

Entering A&S Competitions

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Sometime during the course of getting ready for a competition it is not uncommon to ask yourself, "Self, remind me... why am I doing this?" It can be very comforting to have the answer in advance.

Why do you want to enter?

To share – showing others what you have done

To learn – using the comments & critique you receive to improve

To teach – using competition as a passive teaching tool

To win – competition for competition's sake

Three ways to set yourself up for almost certain failure:

If competitions just aren't the right venue for you... don't force yourself to enter them. There are many other outlets for artisans – displays, forums, making largesse, teaching classes or just using or wearing the spiff things you've made

Don't convince yourself that winning is the only option. Winning can be the goal, but what happens if you don't win? Will coming in second or third crush your spirit or inspire you?

Don't use the competition to prove you know it all... none of us *really* know it ALL. How will you accept the comments you will receive? Will a well-intentioned piece of constructive critique cause you to fly off the handle or help you gain new perspectives?

Some ways to set yourself up for success:

Plan – Take your time and don't rush. Some entrants start working on projects many months before a major competition.

Research – Start off by finding out all you can about your entry. Any well researched project can become an A&S entry. It doesn't work very well if it's done the other way around. It also may help to enlist a "research buddy" or two. These are others who know what you are interested in and will send you interesting little tidbits they trip across.

Write everything down – Keep a log of research notes. Many artisans use a spiral bound notebook or folder to keep everything organized. Write down the books you used, print outs of information found online, what materials you used, the step by step process to make your entry, substitutions ... right down to what you learned or would do differently. Keeping good notes will make writing documentation very easy.

Double check – When you think you are done, have someone else look over your entry and documentation. They may notice flaws you can fix or have questions that aren't answered in your documentation.

Some competitions provide the rules and judging criteria ahead of time. Read them and use them to your advantage. Even using the criteria from another competition or kingdom to pre judge your entry may help you find areas for improvement before you enter a piece.

What to expect from a Competition

It's normal to be a bit anxious about the competition.

If you have questions, ask them. It's OK to talk to the organizer of the competition, Laurels, Fleurs or even other entrants.

Most formal A&S competitions involve scoring/judging. The process involves assigning a score of 1-5 in each category. 1= beginner 3=average 5=Master level work
The number of categories varies, but commonly in Aethelmearc we use six:

Aesthetics – the extent to which the elements of an entry work together to create a pleasing “whole” while maintaining the period aspect of a piece.

Authenticity - the extent to which the entry uses period materials and techniques to create an item of a specified period (may be influenced by process, materials or aesthetics)

Workmanship - the extent to which the entrant uses their skill combined with their knowledge of materials and techniques to make an entry.

Creativity - the extent to which the artist combined original elements and substitutions with their knowledge of period materials and techniques to create a unique entry.

Complexity - the extent to which the entry was difficult to produce. (May be influenced by materials used, availability of materials, difficulty/simplicity of style, intricate details, number and difficulty of steps in the process, overall size and scale.)

Documentation - the extent to which the entrant provides written material that explains what they were trying to produce, the materials used and the process of creating the piece. Provides appropriate historical background and source(s) for the entry.

Documentation ... the dreaded “D” word

Knowing what is expected and how it is going to be judged will help take a lot of the fear out of documenting your entry.

For me, good documentation does not mean a formal research paper filled with footnotes and printed out on a ream of paper. My ideal of good documentation places the value of content over format. A thick pile of papers does not equal good documentation. Keep it simple, cover the basics and make sure it is readable.

Who ... owned the item or who would have used it

What, what ... the item is, what it is made from

When ... time period

Where, where ... location of item and where I can find out more about it (covers Bibliography)

Why ... I made changes from the original

That's it so far as documentation goes in my book :-)

The whole primary, secondary or tertiary source question, IMO, is an authenticity issue.

As an entrant, I use the formula as an outline for writing my documentation. I have written documentation that was 10 pages with footnotes and included several pages of pictures.... And I have written concise 3 page documentation with 1 picture. The shorter version received full points, the longer one didn't (mostly because the judges didn't have the time they needed to read it completely so they skimmed through and missed things.)

After the competition

Please remember that the judges are human

Accept constructive critique graciously. Someone took the time to write a comment to try and help you improve. Seriously question or even ignore any criticism that comes without any positive aspect or recommendations.

Poorly written comments, a missed word in the documentation, different approaches to the art ... many things can lead to misunderstandings. If you have questions or wish to make comments/ clarifications of your own, please find the judges and discuss your entry with them.