

Grand Lodge of South Australia and Northern Territory

Lodge Web Site Guidelines (v.1 draft 29 Feb 2004; v.2 draft 1 Sep 2004)

The following is a DRAFT proposal of guidelines for Lodges and Groups that wish to create “official” web sites. The word Lodge in these guidelines refers specifically to a constituent Lodge of the Grand Lodge of South Australia and Northern Territory, and may be taken to apply to other organisations and groups associated with Freemasonry in South Australia and the Northern Territory.

The document, although meant to be guidance, does require group and individual Lodge web sites to conform to a certain number of laid down standards. These have been devised for two main reasons:-

- to ensure that content placed on the web site is appropriate to avoid any untrue, defamatory or incorrect statements being made about Freemasonry, as the Grand Lodge is the public face of freemasonry in South Australia and the Northern Territory;
- to ensure an element of consistency between sites but avoiding the stifling of initiative.

Web Sites of a Masonic nature which include Masonic material, established by individuals, lodges or groups, which contain material that is considered by the Grand Lodge to be contrary to these guidelines, or Grand Lodge Policy will be required to amend or remove this material. Refusal or dilatory response would render the party involved liable to Masonic discipline.

General Recommendations

The purpose of a Lodge web site should be to share information about the Lodge, its members, meeting nights, events, and news. A Lodge web site is a communications vehicle for the Lodge, and reflects directly on the Lodge itself. This message may be read by people in your community other than your Lodge members, so think carefully about what image of Masonry you would like portrayed by the web site. Include only those materials (text, photos, videos, music) that send a positive message about the Fraternity

The Grand Lodge web site contains general and other information about Freemasonry in South Australia and Northern Territory. There is no need for a Lodge web site to duplicate information that is located on the Grand Lodge web site. Indeed, such duplication is undesirable. Instead consider creating a link. The great advantage of a medium such as the World Wide Web is that hypertextual links can be used to provide multiple pathways to information, rather than copying that information to multiple locations. This reduces the likelihood of errors in the information and provides a single source of input, revision, and ownership.

Have fun in designing your Lodge web site, but keep in mind that many users access the Internet via dial up modems and older computers, especially in rural settings. Large graphics and sound files (more than 100kB) may take a long time to download on someone else’s computer, and may in fact crash that computer. Be sure to use graphics and sounds to enhance your site, not just because you are able to use them.

Consider creating a personal web site to showcase your web site building talents or at least **build the site in a way that leaves the choice of whether or not to download large files to the visitor**. It is good manners to indicate the size of those files which may be downloaded at the discretion of the visitor. With respect to document files provided for download from the site, it is recommended that these be in PDF format (a universally recognised standard). All such files should be free of viruses and similar nuisances.

Lastly, keep in mind that **maintaining a web site is an on-going task**. The webmaster of a Lodge web site should be prepared to update the site at least bimonthly. Feel free to contact the Grand Lodge webmaster if you have any questions about creating a Lodge web site.

Guidelines

Lodge web sites are **official communication vehicles** from the Lodges posting them and as such **must conform** to the provisions of the Constitutions and Regulations of the Grand Lodge.

Lodge web sites are the property of the Lodge, even if they are hosted on a member's ISP allocated server space. The control of that web site is always the responsibility of the Worshipful Master, who is accountable for all material placed in public. It is a good policy for the Worshipful Master to approve everything that is posted on a Lodge web site.

It is important that if a web site is to represent a particular Lodge, then the Lodge officers must be consulted during the development stage as well as on an ongoing basis. The frequency and level of involvement can be determined by the officers concerned. Lodges can, if they so wish, supplement these guidelines with their own internal practices for obtaining approval for content and the updating of Lodge web sites (but being mindful that too complicated an approval process will severely limit the ability to keep the web site current and up to date).

Lodges can appoint whomsoever they wish to create and maintain the web site (it doesn't have to be a Lodge officer). The person who maintains the web site should be in regular contact with and report to the Lodge Master and Secretary.

Only one web site per Lodge may be designated as the "official" Lodge web site. The Master and Secretary should have a copy of the current site access codes/passwords in the event of problems. Only **ONE** person should have access to the server, to make changes to the web site.

HOME PAGE

The home page is the first page of a Web Site. It should include, but not be restricted to, the following information:

1. the Lodge originating the site.
2. the e-mail address of the site's Webmaster for response to any technical or operational questions.
3. the e-mail address for a Lodge official to answer public questions and concerns.

APPROVAL

A Lodge that wishes to ensure its web site conforms to Grand Lodge standards and guidelines should submit the site to the Grand Secretary for confirmation **BEFORE** publicly posting it on the Internet. He will consult with the Grand Lodge webmaster and others as appropriate, and confirm in writing that the Lodge web site conforms. This procedure may take a month or more. The site may then be released publicly.

Each approved page will be entitled to carry on that page one or both of the following:-

- "This page has been approved by the Grand Lodge of South Australia and Northern Territory" or
- a small representation of the Grand Lodge Coat of Arms with the statement "approved by Grand Lodge of SA and NT"

Any additional pages or major changes to existing pages e.g. additional items or graphics will require resubmission for approval. Day to day changes such as news items, lodge meeting details etc., do not require re-approval. Sites will be monitored from time to time.

Important Note - as the Grand Lodge does not endorse the writings of individuals, pages showing the text of talks, addresses etc, by individuals, extracts from book or pamphlets etc, will not be entitled to carry the approval statement or charter mark.

Lodge web sites **must** be presented and maintained so as to conform to the Constitution and Regulations of Grand Lodge. Page designs, whilst being up to the individual Lodge, should conform to accepted standards of good taste. The Grand Lodge retains the right to determine and set standards.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The privacy of individuals is important and **MUST** be respected.

One way to enhance a web site is to include photographs of Lodge members doing things in the community. As newspapers do, it is prudent to have written permission of those in the photograph for publication on the web. In some cases, it will be more prudent to have very general captions that describe an event, but do not identify the individuals pictured. Always respect the privacy of those who may benefit from the Lodge's charity.

Names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and other personal data (including photographs) belonging or pertaining to Grand Lodge Officers **must not** be listed in Lodge web sites. Names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and other personal data (including photographs) belonging or pertaining to Lodge members may be published only with the permission of the individuals involved.

Take care how email addresses are shown as they may become subject to unwanted or spam e-mail.

INFORMATION CONTENT

Lodge summons and papers, which contain personal details, must not be posted on "Open" pages of a web site. Pages containing lodge news may be used, provided they comply with the Regulations of Grand Lodge and bear in mind the privacy of Masonic ceremonies. Mention may be made that ceremonies will be performed, but the subjects of those actions must not be named. That is business which is private to the Lodge.

It is **NOT PROPER** to include the names of petitioners, or candidates for degrees, on a web site.

Lodge minutes **must not** be posted on the web site. This includes specifics of ballots taken, and other reports of business or discussion conducted in a tyled lodge.

The names of persons identified as having attended a specific meeting may not be posted on web sites. This does not apply to recipients of long service awards, and participants in noteworthy events, with their permission.

When referring to individuals by name (provided written authorisation has been obtained) it is recommended to avoid use of the titles Bro or W. Bro. and to remove all references to Grand Ranks. For example, the Grand Secretary should be referred to as John Smith, Grand Secretary and not R.W. Bro. John Smith, P.S.G.W., Grand Secretary. This is to avoid any unnecessary mystification over letters after names, especially for non masons reading the material on the web site.

All information included on web sites should be kept up to date and changed as soon as changes are required. News items should be archived after say 2 months but can be moved to an archive news page so that they are still available but do not detract from the more recent news stories.

Information contained on the Grand Lodge web site **must not** be duplicated on the Lodge web site. Instead, a link should be created.

ADVERTISING

Web sites are **PROHIBITED** from carrying any commercial advertising of any kind. Freemasons must never use their membership to advance their own interests be they personal, business, professional or whatever.

Commercial activities of Masonic Halls must be placed on an alternative web site outside of the Lodge web site. Under no circumstances may such pages be included in the main Lodge pages. The Lodge web site may include a link to a Hall web site.

Lodge web sites should not be associated with inappropriate advertising material. Banner and pop-up advertisements can be a particular concern. These should not be permitted on Lodge web sites. Care should be exercised when choosing a host server for the Lodge web site, as some free host servers sponsor the use of advertisements that are in conflict with the principles of Freemasonry.

Lodge web sites may be linked to personal web sites of Lodge members **as long as** these sites reflect these general guidelines and the site owners have given permission in writing.

LINKS

If links are to be provided to other web sites then the details should be checked before inclusion and on a regular basis thereafter (to ensure the link is not out of date, not working or has changed its nature).

Masonic links can be checked with the Grand Lodge webmaster to ensure they are bona-fide and relate to bodies of Freemasons who are recognised by our Grand Lodge. When creating links to web sites of other lodges it is a courtesy to seek permission from the Lodge concerned.

Links to non-Masonic or general interest web sites should only be included if they do not conflict with the principles of the Fraternity, or present controversial, political, or otherwise inappropriate content.

Lodge web sites should not provide links to any business or commercial web sites with the exception of web counters, guest books, link exchanges, or awards received.

All web sites must contain a disclaimer if they are to have pages of links within their site. The disclaimer must warn the visitor that the Lodge web site cannot be held responsible for the content, availability or appropriateness of web sites that have links with the Lodge pages.

A link to the home page of the web site of the Grand Lodge is required. The web page must open in a new browser window and not within the pages of the Lodge web site.

MONITORING

Grand Lodge reserves the right to monitor ALL Lodge web sites (and links thereon) and to offer constructive advice on their contents. Any items appearing that are considered detrimental to Freemasonry in general or the Grand Lodge will be notified to the appropriate Lodge or Group Secretary for immediate action.

COPYRIGHT

In general, all sites should respect copyrights, especially including graphics, cartoons or other illustrations which are not known to be in the public domain or for which written permission to publish has not been obtained.

All material (written or recorded) copied from another source must appear with a credit line acknowledging the source of the original material, if known. This is both a courtesy to the original author(s) and protection against misquotes and claims of copyright infringement.

Consider using the copyright symbol on all the pages that you generate to avoid any other sources using the material held on your site.

GUEST BOOKS / COMMENTS PAGES

If a web site is to use a guest book or visitor's page, then careful monitoring is necessary. Any items including profanity, religious, political or anti-Masonic comments should be removed immediately. As Masonic sites may be particularly susceptible, monitoring should be on a weekly basis, daily if possible. It is preferable to vet messages and comments before allowing their publication.

MEMBERS ONLY SECTION

There is a whole host of information that could be included in a member's only section of a web site, such as contact names and addresses etc. Any use of a member's only area must be password protected. The service provider must

be able to support the technology for maintaining a password protected area. Care must still be exercised in determining content of a member's only area, as security may be breached.

Lodge webmaster's Role/Duties

The brother appointed to set up and maintain a Lodge web site should be given delegated powers to maintain certain aspects of the web site without the need for any other officer approval. The areas he can maintain should be determined in advance to avoid confusion.

The webmaster must be aware of which officers can approve details for inclusion if they are to be posted on a page requiring subsequent authorisation. The lines of communication must be clearly defined in advance. e.g. News - approval by the Secretary of the Lodge; Master's Page - approval by the Master; Charitable matters - Lodge Care Officer; Educational matters - Lodge Education Officer.

There must be a mechanism for obtaining approval of those brethren included in photographs etc. It is suggested that a form be used to obtain written consent of those included in a photograph at the time the photograph is taken.

The Master is answerable for the content included on a Lodge web site. If the Worshipful Master does not have access to the Internet, it should be the webmaster's responsibility to get approval of a paper copy of all material before it is posted.

Grand Lodge webmaster's Role/Duties

The Grand Lodge webmaster will provide any guidance to individual lodges or groups at any stage of the development process. Ongoing support and assistance will still be available after the site is live.

All new content to be placed on a web site must first be approved by the Grand Lodge webmaster.

Masonic E-mailing

In providing guidelines for the creation and maintenance of web sites it is important to realise that electronic communication is increasing as more and more people of all ages have access to computers. E-mailing is becoming a day to day practice for many individuals but in terms of its use for Masonic material there are still some concerns and therefore some guidance is indicated below.

The e-mailing of summonses to individual lodge members is permitted, but consideration should be given to obtaining written consent from the recipient prior to commencement

No attempt should be made by brethren in the South Australian and Northern Territory Constitution to correspond formally with other Grand Lodges recognised by the Grand Lodge of SA and NT by e-mail as it would contravene Masonic Protocol. Any communications must be via the Grand Secretary.

Lodge summonses can be e-mailed to the Grand Lodge Office on a monthly basis provided the Grand Lodge Office is notified that communication is to be made this way and the e-mail includes all elements of the summons as though it were a printed copy.

These guidelines are subject to change by the Internet Subcommittee of the Grand Lodge of South Australia and Northern Territory.

Acknowledgments and resource materials

masons.sk.ca/lodgewebguide.html westlancsfreemasons.org.uk/pages/communication/commnotices.htm
glnb.ca/committees/juris.html pagrandlodge.org/programs/internetcommittee/guidelines.html
freemasonry.bcy.ca/grandlodge/guidelines.html grandlodgeofkentucky.org/web_protocol.htm

Advice for users of e-mail

Users of e-mail should be mindful of the following points:-

Never send anything you would not want to see in tomorrow's newspaper. There are no security guarantees with electronic mail. Avoid sending ANY confidential or sensitive information via email. Remember, it's very easy for someone else to forward messages you thought were confidential.

When you are upset or angry, review the message after you have had time to calm down.

Do not send abusive, harassing or threatening messages.

Be cautious when using sarcasm and humour. Without facial expressions and tone of voice, they do not translate easily through email.

Use email in a professional manner. Remember, you cannot control where your message might be sent.

Do not send chain letters through email. This includes any message that contains a request to forward the information to lots of other people. This especially applies to advices about viruses etc (see below).

Don't leave your email account open when you leave your computer. Anyone could sit down at your keyboard and send out any libellous/ offensive/ embarrassing message under your name.

Don't send replies to "all recipients" unless there is a very specific need for everyone to receive the message. It wastes disk space, clutters up inboxes and can be annoying.

Avoid including all your recipients in the "to" box as you may circulate the private email addresses of colleagues without their prior consent. This could lead to a possible breach of the Privacy Act. You can use the "cc" and "bc" facilities within your e-mail system. The "cc" facility will copy the message to everyone listed and their e-mail address will be visible to every other e-mail recipient. The use of "bc" (blind copy) will copy the e-mail to all the users listed but their e-mail address is hidden and all the other recipients are not aware of who the e-mail has been copied to.

Remember that all laws governing copyright, defamation, discrimination and other forms of written communication also apply to email.

Use "receipt requested" sparingly. Some people view it as a sign of distrust. It is okay to use it if you have reason to question whether the person will log on to receive your message.

Check your mail regularly and, whenever possible respond to people who write to you.

Briefly describe who you are if the recipient doesn't already know.

Be aware that e-mail can be archived and, under certain circumstances, may not be secure. Internet service providers generally protect the confidentiality of their subscribers' e-mail, but some companies consider employee e-mail sent over the office network to be company property and subject to scrutiny. All archived e-mail can be subpoenaed and made public via a court order.

Don't "cry wolf." Avoid "Urgent" or "Priority" unless it really is.

Employ capital letters sparingly. Using them for an entire message is perceived by many as SHOUTING, and is harder to read. Those sending e-mail via "works" computers must be aware that companies have the right to check e-mails being sent via their computers. They are not allowed to look at the content unless the company has reason to believe there is unlawful activities being undertaken, but they are allowed to monitor the senders address and title of the e-mail.

Be careful about forwarding advice to others about viruses and other nuisances. In the majority of instances, such advice may be misleading or a hoax. Check the facts on a virus advisory site such as Norton or McAfee.

Web site development considerations

ESSENTIALS FOR A SITE'S SUCCESS

- Define Site intent and goals - determining why the site exists and being able to justify it to visitors.
- Understand Audience Needs - the site should serve the needs of those whom it is aimed at.
- Have a specific Site development process - with clear goals and knowledge of the audience, your clearly defined work can now be put to use in the development process. You need to have a production process in place to define the methodology of such things as obtaining content, colour schemes, updating schedule etc.

PRE-PRODUCTION PROCESS

This area of production forms the foundation of your design.

Choose a provider - detailed consideration should be undertaken as to the provider you are to use for hosting your site on the Internet. You must consider cost, down time, features depending on what you want available on your pages, company length of existence, number of existing users, recommendation from friends, upload facilities.

Register a Web Address - the web address is used by anyone in the world to access your site. It is like your house number, address and postcode combined into one. It must be meaningful, short (if possible) convey a description of the site and be memorable.

Gather and generate content - sit down with the Lodge officers and determine what information will be put on the web site, It may be as simple as defining and gathering content for a few pages or as extensive as hundreds of pages.

Construct the site map - mapping the site (also known as storyboarding) defines all the content within a specific structure. This structure will not only be used to determine the location of physical files but also how the navigation will work.

Develop and approve a look and feel - You need to then apply design techniques, bearing in mind audience and content to come up with a visual design and navigation scheme. This may take several tries and group officers must be involved in the decision on the final design. When deciding on a colour scheme, designers must be aware that the site may be used by members of the public with accessibility difficulties (i.e. partially sighted, colour blind etc).

Determine technological needs - a simple site may not need to consider any areas under this heading as content may be purely textual information. If the site is to develop and provide say database information, guest books, or a restricted area for members only, then this needs to be determined as part of the pre-production stage and the technological solutions chosen. (although these can be added later if required).

Ensure conforms to guidance from Grand Lodge. - Guidance is available from the Grand Lodge webmaster to ensure there is some consistency in the development of Lodge web sites and that there are agreed procedures for content approval etc. At this stage anyone involved in the development of the site must be made aware of these and ensure compliance with them.

PRODUCTION OF THE WEB SITE

This is the heart of web development. Following these production techniques, whether it is a major or minor project will help you get the project done quickly and effectively.

Schedule Milestones - when running the development of a project it is important to break the project into manageable milestones. Set goals for each one and monitor the success of hitting those milestones.

Perform quality testing - during the early stages of development it is important to check the design, content and navigation, preferably by other than those developing the site. When you are working on the site on a regular basis, it is easy to miss simple errors such as navigation not working, spelling mistakes and the like. Getting someone from outside the development process to check the site will help speed up development and ensure that the content, when it does go live, is as error free as possible.

Check relevance/appropriateness of content - much of the content will be static and never change. Ensure this is correct and if possible get it checked by others in the know (i.e. other Lodge officers).

Revise the plan - if, during this stage, the original plan needs to be revised or changed, then this is the point to do it. Making changes now rather than later can help the operation of the site.

There are many other details that go into production of the site including testing pages for use in different browsers, much of which will depend on the content of the site. These should be considered and addressed as necessary.

PUBLICATION

Publication is the act of transferring the finished site to the live server and testing is complete. This may have been done during development to allow non development users to test at varying stages.

There are some tasks to be done as part of publication:-

Test all pages for cross platform compatibility - may not be necessary, it depends how many users are likely to be using different browsers and although you may have been doing this during development, you need to do it again once the site has gone live. Again, this doesn't have to be done by you, but encourage others to try each page and report back.

Check META tags - ensure you have META tags in your document and they are correct as many of the search engines use these to define your site to the search engines. Search engines allow users of the internet to search for information using key words, especially if they are not aware of the web address.

Check all links (internal and external) - to ensure they are working and for external links that they result in the user being moved to the site that you expect and opened in a new browser window.. For internal links make sure that on each page that a link exists, there is an alternative description and the link is correct. Internal links should open in the same window as the original page.

Check spelling and grammar - again this should have been done during testing but needs to be done again once the site is live.

POST PRODUCTION

After the site is live there are a number of concerns that you will want to address:-

Maintenance & Updates - the upkeep of a site is the most important aspect to the relevance of a site, keeping visitors coming back and being able to provide useful information. Links get out of date, content needs to be modified and new content needs to be added. Plan and schedule the site maintenance tasks from the onset and keep to them. Agree who, if anyone is to approve the use of new content and ensure they are aware of deadlines and the timeliness of relevant information. Agree which content can be changed without approval, i.e. delegated authority to maintain the site.

Promotion - the site will need to be registered with search engines. All publication material used and issues from the groups concerned must be changed to advertise the address of a new web site. If possible, there should be a specific launch date and an event to publicise it to as many brethren as possible. If there are open days, make sure there is a PC running with web site details.

Redesign & Mergers - there will be natural point where the site will need a re-design and pages/sections to merge. Whilst major changes and mergers are difficult to prepare for, you will find that if you manage the site effectively, they will be easier to approach and less likelihood of major issues.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SITE MANAGEMENT

Prepare a site style guide - keep your design on track by pre-determining and writing down a style guide. The guide should include colour palette, navigation buttons, page headers and details of content and site map.

Keep original mock-ups - if you have used sketches or mock-ups to determine your final design, ensure you keep them. You may need this for reference if you need to change a colour or design direction. You can always access original design elements and re-use them.

Use Version Control - if your software that you use for developments allows, keep previous versions of graphics, pages, and any other elements you have used. You can do this with comments in the documents (hidden from day to day users) or storing them in alternative directories on the server. This may be useful if someone takes over the running and maintenance of the site at some time in the future.

Use Comment Tags - similar to notes in version control. Comment your pages with relevant information including version, author, and date. Use comment tags to denote sections within your pages. This helps you when re-visiting pages after some time or others when they have to work on someone else's pages.

Archive Version - back-up your files! There is nothing worse than doing some work on pages only to lose it just before you save it. Create an archive system and ensure you stick to it. This not only applies to the development of pages but also live ones. It may be that the provider you are using to provide your site on the internet does not take regular back-ups or in the worst scenario, shuts down. If you have back-ups of your site on your local machine you can easily get the site up and running quickly.

Document the Process - minute meetings with Lodge officers, make notes as you go along with reasons for decisions being made or a particular route chosen and keep copies of notes / e-mails and content sent by others relevant to the site.