

# A day in the life of Louis XIV

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the questions that follow the reading. Read and annotate the account of the king's daily routine, and as you come upon the answers, pause to write them down. Remember you can go back to add to an answer if you find further information in the reading.

## THE KING'S DAILY ROUTINE

*Outside Paris, Louis XIV transformed a royal hunting lodge into the grand palace of **Versailles**. The palace represented the king's great power and wealth. Elaborate court ceremonies were held to emphasize the king's importance. The Duke of Saint-Simon, who kept the memorials of Versailles, wrote of Louis XIV: "With an almanac and a watch, you could be three hundred leagues from here and say what he was doing". The King's day was timed down to the last minute so that the officers in the service of the monarch could plan their work as accurately as possible. From the rising ceremony to the retiring, he followed a strict schedule, as did all the members of the Court, all regulated like clockwork.*

### The King's mornings

**7.30-8 am** "Sire, it is time", the first Valet de Chambre awakens the King. The First **Levee** begins. Doctors, familiars and a few favourites who enjoyed the privilege of the Grand Entries followed in succession into the bedchamber of the King who was washed, combed and shaved (every other day). The officers of the Chamber and the Wardrobe then entered for the Grand **Levee** during which the King was dressed and breakfasted on a bowl of broth. Only the most important personalities in the kingdom were admitted to observe this ritual. The number of attendants is estimated at around a hundred, all male.

**10 am:** As they left the King's apartment, a procession formed in the Hall of Mirrors. Followed by his courtiers, the King crossed the whole breadth of the Grand Apartment. This was the moment when the crowd gathered along the passage of the royal cortège was at last able to catch a glimpse of the monarch. Some were even able to speak to him briefly or pass him a written request. The King sat in the tribune of the Royal Chapel to attend mass, for about thirty minutes. The choir of the "Chapel Music", renowned throughout Europe, sang a new work each day, composed by Lully, Delalande and many others.

**11 am:** Back in his Apartment, the King held council in his cabinet. On Sundays and Wednesdays was the Council of State, Tuesdays and Saturdays were devoted to the Royal Council of Finances, and finally, on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays there might be an extra Council of State to replace a Dispatch Council (domestic affairs) or a Religious Council (religious affairs). On these same days, the King might also decide to examine the progress of the building programmes. Five or six ministers worked with the monarch who spoke little, listened much and then made his decision.

**1 pm:** In his bedchamber, the King dined alone, sitting at a table facing the windows. This meal was in principle a private one but Louis XIV used to receive all the men of the Court, in general those present at the **Levee**.

### His afternoons

**2 pm:** The King gave his orders announcing his intentions for the afternoon in the morning. If he wished for a promenade, it was in the gardens, either on foot or in a carriage with the ladies. If he chose to hunt, the favourite sport of all the Bourbons, it took place in the grounds when the King preferred to shoot, or in the surrounding woodland when he rode to hounds.



**6 pm:** Often Louis XIV let his son preside over the indoor entertainments, like the evenings in the apartments. Meanwhile, he would sign the many letters prepared by his secretary and then go to the apartments of Madame de Maintenon where he would study an important dossier aided by one of his four secretaries of State.

### **The evenings**

**10 pm:** The crowd squeezed into the antechamber of the King's apartments to attend the Grand Public Supper. The King would sit at the table, surrounded by members of the royal family. At the end of the meal, the monarch walked through his bedroom and into the salon to salute the ladies of the court. Then he withdrew to his cabinet to converse more freely with his family and a few close acquaintances.

**11:30 pm:** The retiring, a public ceremonial where the King withdrew to his bedroom, was a shortened version of the **Levee**.

**Source:** en.chateauversailles.fr

1. How would you describe the way Louis XIV spent his day? What sort of activities did he do?
2. Why do you think Louis XIV lived his life in this way?
3. Do you think rulers or leaders should be treated this way? Why or why not?
4. Do you think this system had any purpose for Louis beyond just having people serve him?
5. Do you think this system had any negative impact on France? Explain
6. Based on this account, do you think Louis XIV was a good ruler? Why or why not?