

# Rowan's Documentation Tips

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Here are a few important tips that may help to save you from heartache at an event:

## IMPORTANT TIPS

### **Important Tip #1: BE PREPARED TO EDUCATE YOUR JUDGES**

In a perfect world, your judge will be an expert on everything in your category. Unfortunately, that's just not realistic. Some categories (such as illumination) include a wide range of possible entries that vary in technique, style, time period, and cultural influences. Experienced judges are frequently asked to judge categories of which they have only have a small amount of knowledge. As an entrant, you need to be provide enough information in your documentation that you can actually "teach" your judge how to evaluate your entry.

### **Important Tip #2: LENGTH OF DOCUMENTATION (usually 1 page, minimum)**

Gone are the days of being able to write all your documentation on a 3x5 card and take away first place. Most competitions now require typed documentation. Now, here's the caveat. Judges have many, many items to judge and **may not have time to read all your documentation.**

### **Consider the following suggestions to make sure that judges read all the important information:**

- Write a summary or outline in the first page of your documentation
- Use bullet points
- Use headers in **bold, larger font** and/or underlined
- You can say a lot with pictures. Replace wordy descriptions with scanned photos with captions

## Good Documentation Answers These Questions

### **Who are you?**

Picture it, you've placed your thoroughly researched and painstakingly reconstructed project at a Pennsic display table. Everyone is raving about your project, but you've forgotten to put your name on your documentation! No one can personally congratulate you on your efforts or give you helpful tips for next time. Don't forget to always include your name (SCA and modern) with your work.

### **What have you created?**

In a nutshell, what is your finished product? Is it a replica of a 10<sup>th</sup> century brooch? Is it an SCA scroll inspired by a 15<sup>th</sup> century book of hours?

### **What was your item like in period?**

This is where you can tell judges about your research. You should describe your project in the specific time period of your recreation. In an example of a 15<sup>th</sup> century Spanish manuscript, you could write specifically about 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts: colors used, design motifs, paints used, who created them?: Monks? Professionals for hire?

### **To go to the next level of documentation:**

To take your documentation to the next level, you could briefly describe your project across cultures (discuss Middle Eastern influences on Spanish manuscripts, for example) or compare Spanish manuscripts with English manuscripts.

This is an opportunity to show the judges your research. Show judges that you've executed some critical thinking here. For example, your research indicates that the manuscript was painted with motifs that are not common in Spanish art. You might tell the judges what could have influenced the artists in this region.

### **What materials were used in period?**

As an extension of the previous question, you should take care to tell your readers what materials were used in period. (For example, vellum, lead-based paints, etc.)

### **How did you recreate your project?**

What materials did you use? Did you use vellum? Did you use readily available bristol board because it is for an SCA scroll and it is affordable? Tell us about your paints. What colors did you use? Tell us about the motifs you chose. If it's for an SCA scroll and you used a motif that might not be correct for the time period of your scroll, but you wanted to personalize the scroll for the recipient - - tell the judges!

### **Why did you choose your materials or techniques?**

If your materials are not period, why did you choose them? Telling a judge that "cotton embroidery floss is what I had in my apartment" is a weak reason. Be prepared to lose points for authenticity. Telling a judge that you used cotton yarn to knit stockings because of a wool allergy is acceptable. Also, telling a judge that you used a more durable material (say, for a banner that you made as a gift to be displayed outside at Pennsic) is usually okay, but you might still lose a bit on authenticity. **It's a bad idea to forget to tell judges why you used non-period materials.** Be sure to tell judges that you do know what materials might be used in period and that you recognize how period materials/techniques behave differently from modern ones.

### **Did you run into any challenges in your recreation?**

Judges like to hear about the process. Did you learn something new? Did you have trouble with some of the materials? Why? How did you overcome these obstacles? If you had to do it again, what might you do differently next time?

### **Photos**

Include some photos of extant pieces. A great visual of a period piece pasted into your documentation next to a photo of your work is a powerful statement.

## Summary

Summarize your project. Perhaps you could mention whether or not you enjoyed the project. Summarize what you learned.

## Sources

You should cite the sources that you used in your documentation. Good sources will help back up your work.

**Be careful of some sources!** Some websites and published books provide inaccurate information. **How can you tell?** Always check to make sure that your source cites sources. For example, you don't want to use a costuming book that covers the years 500 AD – 1500 AD but doesn't make reference to any sources or extant pieces.

“Because my Laurel told me” is NEVER an acceptable citation. However, you can cite a conversation with a Laurel or other expert in the field. A more powerful citation would be to cite his/her papers. Even better, you can ask the Laurel or other expert for some sources that you can use for more information. After reviewing the sources, you can cite them!

Primary sources are great if you can find them. For example, household books or information from a museum on an extant piece or pieces are great resources. If you use a period book that has been translated, be sure to cite the translator too.

It doesn't hurt to follow the MLA guide or APA style to help you cite your sources. Information on how to cite references is readily available on the web. Try <https://www.hvcc.edu/lrc/index.html> or just about any college library website for basic MLA and APA information.

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