

# **Catechism as Ritual**

An examination of the ritual roots of the  
Candidate Proficiency Question and Answer  
Catechisms

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This year the Grand Lodge Ritual Committee has decided to include exemplification of the EA Proficiency Exam as part of the ritual work to be demonstrated in the Grand Lodges of Instruction held annually in each district. The general reaction of the Craft to this change is the usual patient acceptance of all such changes in ritual that seemingly accompany changes in Grand Masters. This change, however, seems to have raised more eyebrows and caused more head shaking than most. After all, we already spend a great deal of time on the degree work and the lectures, so why lengthen the proceedings with a recap of all these? And why have lodge officers perform work in GLI that only candidates will ever do – and then promptly forget? And what about that method of delivery, with the Worshipful Master and Senior Warden going back and forth across the lodge? That isn't even the method we use for proficiency exams! All of these quibbles basically stem from the notion that Proficiency Exams are nothing more than tests for candidates, and therefore are not taken seriously as an inherently worthy part of the ritual.

In the course of my research on the history of the ritual, however, I have come to a complete reappraisal of opinion regarding the traditional catechisms, or question and answer dialogs, that we use for candidate proficiencies. Rather than being mere tests, I have found that they were in fact the original form of the lectures. In addition to being lectures for candidates, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century they traditionally were worked at every lodge meeting, which in those days were typically in “table lodge” format. The Master asked the questions and the brothers answered, each in turn around the table, even in meetings when there was no degree work. The entertainment of the evening was the working of the catechism with intermittent breaks for singing, toasting and firing (which is the unison stamping, clapping, gesturing and glass pounding accompanying the toasts). The primacy and antiquity of catechism in Masonic ritual work is further evidenced by the earliest surviving documentation of ritual, which consists primarily of catechisms rather than straightforward descriptions of degree work. Thus the catechisms preserved today as proficiency examinations are in fact some of the most ancient and original pieces of work that we currently use. As such, they merit more attention and study than they have received from recent generations of Masons.

The earliest example we have of a Masonic catechism is in the Edinburgh Register House Manuscript (ERH) dated 1696, and discovered in 1930. It also contains the earliest description we have of a Masonic

degree, but it is the catechism that is of interest here. This catechism is reproduced below (from Harry Carr's *Early Masonic Catechisms*)<sup>1</sup>:

SOME QUESTIONES THAT MASONS USE TO PUT TO THOSE WHO HAVE YE  
WORD BEFORE THEY WILL ACKNOWLEDGE THEM

- Quest. 1 Are you a mason. Answer yes
- Q: 2. How shall i know it? Ans: you shall know it in time and place convenient.  
Remark the forsd answer is only to be made when there is company present who are not masons But if there be no such company by, you should answer by signes tokens and other points of my entrie
- Q: 3. What is the first point? Ans: Tell me the first point ile tell you the second, The first is to heill and conceall, second, under no less pain, which is. then cutting of your throat, For you most make that sign, when you say that
- Q: 4 Where wes you entered? An: At the honourable lodge.
- Q 5 What makes a true and perfect lodge ? An: seven masters, five entered apprentices, A dayes journey from a burroughs town without bark of dog or crow of cock
- Q: 6 Does no less make a true and perfect lodge, An: yes five masons and three entered apprentices &c.
- Q 7 Does no less. An: The more the merrier the fewer the better chear
- Q 8 What is the name of your lodge An: Kilwinning.
- Q 9 How stands your lodge An east and west as the temple of Jerusalem.
- Q 10 Where wes the first lodge. An: in the porch of Solomons Temple
- Q: 11 Are there any lights in your lodge An yes three the north east. s w, and eastern passage The one denotes the master mason, the other the warden The third the setter croft.
- Q: 12 Are there any jewells in your lodge An Yes three, Perpend Esler a Square pavement and a broad ovall.
- Q 13 Where shall I find the key of your lodge, yes [? = Ans] Three foot and an half from the lodge door under a perpend esler, and a green divot. But under the lap of my liver where all my secrets of my heart lie.
- Q: 14 Which is the key of your lodge. An: a weel hung tongue.
- Q 15 Where lies the key. Ans: In the bone box.  
After the masons have examined you by all or some of these Questions and that you have answered them exactly and mad the signes, they will acknowledge you, but not a master mason or fellow craft but only as an apprentice, soe they will say I see you have been in the Kitchine but I know not if you have been in the hall, Ans I have been in the hall as weel as in the kitchine.
- Quest 1 Are you a fellow craft Ans yes.
- Quest 2 How many points of the fellowship are ther Ans fyve viz foot to foot Knee to Kn Heart to Heart, Hand to Hand and ear to ear. Then make the sign of fellowship and shake hand and you will be acknowledged a true mason. The words are in the I of the Kings Ch 7, V, 21, and in 2 chr: ch 3 verse last.

The Edinburgh Register House Manuscript can be used as a point of departure in any number of directions for historical analysis of Masonic ritual, especially the development of Masonic symbolism. The salient point in this discussion, however, is that this catechism is advertised as a set of test questions that every Mason should know. The ritual description portion of the document makes no mention of a lecture as part of the proceedings. After the obligation the candidate is removed from the lodge and instructed in the “*the*

*manner of making his due guard whis is the signe and the postures and words of his entrie*<sup>iii</sup> by the youngest EA before returning to prove his proficiency. So we do not know how or when this catechism was taught, or what else it might have contained. But the mere fact a Mason was expected to know it indicates that it was common knowledge and probably rehearsed in lodge.

As previously mentioned, most of what we know about early Masonic ritual, prior to the 1740's, comes to us in the form of catechism. Most of these are conveniently found together in a single book "Early Masonic Catechisms" (EMC) originally collected by the Masonic historians Knoop, Jones, and Hamer in 1943, and subsequently revised and expanded by Harry Carr in 1963 (previously cited). Many of these are private manuscripts made by Masons as aids to memory. Others are published exposures, whose contents therefore are suspect. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed analysis of the reliability of each of these documents. Suffice it to say that the consensus of opinion of most Masonic scholars is that they are generally reliable, but must be used with caution.<sup>iii</sup> Fortunately for these purposes, however, their reliability in particular details is not significant, but rather the broad fact that so much of the surviving documentation from this period is in the form of catechism.

The catechisms were far from uniform. The questions varied and often had different answers or explanations for the same or similar questions. Some documents such as the Dumfries #4 Manuscript and the Sloane Manuscript #3329 (both contained in EMC) even contain two different sets of test questions in the same document. From my observation, what is consistent from version to version is the type of questions asked. All had questions concerning the particulars of a lodge, its form, where it meets, who comprises it, and various aspects of its symbolic contents. Some catechisms also included questions relating to the manner of initiation. Also quite surprisingly, few if any of the questions concerned the moral significance of any of the symbols.

This is illustrated by comparing the ERH catechism given earlier with the following partial catechism (the first 19 out of 43 questions) from the first catechism in the Dumfries #4 Manuscript (also Scottish, dated approximately 1710).<sup>iv</sup> The numbering is my own.

### Q PROPOUNDED AND ANSWERED

1. Q what are you  
A I am a man
2. Q how shal I know that  
A by all trwe signs in ye first part of my entry Ill heall & conceall
3. Q what are you no more to --- .  
A yes but a man I was begotten of a man & born of a woman and besids I have severall potentat kings & mighty princes to my brothers
4. Q what lodge were you entered in  
A in ye trwe lodge of st John
5. Q where ought a lodge to be kept  
A on the top of a mountain or in ye midle of a boge without the hearing of ye crowing of a cok or ye bark of a doge
6. Q how high is your lodge  
A inches & spans Inumberable
7. Q how Inumberable  
A the material heavens & stary firmament
8. Q how many pillers is in your lodge  
A three
9. Q what are these  
A ye square the compas & ye bible
10. Q where Lyes ye key of your lodge  
A in a bone box covered with a rough map
11. Q give ye distinction of your box  
A my head is ye box my teeth is the bons my hair is the mapp my tongue is ye key
12. Q hou were you brought in  
A shamfully with a rope about my neck
13. Q what pouster were you in when you Received  
A neither sitting nor standing nor running nor going but on my left knee
14. Q whay a rop about your neck  
A to hang me if I should Betry may trust
15. Q why upon your left knee  
A because I would be in too humble a pouster to ye receiving of ye Royall secret
16. Q what Obligation are you under  
A great oath
17. Q what punishment 's inflicted on these that reveals ye secret  
A your heart is to be taken out alive your head to be cut of & your bodys to be buried in ye sea mark & not in any place where Christians are buried
18. Q how many lights is in your lodge  
A two
19. Q which be ye two  
A ye sun riseth 'in ye cast & sets all men to work & sets in ye west & so turns all men to bed

Beginning in the 1720's, not long after the formation of the Grand Lodge of England (GLoE) in 1717, there appeared a number of supposed exposures of Masonic work, all of which consisted mostly of catechisms. The most famous of these was Pritchard's *Masonry Dissected* of 1730. Pritchard was apparently accurate enough that the GLoE decided to swap the EA and FC words to confound imposters. It also confounded sojourning Irish Masons, who were thus excluded from English lodges, and subsequently formed the so-

called Antient GL in competition with the original GLoE.<sup>v</sup> After some preliminary remarks, Pritchard's exposure consists entirely of catechism. The beginning part of his work is excerpted below:<sup>vi</sup>

*Enter'd 'Prentice's Degree.*

1. Q. From whence came you?  
A. From the Holy Lodge of St. John's
2. Q. What Recommendations brought you from thence?  
A. The Recommendations which I brought from the Right Worshipful Brothers and Fellows of the Right Worshipful and Holy Lodge of St. John's, from whence I came, and Greet you thrice heartily well.
3. Q. What do you come here to do?  
A. Not to do my own proper Will,  
But to subdue my Passion still;  
The Rules of Masonry in hand to take,  
And daily Progress therein make.
4. Q. Are you a Mason?  
A. I am so taken and accepted to be amongst Brothers and Fellows.
5. Q. How shall I know that you are a Mason?  
A. By Signs and Tokens and perfect Points of my Entrance.
6. Q. What are Signs?  
A. All Squares, Angles, and Perpendiculars.
7. Q. What are Tokens?  
A. Certain Regular and Brotherly Gripes.
8. Exam. Give me the Points of your Entrance.  
Resp. Give me the first and I'll give you the second.
9. Exam. I Hail it.  
Resp. I conceal it.
10. Exam. What do you Conceal?  
Resp. All Secrets and Secresy of Masons and Masonry, unless to a True and Lawful Brother after due examination, or in a just and worshipful Lodge of Brothers and Fellows well met.
11. Q. Where was you made a Mason?  
A. In a Just and Perfect Lodge.
12. Q. What makes a Just and Perfect Lodge?  
A. Seven or more.

Pritchard's exposure remained in print for some decades, being released in a number of different editions, some of which were explicitly arranged for use by Masons. It is frequently asserted that *Masonry Dissected* contributed greatly to the stability of the ritual in those years.<sup>vii</sup>

The ubiquity of catechism in early Masonic records, whether exposures or aids-to-memory, and regardless of accuracy in particulars, indicates that Masons of that period considered catechism to be far more important than we consider it to be today. We do find a few examples of charges given at initiations, but no other crib notes on lengthy lectures or officers speaking parts in degrees. The difficulty is that the early

documents do not provide us with any indication of how these catechisms were used apart from being test questions to prove membership.

It could be, of course, that the catechisms themselves were the crib notes that we do not otherwise find. This would stand to reason since question and answer catechism is an easy way to remember large amounts of unwritten material. Speaking from my own experience, it took me nine months of relatively constant work to memorize the Middle Chamber lecture that takes about twenty minutes to deliver. But in three weeks I was able to master the similar length long-form proficiency well enough to correct my examiner. Catechism or dialogue that appears so frequently in Masonic ritual is a very efficient memory tool.

The use of catechism in Masonic ritual finally becomes clearer with a series of detailed exposures from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest of these is “*Three Distinct Knocks*” (TDK) published anonymously in Dublin, Ireland in 1760.<sup>viii</sup> Then followed “*Jachin & Boaz*” (J&B, 1762<sup>ix</sup>, largely a copy of TDK); “*Shibboleth*” (1765<sup>x</sup> – the only clearly “Modern” exposure, the others apparently being “Antient”); and finally “*Mahabone*” (1766)<sup>xi</sup>. There are also some French exposures from the 1740’s and a few other English exposures, but I have not been able to study these so I cannot comment on their contents. In the available exposures I find – at last – a description of how these catechisms were practiced. In TDK (page 15), after the description of the opening is given the author inserts this note of explanation:

N.B. Then he [the WM] gives Three Knocks upon the Table with a wooden Hammer, and puts on his Hat; then they all sit down, and begin their Lecture, as follows.

This is the first reference to Catechism as a LECTURE. In other words, at every meeting as soon as it is convened, the catechism lecture is begun. The author of TDK omits a separate description of the degree ceremonies since the catechisms are quite detailed in their descriptions of the degree work, although he does insert comments on those proceedings in the recounting of the catechisms.

The author of *Mahabone* provides additional descriptive details of the proceedings (pages 15-16). After the initiation ceremony itself, the brothers return to the table and enjoy toasts accompanied by firing. Then:

After they have regaled themselves a little Time, the Worshipful Master calls to Order, (by giving three strokes on the Table with a wooden Hammer) and says, 'We must proceed to instruct the new Brother, in what further belongs to the Craft;' which is by way of Catechism or Lecture: The Master asking the Questions, and the Members, properly seated, making the Answer, one after the other ; this is termed *Working* [original emphasis] ; and when it comes to any Member's Turn to answer, who, perhaps, is not properly qualified, (by not having a good memory) he gets up, and clapping his right Hand on his left Breast, makes a low bow, which is considered as an Excuse, and it passes to the next Brother on the left hand; but when the Brethren are ready in answering the Questions, it adds a great Lustre to the Order.

This passage is strikingly similar to a parallel passage in *Shibboleth* (page 13) and may have been copied from it. The author of J&B (page 13) confirms the basic order of things, and adds some distinctive phrasing that also seems to have been incorporated in the above passage. (Not surprisingly, exposure authors frequently seem to have plagiarized each other, even copping parenthetical comments verbatim.)

In this day and age we are apt to think of the degree work as the more significant rituals, so it is puzzling to us that both aids to memory and exposures from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century largely ignore these ceremonies in favor of catechisms. At this juncture we at last can understand the significance of catechism to Masons of that time. Assuming that mid-18<sup>th</sup> century practice resembles earlier practice – and there is no reason to assume it did not – then it is apparent that catechism was important, quite simply, because the catechisms were normally “worked” at every meeting, and constituted the core of esoteric Masonic symbolism. Not only were they needed to prove Masonic membership, but also it was a point of pride to be able to respond properly when called to do so during lodge meetings. It seems likely to me that as the degree work became more elaborate, it came to occupy a larger proportion of space in the surviving documentation.

I must admit that I find the image of lodge meetings consisting of feasting, toasting, firing, and singing while working Masonic Q&A to be quite appealing. They sound like a lot more fun than modern lodge business meetings. It is no wonder that activities such as these were popular in the days before mass entertainment. But perhaps they were a bit too much fun by the evolving standards of moral behavior at the end of the century. Temperance came to mean sobriety rather than moderation; lodges moved out of taverns into more church-like apartments (complete with organs); and lectures came to resemble sermons instead of elaborate drinking games. This change did not happen all at once, however, and never completely eliminated the catethetical form of lecture.



These four exposures that I have studied show some further development in the Catechism toward the form of both the lectures and proficiencies we know today. Unlike earlier catechisms, these EA catechisms now contain three distinct sections, namely a description of the initiation ceremony, an explanation of the ceremony called the “EA Reasons”, and the ‘The Form of a Lodge’ containing the lodge symbolism that was the principal focus of the earlier catechisms. Catechisms in this period also begin to contain more questions related to moral symbolism, which was notably lacking in earlier catechisms.

The EA catechism is quite a lengthy affair and includes symbolism related to such topics as the seven liberal arts and sciences and either the five human senses or the five orders of architecture – never both – but no mention is made of a staircase. The FC catechism is quite short, covering a few particular aspects of the passing ceremony and symbolism related to the pillars. The MM catechism becomes lengthy due to the detailed description of the Hiram Legend but has no reference to other symbols such as arks or beehives. Examples of the three sections of the EA lecture are as follows (From TDK), beginning with the first section concerning the details of the initiation.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>The enter'd Apprentices Lecture.</i></p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Brother, Is there any Thing between you and I ?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> There is Worfhipful.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> What is it Brother?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> A Secret.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> What is that Secret Brother ?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> Masonry.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Then I presume you are a Mason ?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> I am so taken and accepted amongst Brothers and Fellows.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Pray what Manner of Man ought a Mason Man to be?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> A Man that is born of a Free Woman.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Where was you first prepar'd to be made a Mason ?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> In my Heart.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Where was you next prepar'd</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> In a Room adjoining to the Lodge.</p>	<p><i>Mas.</i> How was you prepar'd Brother?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> I was neither naked nor clothed; barefoot nor shod, depriv'd of all Metal, hood- wink'd with a cable Tow about my Neck, where I was led to the Door of the Lodge in a halting- moving Posture, by the Hand of a Friend, whom I afterwards found to be a Brother.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> How did you know it to be a door, you being blinded ?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> By finding a Stoppage, and afterwards an Enterance or Admittance.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> How got you Admittance?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> By three distinct Knocks.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> What was said to you within</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> Who comes there.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Your Answer Brother?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> One who begs to have and receive Part of the Benefit of this right worshipful Lodge, dedicated to St. <i>John</i>, as many Brothers and Fellows have done before me.</p>
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<p>Now I shall proceed to the enter'd Apprentice's R E A S O N S.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Why was you neither naked nor cloath'd, bare foot nor shod, with a Cable -Tow (or Halter) about your Neck ?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> If I had recanted, and ran out in the Street, the People would have said I was mad but if a Brother had seen me, he would have brought me back, and seen me done justice by. N.B. What a foolish Reason is this, for Men of Understanding, to dispute about!</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Why was you hoodwink'd ?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> That my Heart might conceal, before my Eyes did discover ?</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> The second Reason, Brother ?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> As I was in Darkness at that Time, I should keep all the World in Darkness.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Why was you depriv'd of all Metal?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> That I should bring nothing offensive, or defensive, into the Lodge.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Give me the second Reason, Brother ?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> As I was poor and penniless when I was made a Mason, it inform'd me that I should assist all poor and penniless Brethren, as far as Lay in my Power.</p> <p>[Six further questions are given, then the following comment:]</p> <p>N.B. There are some more Reasons, but they are so foolish that they are not worth Mentioning; so I shall proceed to the Form of the Lodge, as follows.</p>	<p><i>Mas.</i> BR O T H E R, we have been talking a great while about a Lodge ; Pray what makes a Lodge?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> A certain Number of Masons met together to work.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Pray what Number makes a Lodge?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> Three, Five, Seven, or Eleven. .</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Why do Three make a Lodge, Brother ?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> Because there were three Grand Masons in the building of the World, and also that noble Piece of Architecture Man; which are so complete in Proportion, that the Antients began their Architecture by the fame Rules.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> The second Reason, Brother?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> There were Three Grand Masons at the building of Solomon's Temple.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Why do Five make a Lodge?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> Because every Man is endued with Five Senses.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> What are the Five Senses?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> Hearing, Seeing, Smelling, Tasting, and Feeling.</p> <p><i>Maf.</i> What Use are those Five Senses to you, in Masonry?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> Three are of great Use to me, viz. Hearing Seeing, and Feeling.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> What use are they, Brother?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> Hearing is to hear the Word; Seeing, is to see the Sign; Feeling, is to feel the Gripe; that I may know a Brother, as well in the Dark as in the Light.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Why should Seven make a lodge?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> Because there are Seven liberal Sciences.</p> <p><i>Mas.</i> Will you name them, Brother?</p> <p><i>Ans.</i> Grammar, Rhetorick, Logick, Arithmetick, Geometry, Musick, and Astronomy.</p>
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From the additional comments I have retained in the above quotes from TDK (those beginning with N.B. meaning *nota bene* or note well) it is apparent that there was some dissatisfaction with the traditional catechism explanations, and perhaps expressions of Masonic symbolism. It might be easy to dismiss these particular comments as mere sour grapes grumbling from a turncoat Mason. But similar enough dissatisfaction was expressed by William Preston, who is generally considered the father, or at least grandfather of modern American Masonic lectures. Consider the following quote from his introduction to *Illustrations of Masonry* (1792 edition) describing his efforts to revise all the lectures after the favorable reception of his explanatory version of the EA lecture:<sup>xii</sup>

This agreeable success exceeding my most sanguine wishes, encouraged me to examine, with more minute attention, the contents of our various lectures. The rude and imperfect state in which I found them, together with the difficulties I encountered with my search after the variety of modes established in our assemblies, rather discouraged me in my first attempt: persevering, however, in this design, I continued the pursuit; and with the assistance of a few friends, who had carefully preserved what ignorance and degeneracy had rejected as unintelligible or absurd, I diligently sought for, and at length happily acquired some of the ancient and venerable landmarks of the Order.

The lectures as Preston knew them were “rude and imperfect”, to use his own description. He must be referring to the sort of lectures I have excerpted above as he was initiated in an Antient lodge in 1762 (the year J&B was published), joined a modern lodge a year later, and had developed his EA lecture by 1772.<sup>xiii</sup> It strikes me that Preston could only square his vision of the antiquity, nobility, and high moral purposes of the fraternity with the catechetical lectures as he knew them by assuming that “ignorance and degeneracy” were responsible for the then current state of the lectures. Preston did not think he was innovating or re-writing the lectures, but rather rescuing and restoring them. A sample of Preston’s work from the FC lecture is excerpted below, namely his original version of the staircase lecture.<sup>xiv</sup>

When they passed the columns, where did they arrive?

Having passed through the porch, at the entrance of which the two sacred columns were reared, the skilled craftsmen came to a winding staircase, that led to the middle chamber, where Solomon had ordered all the gifts of merit to be conferred. On every step of that staircase was stamped the name of a different art, and over each art was appointed a superintendent, to try the merit of the claimants in that art.

Who guarded the staircase?

At the bottom of the staircase was posted an ingenious craftsman to whom all who approached must submit their claims.

What was the duty of this craftsman?

The duty of this guard was not only to receive, examine, and arrange the claims, but to refer the candidates, who delivered them, to the superintendent, who was appointed to enquire into the abilities of each claimant. By this arrangement all attempts at imposition were prevented, and the merits of the industrious were duly honoured and rewarded.

Of how many steps is it said, did this staircase consist?

This staircase is said to have consisted of seven steps.

To what do those steps refer?

In reference to the seven liberal arts, one or other of which was considered as an essential qualification for preferment: every candidate was tried, and approved, in the art, in which he excelled, by the superintendent of that art; who was pledged to display his powers, and illustrate his excellence on the step, which was allotted to his profession.

How were these arts used?

- These seven arts, which were marked as objects of merit, were thus named and arranged: Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, Astronomy, and in these arts the professors were appointed under Royal commission, to exemplify at stated periods their skill and talents.
- Grammar, the First step. On the first step, there the Grammatician usually displayed, the excellence of his art. He taught the proper arrangement of words, according to idiom or dialect; and how to speak or write a language, with justice and accuracy, according to reason and correct usage.

- On the Second step, the Rhetorician displayed the powers of his art. He taught the mode of speaking copiously, and fluently, on any subject; not merely with propriety alone, but with all the advantages of force, and elegance; wisely contriving to captivate the hearer by the strength of argument, and beauty of expression.

One of the most significant points to notice in the above extract, in addition to its elegant style, is that Preston himself still worked his lectures in catechism format, as did all his English contemporaries such as Browne and Finch. That said, it is also quite true that throughout much of Preston's lecture system the questions serve as mere prompts for long, speech-like responses. In fact, the questions themselves easily could be eliminated without any adverse effect on the lecture. These lectures were not worked in table lodge format, but rather Preston used a team of two or three highly trained assistants acting as Wardens to perform a very dignified delivery to the audience in lodge.<sup>xv</sup>

Another factor contributing to the shift from catechism to narrative format lecture is the inclusion of commentary on Masonic symbolism as part of the lectures. Preston himself wrote a great deal of such commentary in the various editions of his *Illustrations of Masonry*, never intending it to be used as ritual. Later Masons thought it worthy enough to be included in the narrative lectures. One example is a single essay written by Preston (*Illustrations*, Book I, Section IV) that now is split and used in part as the introduction to the FC lecture ("Masonry is understood under two denominations...") and later in the "G" lecture ("The lapse of time, the ruthless hand of ignorance..."). These items were never part of any catechism.

Responsibility for the transition from catechism to narrative lectures in the United States is generally attributed to Thomas Smith Webb. It certainly is true that Webb borrowed heavily from Preston, and also wrote a good deal of additional commentary himself that, like Preston's, wound up in the narrative lectures we use today. I am not entirely convinced, however, that Webb was completely responsible for this change. I have been told that Ralph Lester's unofficial ritual (exposure?) "*Look to the East*"<sup>xvi</sup> is generally considered the closest detailed account of Webb's model working. If this is true, then based on my examination of that work, Webb also continued to work his lectures in catechetical form, although, like Preston, large stretches of it are narrative speeches.

The issue is further complicated by the evidence of the Pennsylvania ritual. This ritual is supposedly a pre-Webb working, yet according to the 1889 PA “Ecce Orienti”<sup>xvii</sup>, another unofficial cipher, the lecture is given entirely in narrative rather than catechism form. Also, interestingly enough, it is given immediately after bringing to light before the apron and working tools. So at the very least the narrative form of lecture either pre-dated Webb, or was later adopted independently either by common usage or by the Grand Lodge.

In all honesty, I do not know how and by whom the strictly narrative form of lectures became so widely established in the US. More advanced researchers than myself may be able to answer that question. Neither do I know how catechisms came to be used as proficiencies. It might have been simply time immemorial custom. The influential ritual reformer Rob Morris advocated the memorization of extensive question and answer material by candidates as part of his Conservator movement active from 1860 to 1865. Morris asserts that this was Webb’s practice as well.<sup>xviii</sup> Under Morris’ influence, the GL of Iowa decided to retain some catechism in their lectures, where it can still be found in the Iowa “King Solomon and his Followers” unofficial cipher.<sup>xix</sup>

Iowa is not the only place where catechism continues to be used as lecture. It turns out that our own neighboring jurisdiction of New York continues in this custom as well. The current New York EA lecture is in the three parts familiar to us from TDK of 1760. The first two parts, namely the “Lecture of Forms and Ceremonies” and the “Lecture of Reasons” are given entirely in question and answer format as a dialogue between the WM and SD.<sup>xx</sup> Only the third part concerning the form of the lodge and various other matters is in narrative form. The candidate is also informed that he is required to memorize the Q&A sections before he can proceed to the next degree. This same arrangement can be found in Morgan’s 1827 exposure of the New York work<sup>xxi</sup>, which is less than a decade after Webb’s death.

In conclusion, it strikes me that our Grand Lodge Ritual Committee is not really requiring us to demonstrate the EA proficiency. It might be better to think of it as a revival of the catechism form of lectures that Masons have been using since time immemorial, and which have been fortunately preserved for us in the relative obscurity of candidate proficiencies.

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<sup>i</sup> Harry Carr (editor) *Early Masonic Catechisms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. (designated as EMC in further citations)  
Reprint by Kessinger Publishing, ISBN1-56459-324-X. Pages 31-32.

<sup>ii</sup> EMC, page 33.

<sup>iii</sup> EMC – see detailed discussion in introduction under ‘Authenticity of the Printed Catechisms’, pg 9-19.

<sup>iv</sup> EMC – pg 62.

<sup>v</sup> Any number of sources, including:

*Coils Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Macoy Publishing, 1996, ISBN 0-88053-054-5, p 237 and  
J.M. Hamil, “The Grand Lodge of the Antients”, article published in the *Grand Lodge News (UGLE)* of  
September 2001

<sup>vi</sup> EMC – Page 160.

<sup>vii</sup> EMC – Publisher’s Introduction, Page 2. Also *Coils Encyclopedia*, p 565, Article on Ritual

<sup>viii</sup> Anonymous, *Three Distinct Knocks*, Kessinger Publishing ISBN 1-56459-247-2

<sup>ix</sup> Anonymous, *Jachin and Boaz*, Kessinger Publishing ISBN 1-56459-246-4

<sup>x</sup> Anonymous, *Shibboleth or Every Man a Freemason*, Kessinger Publishing ISBN 1-56459-996-5

<sup>xi</sup> Anonymous, *Mahabone or The Grand Lodge Door Open’d*, Kessinger Publishing ISBN 1-56459-994-9

<sup>xii</sup> William Preston, *Illustrations of Masonry*, 1792 edition. (Reprint published under the title *Preston’s Masonry* by Kessinger Publishing ISBN 0-7661-0064-2). Page x under original page numbering.

<sup>xiii</sup> Colin Dyer, *William Preston and His Work*, 1987, Lewis Masonic, Ch 1, especially pages 9-19.

<sup>xiv</sup> Dyer, *op. cit.*, appendix iii, page 250. (Lecture in the Second Degree, Section IV, Clause 6.)

<sup>xv</sup> Dyer, *op. cit.*, page 22.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ralph P. Lester, *Look to the East*, Kessinger Publishing, ISBN 0-7661-0465-6

<sup>xvii</sup> M. Wolcott Redding, *Ecce Orienti (National Series #4 PA)*, 1886. Reprint by Poemandres Press, 1996  
under title *Ritual of Pennsylvania Ancient York Masonry*, author anonymous.

<sup>xviii</sup> Rob Morris, LL.D., *Morris’ Miniture Monitor*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition, Published by John C. W. Bailey, Chicago,  
1864. See Morris’ introductory essay ‘Uniformity of Work’, especially pages 12-13.

<sup>xix</sup> *King Solomon and His Followers – IOWA*, Allen Publishing Company 1913.

<sup>xx</sup> Grand Lodge of New York, Gary A. Henningson Grand Secretary, *The Standard Work and Lectures of Ancient Craft Masonry*, revised 2001, pages 61-85.

<sup>xxi</sup> Capt. Wm. Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry*, Printed for the Proprietor 1827