

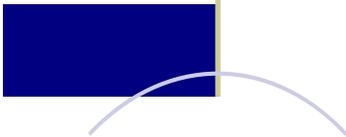
A Publication of  
The Pipe Club of  
Lebanon

February 28, 2009

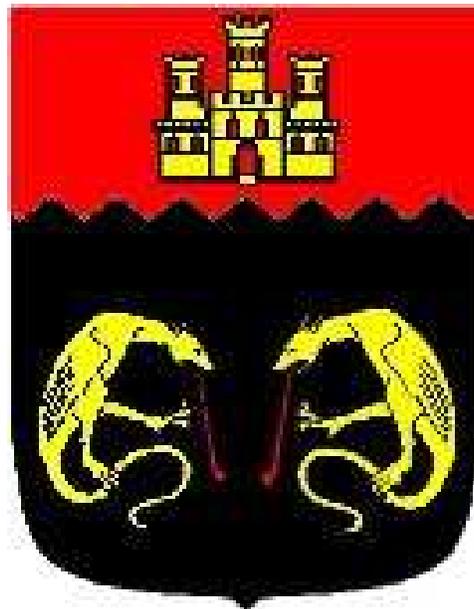
"Pipesmoking is properly  
an intellectual exercise"

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# The Pipe Club of Lebanon's Pipesmoker Ranking System



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## Preamble

There are ranking scales in all sports, be they physical or purely intellectual (chess and go, for example), and in almost all human endeavours (academic degrees, medieval artisan guilds, etc.) which govern the ways in which proficiency is measured for a particular skill or knowledge.

Similarly, a ranking system for pipesmokers will be seen as a fair estimate of the smoker's abilities relative to others and, like all systems of skills and knowledge, will be indicative of a scale of experience, theory, and know-how.

Though all serious pipesmokers are equal as brethren of the briar, not all of them are born equal in smoking skills, knowledge, and history; in brief, not all of them are born equal in the lore of pipesmoking. This is natural and common to all acquired arts, and provides a personal incentive for learning more, for surpassing one's own limitations and will ultimately lead to a richer enjoyment of pipe smoking.

Ranking systems will obviously vary across cultures and ages and, when following the general guidelines presented here, flexibility is to not only expected but also encouraged as it mirrors the true spirit governing the art of the pipe.

## Ranks

The nine ranks, in ascending order, are described as follows along with their emblems:

### Novice



The novice pipesmoker is really a (welcome) new smoker who knows next to nothing about anything related to the lore, but is interested in learning more.

### Apprentice



The apprentice pipesmoker is slightly more knowledgeable in the art and knows the basics of filling, lighting, and cleaning a pipe.

## Able



The able smoker not only knows the basics but is also able to differentiate between standard pipe tobaccos and can hence choose the latter more knowledgeably. He/she is also interested in knowing more about the craft of pipemaking.

## Adept



The adept smoker is an experienced smoker who knows how to keep a pipe lit long enough for it to release its secrets. He/she is also more sophisticated and thus more demanding when it comes to choosing tobaccos, and is developing a keener interest in the history of pipemaking.

## Skilled



The skilled pipesmoker knows what pipesmoking is about, and is aware of the mysterious marriage of pipe and tobacco leaf; he/she is expected to also know more about the pipe's history and makers, as well as the different types of tobaccos.

## Advanced



The advanced pipesmoker has reached the point where he/she can match the appropriate pipe to the appropriate tobacco in order to produce the optimum smoking experience; he/she is aware of the different pipe styles, pipe makers, pipe types, and is comfortable with most matters related to the pipe and to the leaf. He/she also knows the intricacies of tobaccos.

## Superior



The superior pipesmoker has reached the stage where pipesmoking has become a natural way to experience the pleasure of the smoke; his/her knowledge of the lore (history, craft, makers, etc.) is almost complete but is kept open to new advances and knowledge. His/her smoking technique is almost perfect, but he/she knows that perfection is always to be sought and is never fully attained. He/she is also aware of the social importance of pipesmoking and of the symbolic gesture of tobacco sharing, and willingly offers advice and guidance to other pipesmokers. In this respect, the superior pipesmoker is beginning to understand the "thinking" dimension of pipesmoking.

## Master



The master pipesmoker is a philosopher-smoker; his/her view of life is coloured by his/her unique personal style and vice-versa. Having understood that pipesmoking is "properly an intellectual exercise," he/she can, along with others, savour life's moments with wisdom, equanimity, and peace.

## Grandmaster



The grandmaster pipesmoker "smokes without smoking," and has in fact mastered the art of "doing without doing." His/her smoking philosophy, like his/her philosophy of life, has been patiently constructed throughout the years, giving him/her the necessary wisdom to go through the everyday moments in perfect equanimity. As such, he/she not only selflessly helps other pipesmokers of different levels move forward, but also transforms mutual pipesmoking into an almost "magical" experience of the present.

### Notes

- The ranks are abbreviated as follows: Nov., Apt., Abl., Adt., Skd., Adv., Sup., Mas., GMr. for display after proper names, following a comma (ex. John Doe, Adv. Pipesmoker).
- Ranks are upward moving, i.e., while a pipesmoker can advance in rank, he/she will not be demoted but should, at specified intervals, show continued knowledge and experience. A pipesmoker who has been inactive as a club member for more than five years may have to re-assess his/her rank.

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## The Bestowing of Ranks

- Ranks are given by established and active pipe clubs at least three years old and comprising at least five members.
- Where there is no previous ranking system, an elected committee (comprising the pipe club president or, if impossible, the vice-president) of two members is responsible for administering the ranking to other members. The two members should preferably be of the rank of **Superior** (see below for initial ranks).

## Initial/Automatic Ranks

- A pipe club president is automatically bestowed an initial rank of **Skilled** if he/she has been smoking regularly for more than five years and his/her pipe club fulfills the conditions above, and that of **Superior** if he/she has been smoking regularly for more than ten years and his/her pipe club fulfills the conditions above. When a pipe club president presents a candidacy for promotion, a **Superior** member takes his/her place in the committee.
- All members who have been smoking regularly for more than five years are automatically bestowed the initial rank of **Able**; for more than ten years, that of **Adept**.
- Automatic ranks are initial and can/should be upgraded as soon as feasible.

## Ranking Tests

- Ranking tests recur throughout the year: during the first week of every four months (January, May, and September) and in the event of the club's pipesmoking competition or participation therein. Candidates for rank promotion in all the cases above are to send a written notice of intent to the pipe club president at least one month in advance.
- A full test can take between fifteen minutes and three hours, so the committee must set

aside such time for the event.

- For the smoking test, all candidates can be put together; for the recognition tests, candidates will preferably be assessed separately.

## Test Details

Ranking tests may be based on a point system, and will comprise a mixture of practice, theory, and history; they will be divided into the following events:

### A. Smoking Abilities

As in a pipesmoking competition, candidates are given between 3 and 5 grams of tobacco, two matches, and a tamper. They will have five minutes to pack their pipe (to be duly examined by a member of the committee) and then one minute to use one or two matches to light their pipe. After that, smoking is monitored until the pipe goes out. The following may provide a handy scale:

- Up to 60 minutes (less than 3 minutes is counted as a false result and can be repeated once)
- Between 61 minutes and 90 minutes
- Between 90 minutes and 120 minutes
- Above 120 minutes

As noted above, the smoking abilities test may be waived at the request of a candidate who has participated in a local, national, or international pipesmoking competition not older than a year and who wants the timing obtained to be used in lieu of this test.

### B. Pipe and Tobacco Recognition

*Pipes:* Photos of ten pipes (or actual pipes) are shown from a distance of not less than

three meters to the candidates who are to correctly guess the pipe maker. While logos on the pipe can be displayed, care has to be taken, when applicable, for brand names not to be visible. Care is also to be taken not to display obviously known pipes or familiar pipes belonging to fellow pipe club members. Should there be difficulty procuring photos or actual pipes, this test can also be performed by providing candidates with a printout of unnamed logos of different pipe makers,

*Tobacco:* Samples from five to ten tobaccos are placed in opaque bags/pouches and given to candidates to recognize. If there is a need to, candidates can be blind-folded. Too exotic/outlandish/rare tobaccos are to be avoided as much as possible, especially for beginner ranks; the preferred ratio would be one with familiar as well as not-too-familiar tobaccos. Candidates may be given a list of a dozen or more tobaccos beforehand in order to prepare for the test.

### **C. Care and Maintenance**

A series of questions (not less than five but not exceeding ten) is asked about pipe care and maintenance; the candidate may also have to give a hands-on demonstration on how to maintain/clean a pipe.

### **D. History, Makers, and Tobaccos**

A series of questions (not less than five but not exceeding ten) is asked about the history of pipemaking (in different countries), pipesmoking, pipe lore, pipe artisans, pipe companies, and the like. Questions about tobacco types/varieties and features are also asked. Care is to be taken not to ask either too easy or too arcane questions.

### **E. The Philosophy of Pipesmoking**

A series of questions (not less than three but not exceeding six) is asked about the philosophy of pipesmoking. These questions must be crafted with care as they make up an

important part of who the pipesmoker is and who he/she wants to be, and how pipesmoking is understood to be a respectable and honourable brother/sisterhood.

## Ranking Classification

Based on the tests above, ranking classification is determined according to each rank's description at the beginning of this document.

## Responsibilities

The holding of titles does not dispense, however, from service to the pipesmoking community. Quite the opposite is true, in fact. Below is an attempt to practically show what every seasoned pipesmoker knows, that with every advances in life come heavier responsibilities.

For the sake of simplicity, the nine ranks are divided into three main categories: CAT1 (Novice, Apprentice, Able, Adept), CAT2 (Skilled, Advanced, Superior), and CAT3 (Master and Grand-master). Members in each category are expected to fulfill the following responsibilities:

- CAT1: Regularly attend meetings and learn from their brethren
- CAT2: Attend meetings, help their CAT1 brethren, and deliver presentations about pipesmoking
- CAT3: Attend meetings, help their CAT1/2 brethren, deliver advanced presentations, and promote pipesmoking nationally and internationally

## Emblems/Logos

The shields displayed above are available for members who have successfully earned their

ranks. If said shield is part of a coat of arms, the pipe club's name should be clearly displayed and, if any, the club's slogan/motto on a ribbon beneath the shield.

Grandmaster	Two Dragons Sharing Two Pipes
Master	A Dragon Smoking a Pipe
Superior	Two Tobacco Leaves and Two Pipes
Advanced	Two Tobacco Leaves and a Pipe
Skilled	A Tobacco Leaf and a Pipe
Adept	Two Tobacco Leaves
Able	A Tobacco Leaf
Apprentice	Two Pipe Friends
Novice	A Pipe Friend

**A final note:** as much as we have tried to structure, quantify, and classify the pipesmoker's technique, experience, and knowledge, we also passionately believe that pipesmoking is all about measured, thoughtful, and responsible pleasure. Let us not forget this.

Smoke in Peace,

The Pipe Club of Lebanon

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