

Helpful Hints on the Organization and Running of an Arts and Sciences Competition in the SCA

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I am writing this to give a base of understanding of how a typical SCA A&S Competition might run. Out of all the research I have done and the knowledge I have gained: I feel that you can write a how to, but you will never be able to write about every nuisance that will happen to everyone uniquely through this process. All I could hope is that by the time you have read this article you have gained some perspective which should give you enough confidence to peruse running one of the staples of the SCA.

Art in the SCA is what everyone has in common: from the close or armor one may wear, the personal device one displays, or even the food one may eat at a SCA Feast. There are many reasons to pick from on why you would enter a A&S Competition: Showing others what you have learned, gaining feedback, likes competing and challenging yourself. Most of all it should be because it is fun. No matter the reason running a A&S Competition you must keep all of this in mind so you can share the goal of everyone else participating. Another aspect of a well executed A&S Competition is to propel the interest in the arts and give everyone participating to continue to grow and continue in the arts in general.

To start out, find as much information as you can on how other A&S Competitions have, can, or will be happening. Contact any and all who have run an A&S Competition in the past to see how they did theirs and glean whatever information you can. It is better to learn from others' successes and downfalls to get yourself to a better starting point. Participate and or volunteer at every A&S Competition you can to give yourself the opportunity to get knowledge and ideas while not having the responsibility of running the competition itself. Try not to be responsible for the whole event that you will be holding the A&S Competition at. If not already set for your venue, get a site autocrat or event autocrat who will take care of site issues, set-up, meals if any, activities for the populace etc.

Besides encouraging artisans to enter the A&S Competition, you will also need to find judges to judge for the Competition. To help with finding judges, I would suggest asking those that are already familiar with the arts and hopefully have been judges before, who would be the most beneficial to the Competition. There are also good and not so good judges who think they are good judges so ask carefully. Keep in mind that you may need to find judges on site as life happens and your confirmed judges may not be available. Either ask for backups in case that happens and keep an eye and ear out at the event just in case you need to ask anyone to step in. Keep in mind that you should not ask those that are competing to also judge. The ultimate goal is for all the artisans participating in the A&S Competition to leave with a better knowledge of what they entered and that they not only want to continue to participate in the Arts.

Once you are placed in charge of the competition, get as familiar as you can with where the competition will be held: How much space and how many rooms you have to work in, how much table space and how many chairs you will have access to. Ideally you should have a good size room where the entrants will have a reasonable amount of space to display their items, with the

yet unknown amount of entries you will get. You should be able to close off this area so the judges have a quiet and comfortable place to judge adequately [this will give the judges the ability to focus on the tasks that have been given them]. Set a place for entrants and judges to sign in. This should be in two separate places to give the entrants a choice of keeping their anonymity or not. This is not a must, as trying to do this may not be an option. you should also try and have an area, or room, that is a small distance away from the main competition area where you will be able to read through the judging sheets to make sure everything is filled out i.e.: scores were given, judges signed their name, and that the comments were not destructive but constructive, and to tally the scores. Make sure you know where your judges will be until the conclusion of the Competition, just in case you need to ask them an important question.

You will need to set a time when sign in ends for entrants so you can start on assigning judges to the items entered, the farther out from the competition the better to find the best judges for those items. You can also try and have preregistration for entries to help with this issue. This helps to make sure you have the right amount of the right judges for the competition. Usually a small percentage will not be able to make it to the competition for any number of reasons; from car trouble to they were not able to finish their items. So be ready to make adjustments to accommodate this and anything else that may happen unexpectedly before Competition starts.

Set a time to meet with all of your judges just prior to the Competition. This should happen in the same quiet area that either the Competition will be happening in, or where you will be tallying the scores. All of this is dependent on the room/s you were able to acquire for the Competition itself. Let the judges know that you would like the judging sheets back as soon as they complete them so you will have more than ample time to tally all the scores and start running the final totals. This is so you will have time to get the list of winners together and ready to be announced, or for those winners' names to be written on scrolls or category winner certificates (depending on whom you are running the competition for or how it is being run). Remind your judges the level your particular A&S Competition is set at, and to judge accordingly.

Once judging starts make sure you are close by if there are any questions or any issues. If it is going to be a long day, try and have snacks and drinks to make the judges and those helping you more comfortable and keep things moving. You want to encourage a small break or two as judging can be very draining on the mind and body. As an extra thing you can provide a small thank you to the judges for sacrificing their time. Remember to treat your judges well; if you do another A&S Competition down the road, you may need their assistance again, you want them to have had an enjoyable experience.

Everything will work much better if you have a lot of help: help setting everything up, taking everything down, cleaning up, remembering things, double checking scores, double checking the judging sheets as a whole, helping check in the judges and entrants, helping the entrants find a spot to set up their items, and making sure everyone has space. Also you should have some runners or other such people on –board so that you are not trying to be everywhere at once.

The hardest thing you may have to do is deal with plagiarism and actually proving it. This is where more seasoned advisers will become invaluable. You will most likely involve Majesties, Baronial Excellencies, or Minister of the Arts and Sciences depending on whom, why, and where you are conducting your-A&S Competition. If any issue should arise keep it as discreet and as quiet as possible. You want to be able to handle the situation behind the scenes, the last thing you want to do is embarrass anyone or yourself. You will have to make lots of

decisions and most will be straight forward, but not all of them will be. As with anything, your responsibility is to make sure everything is fair, beneficial, and that everyone will want to improve and go through this process again.

Make sure you keep a constantly updated and always concealed list in your hand at all times of what the scores are, or who was voted the winner/s. This should stay with you and kept safe from everyone, until it is time to announce the winners.

For the general “just because we can” A&S Competition you will need to find gifts for the winners for each of the categories that was entered. But there are A&S Competitions that are done for Majesties or Excellencies where there will need to be more communication on the specifics of what their wishes are i.e.: what will be the A&S Categories, who will be awarded, and when things will happen. Most of the time these things are already written and set in place but it is always good to double check on everything. If you are doing a A&S Competition for Majesties or Excellencies make sure you know what scrolls for what categories you will need to find someone to make or whoever is responsible to make them will need to have for the winners as far in advance of the A&S Competition.

Make sure to recognize all that helped you and all that judged for that day, small gifts are always appreciated if that is a possibility.

At most A&S Competitions there will be a Court, one at the beginning and/or one at the end, so make sure the Herald/s know—you need to say something as they do not always assume you do. When you get some time in Court this will be the time to give any updates, any changes, and to thank everyone who helped and judged.

Keep track of everything so if anyone asks a question or if someone comes to you for help you will always have something to reference to. Also keep flexible in your plans as much as possible as things do not always go as planned and if you have made enough room for unpredictable situation and issues you will not feel as stressed.

In conclusion I would like to remind you that all that I have written here is meant to be helpful, not rules to follow. I have done a lot of A&S Competitions large and small over the last ten years in the SCA, and even though every event is a learning experience I tried to relay things here that I have learned and I hope you can use.

Have fun, don't run yourself ragged, and if you always try and do your best everything will always work out.

Written by my hand this 11th day of November 2010.

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