy of the esteem of my Brethren.”

Just then the Lodge door opened and the Junior Deacon called the EA in. He went to the Altar, met his Master Craftsman and started his full-form return. He stumbled often and had to be prompted many, many times. After completion, the EA saluted the Master and there was a tangible silence as the Lodge waited for a Brother to stand and make a motion to accept.

“Worshipful, would you permit me to ask this EA a question?” came a voice from the back. It was the Tyler who had snuck in. With permission granted, the Tyler said “Brother, you remember the working tools of the Entered Apprentice. Can you tell me the lesson of the 24-inch Gauge and how you’ve applied that to your life since joining Lodge?”

Without missing a beat, the EA spoke for over two minutes about the lessons he took from the 24-inch Gauge and how he had reflected on it quite a bit; especially as he had made the decision to become a Mason and what that meant for him and his family.

“Worshipful, would you permit me to ask this EA another question?” said the Tyler. “Brother, what is the lesson of the Common Gavel and how have you applied that to your life since joining this Lodge?”

Again, without a pause, the EA spoke for over two minutes about the lessons he took from the Common Gavel, and how he took a hard look at his life and the effects of his choices. When he was done speaking, the Tyler smiled at him and said, “Worshipful, I move that we accept this candidate’s examination and he be deemed proficient.”

So many Brethren immediately rose to their feet that, to this day, there is debate as to who actually provided the second.

SEC. 27.02 of our Code, on the *Advancement and Examination of Candidates* states that:

Neither the Fellow Craft nor Master Mason Degree shall be conferred on a candidate until he has been examined in open Lodge as to his proficiency in the preceding degree and his examination has been approved by the Lodge by a majority voice vote immediately following the examination. The minimum proficiency requirement of all three degrees shall consist of the obligation, step, due guard, sign, grip and words of each degree, all considered modes of recognition.

There are three methods that you will typically see in our jurisdiction: Traditional Proficiency, Minimum Proficiency, and the Principles Proficiency.

Traditional Proficiency: This is the method that has been used for many years, where the candidate is asked to decipher and repeat a series of coded responses found in our Ritual to questions about the degree he just experienced and the associated symbols. Most Lodges that utilize this method require that the candidate recite those responses from memory.

Minimum Proficiency: This relatively newer method consists of selections from the Ritual Examination asking the candidate to demonstrate his knowledge of the obligation, step, due guard, sign, grip and words of the Degree. Most Lodges utilizing this method require that the candidate recite the responses from memory.

Principles Proficiency: This method debuted in 2017 and consists of two parts: Part One requires the candidate to answer questions on readings from and about our Ritual as well as learn how to read the obligation of the degree with the assistance of a Mentor. Part Two consists of a series of 10-12 open-ended questions for the candidate to reflect upon. In Open Lodge, the candidate will demonstrate the due guard, sign, grips, words of the degree; demonstrate that he can read the obligation, and answer a number of the open-ended questions selected by his Mentor to the satisfaction of the Brethren assembled. Many Lodges are combining elements of the Principles Proficiency with the Rote Memorization Proficiency to better integrate and educate new members.

All three are in keeping with our Code and provide one path for our candidates to prove themselves proficient in the lessons of our Fraternity. Arguments can be made that one way is 'better' than another; but the best path to proficiency is the one that ends with a Brother prepared to take the next step in his Masonic journey, whatever that may be. The best path to proficiency is one that is chosen in consultation with the candidate, his mentors, and the Master. The best path to proficiency is the one where the candidate proves himself worthy of the esteem of his Brethren, as shown through a vote reflecting the will and consent of the Lodge.