

# How to document a project for an SCA competition:

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## Part 1: Researching the project

Rule # 1: Research before you start the project.

It is never a good idea to create a wonderful piece of work and then try to shoehorn in documentation to support it. Proper documentation supports the piece, not excuses it.

Rule # 2: Stick to primary sources if possible, secondary sources at the least.

Know the difference between a primary source and a secondary source:

A **primary source** is the item itself or a very good (museum quality) picture of the item; in the case of a recipe, the un-translated original recipe.

A **secondary source** is a second-hand description or commentary on the item, a usual book-quality photo or a drawing of the piece; or in the case of our recipe, a translation of the recipe.

A **tertiary source** is someone's interpretation of the piece; a museum reproduction for example. Tertiary sources are good for inspiration but should never be used for documentation.

There are always exceptions to these rules. For example, a professional sketch in an archeological report can be seen as a primary source; and some authors have reputations that make them primary sources; Janet Arnold on late period costume is an excellent example.

Rule #3: Check your sources.

Just because it is written down in a bound book does not mean the author knows what they are talking about. Costuming and armor references in particular are suspect. Quite a lot of nonsense crept in from authors who were more interested in romanticizing the period than researching it. Things to look out for: Is the author working from original period sources, or other author's work? Are there obvious mistakes in the book (chain mail did not consist of rings sewn to heavy leather)?

When researching always ask these three questions:

Why?

Who says so?

Who are they?

Rule # 4: Take notes.

Keep a notebook or a file folder. Photocopies are your friend. Make note of references for your bibliography. Keep your sketches. Do not throw anything away; you might want it in ten years.

## **Part 2: Documenting for competition.**

Competition documentation should be a summary of your research, not the sum of it. SCA judges are usually under a time crunch, and are possibly unfamiliar with the subject of your research; so you need to strive for brevity and clarity. You do not want to write a book (at least not for a competition) Keep it short (2-4 pages) and to the point. Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Points to cover in your documentation:

- What – What is this piece? What is its time period? Where is it from? How was it used, and by whom?
- How – How was the original made? What materials, techniques processes, etc were used? How was your piece made? What tools did you use; what materials?
- Why – What were your decisions in making this piece, How did you decide on materials, what substitutions were made, what compromises and what creative changes and WHY?

A sample outline:

The cover

- A short description of the piece (“A 14<sup>th</sup> Century German Embroidered Altar Cushion”)
- A photo of the piece, if possible, to enforce judge recognition (which of seventeen woven hand towels does this documentation belong to?).
- If the competition is not anonymous, Your SCA name, mundane name and group.

Page one and on:

- Start page one with a summary: one paragraph summarizing the documentation. This will get the judges minds formatted for the information you are about to throw at them.
- First section, summarize your research on the original piece, technique or source. What is known about it, materials, and techniques and so on? Be brief, clear and to the point. USE PICTURES!
- Second section, summarize your work. What did you do? How did you translate the recipe? What materials did you use? How did you interpret the art style? Especially, what were your decisions and WHY?
- Finally, include a bibliography, list all pertinent sources.

Attachments:

- Here you can go a bit wild. After the main documentation you can include supporting evidence, photocopies of articles (highlighting is good), photos, samples of period dyes. Anything the judges might find useful if they want more information.

A note on formatting: Printed is better than hand written. Use a standard font. Don't crowd the page; make good use of white space. SPELLCHECK!