Protocol Officer: Precedence, Ceremonies and VIP Visits

23 – 27 November 2026
Paris (France)



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Diplomatic protocol is the set of agreed rules that decides who ranks where, how officials are addressed and how official ceremonies and visits are run. This 1-week practitioner course is for protocol officers and the office staff who support them, and it ends with a finished protocol file for a VIP visit. Blackbird Training Centre runs this diplomatic protocol officer course on precedence, ceremonies and VIP visits.

Introduction

The course draws on two reference points. The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations fixes how heads of mission rank among themselves, by class and by the date they took up their functions. Organisational precedence tables, the internal lists that rank an organisation's own office-holders, govern events where officials and executives meet. The level is practitioner: the course concerns the daily work of a protocol office rather than diplomatic strategy. Teaching uses case studies and role-play, from drafting an invitation to walking a guest of honour through arrival.

Course Objectives

- Define the order of precedence for a mixed guest list and explain the rule behind each placing.
- Distinguish a formal invitation from a note of confirmation and select the right format, wording and form of address for each guest.
- Compare head-table and round-table seating plans and select the one that suits a given ceremony.
- Interpret a VIP's requirements and apply them to a minute-by-minute run sheet for the visit.
- Apply flag and place-card conventions to a meeting room, a stage and a vehicle convoy.
- Justify each change to a ceremony when a guest cancels, arrives late or outranks the host.

Target Audience

- Protocol officers in government bodies and companies who receive visiting officials and decide where each guest sits and stands.
- Executive office staff and senior assistants who draft invitations and letters for leaders and choose the correct title and form of address.
- Events and hospitality coordinators who stage official ceremonies and judge which conventions a formal occasion requires.
- Public relations and corporate communications officers who handle the media at official events and decide where press may stand and film.
- Liaison officers who accompany visiting delegations and decide how to handle a late change to the agenda.



Course Outline

Day 1: Rules of Precedence and Rank

- Precedence vs Protocol: Order of Rank Compared With the Wider Rules of Conduct
- Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations: Classes and Seniority of Heads of Mission
- Organisational Precedence Tables: Ranking Internal Office-Holders and External Guests Together
- Ex Officio vs Personal Rank: When the Post Outranks the Person Holding It
- Spouses and Representatives: Placing Deputies and Accompanying Persons in the Order

Day 2: Official Correspondence and Forms of Address

- Formal Invitation vs Informal Invitation: Wording, Third-Person Style and Reply Cards
- Forms of Address: Titles, Honorifics and Salutations for Officials and Executives
- Letters of Thanks and Confirmation: Structure, Tone and Timing After Events
- Guest List Management: Acceptances, Regrets, Substitutes and Final Confirmed Numbers
- Place Cards and Name Badges: Titles, Spelling Checks and Display Rules

Day 3: Ceremonies, Flags and Seating Plans

- Head-Table vs Round-Table Seating: Placing the Host, Guest of Honour and Others
- Right-Hand Rule: Seating the Senior Guest to the Right of the Host
- Flag Order and Placement: Arranging Flags in Meeting Rooms and on Stages
- Signing Ceremonies: Table Layout, Pens, Folders and the Order of Signature
- Speaking Order vs Seniority: Arranging Speeches, Toasts and Presentations at Official Events

Day 4: Planning VIP Visits

- Official Visit vs Courtesy Call: Scope, Duration and Level of Reception
- VIP Guest Profile: Background, Dietary Needs, Interests and Sensitivities of the Visitor
- Run Sheet: Minute-by-Minute Schedule Linking Venues, Drivers and Hosts
- Airport and Venue Reception: Greeting Lines, Escorts and Holding Rooms
- Motorcade and Car Order: Vehicle Ranking, Seating and Flag Display on Vehicles

Day 5: Protocol Officer Practice in a VIP Visit

- Visit Role-Play: Applying Precedence and Seating to a Full Day of Engagements
- Planned Order vs Late Change: Reworking Seating When a Guest Cancels or Arrives Late
- Gift Exchange Protocol: Presentation Moment, Wrapping, Value Limits and Records
- Media at Official Events: Press Positions, Photo Calls and Filming Permissions
- Final Deliverable: Assembling the VIP Visit Protocol File for Sign-Off



Skills You Will Gain

- Order of precedence
- Forms of address
- Seating plan design
- Flag placement
- Run sheet preparation
- Guest list management
- VIP guest profiling

Why Attend This Course

- From reusing an old seating plan to building one from the rules of precedence for each new guest list.
- From guessing titles and salutations to writing invitations and letters with the correct form of address.
- From scrambling over late cancellations on the day to reworking seating and speaking order calmly.
- From scattered notes and emails to a single VIP visit protocol file, the final deliverable of the course.

Conclusion

Protocol work is the practical task of turning rank, courtesy and timing into a ceremony that runs without visible friction. The course separates three things that are often confused: precedence and protocol, personal and ex officio rank, and an official visit and a courtesy call. It is the right choice for protocol officers, executive office staff and liaison officers who handle visits and ceremonies every week and need a firm grasp of the rules, not a course on diplomatic strategy or international negotiation.

Course FAQs

What does a diplomatic protocol officer do?

A diplomatic protocol officer applies the rules of precedence, forms of address and ceremony to official events and visits. The role covers guest lists, seating, flags, correspondence and the minute-by-minute running of a VIP visit.

What is the difference between precedence and protocol for a diplomatic protocol officer?

Precedence is the order of rank among guests. Protocol is the wider body of rules on conduct, ceremony and correspondence, of which precedence is one part. A seating plan applies precedence; a whole visit applies protocol.



Which rules does the Diplomatic Protocol Officer course follow on precedence?

It follows the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations for the ranking of heads of mission, and uses organisational precedence tables for events that mix officials, executives and guests from outside the organisation.

Is the Diplomatic Protocol Officer course right for an executive assistant?

Yes. Executive assistants who draft invitations, prepare guest lists or receive visitors for a leader use the same rules of precedence, address and seating that the course covers, at the same practitioner level as protocol officers.

What do delegates produce in the Diplomatic Protocol Officer course?

Delegates produce a VIP visit protocol file: precedence list, invitations, seating plans, flag layout, run sheet and media plan, assembled during a role-played visit and ready for sign-off.

