

# So, You Want to Enter the A&S Fair?

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## Quick and Dirty

Make something Cool. Document it. Enter it. Hope it does well in judging.

**Better Process:** Think of a cool project. Start researching how it would have been done in period. Figure out how that can be done today. Make it/prepare it/research it, and document your efforts, as well as how your efforts align with period efforts. Make sure to discuss how those differ, and why. Prepare for the Fair and present your project there.

## Basic Fair Rules

The Fair Rules have recently been updated. Much of this update was to improve readability, but there were several substantive changes. One, there is no Pentathlon option in the Fair anymore. Divisional entries are now encouraged in their place. Two, the regional Fairs have been removed from the schedule. Three, the judging criteria have been simplified and streamlined to better serve the depth and breadth of A&S activities done in the Middle Kingdom. In place of the individual topic criteria sheets, there are now only three criteria used – one for Research, one for Made Objects, and one for Performances.

The Rules and Criteria for the Middle Kingdom Arts and Sciences Fair can be found in the Midrealm Library of Documents, at: <https://library.midrealm.org/kmoas/asfaire/>.

I would recommend you read the rules. Some of the key details include that the entry must have been completed within the two years prior to the Fair, it cannot have been entered in any prior Kingdom Fair, and judging is done face to face, so entering the Fair generally means also attending the Fair.

Additional things I find worth mentioning from the rules:

- Group projects are allowed.
- Any physical project that needs more than a 3x3 table space to display needs to be cleared with the Fair Coordinator ahead of time.
- **The rules clearly indicate that substitutions for safety, offensive content, or to avoid prohibitive cost shall not be penalized.**

## Criteria

With the recent Fair update, there are now only three Criteria Sheets. They can be found at the link above, along with the Fair Rules. **These are great for referencing as you work on your project, as they describe, in detail, what the judges will be looking for.**

## Sections for Made Objects and Performance

The criteria break down into several sections. The sections are similar for Made Objects and Performance, and are listed and described below:

## Supporting Evidence

This section is all about the sources, references and raw data used to support your entry. This includes both spoken and written evidence provided during the Fair. The scoring in this section ranges from “there is pretty much no documentation linking this project with the SCA time period” thru to “this is extremely comprehensive and well analyzed – this entrant knows their stuff backwards and forwards”. This is like the Research and Documentation section in the previous criteria.

## Ingenuity

This section is about demonstrating your understanding and interpretation of the why and where and for whom of the project, in period. This is where the resourcefulness and experimentation and the thought process behind the project get judged. I often associate this with the mental load of making the project – the thinking and decision making and figuring things out that must happen behind the scenes.

## Complexity

This section is about the difficulty and variety of skills and techniques present in a project. How challenging is it? This is like the Scope section in the previous criteria.

## Methods

This section is about how the object is made, or about how the entry is prepared and performed.

## Materials

This section is about the raw materials used in the object or performance. I see both this, and the Methods section as a compare and contract sort of section, where you demonstrate an understanding of what was used in period, versus what is present in your project, including a discussion about differences between those. **Substitutions of methods and materials are allowed for safety, offensive content, or to avoid prohibitive cost, but those substitutions should still be explained.**

## Execution

This section is about how well the skills and techniques are demonstrated within the project. How well does the project fulfill its expectations? This is like the Skill section in the previous criteria.

## Sections for Research Entries

The Criteria for Research has different sections, most of which feel somewhat self-explanatory, shown here:

### Supporting Evidence

This section is like the Supporting Evidence for Made Objects and Performance.

### Thesis

This section looks at how well is the thesis defined.

### How Well is the Thesis Supported

This section looks at the breadth and depth of support for the thesis in the provided research.

### Methods

This is about the research methodology used.

## Citation

This section is about how your source material is cited. Preference is given to using a standard citation style with footnotes or endnotes and annotated bibliographies.

## Writing Skill

This section is all about how well the information is presented. Does it provide detailed analysis and insight into the research conducted?

## Choosing a Project

There are many ways to choose a project for the Fair. It can be a personal challenge, along the lines of “I want to see if I can do that!”, to “I want to show off this super cool thing!”, to “I have a skillset that I want to demonstrate.”, to just wanting to show something off. The Fair is meant to showcase skills, and as such, it may not be the appropriate venue for a first effort in a new medium – these efforts may be better suited to the ToA or Queen’s Prize Tournaments. There is no need for the project to be flashy or showy – this can make an entry more memorable but does not automatically mean better scores.

## Research

**Reference a copy of the judging criteria for your project as you do your research. You may realize there are some gaps in what you know about the project that you can track down.**

Projects presented at A&S Fairs have a research component to them. This was probably my biggest stumbling block that kept me from entering A&S competitions for way too long. It intimidated me.

But then I realized it was just a formal way to explain the project. To determine how this type of thing would have been done in period, as well as the where, why, who, what, and such from period. That research can then be used to inform the decisions made for my work, to make my work more authentic.

So, to demonstrate the period work, get as close to those actual works as possible. For made objects, can you find a surviving example of it, somewhere? Perhaps see it in person, or get high resolution photographs of it? Can you find scholarly articles written about surviving examples? Perhaps some paintings or illuminations that inform about it from period? Or written descriptions from authors in period? Family inventories that describe items or purchases? Are there period poems/songs/broadsheets/dancebooks/etc that provide inspiration or provide examples of that style of performance? Can you use a variety of these sources to develop a fuller picture of this sort of work in period? Try not to limit yourself to just one type of source material – multiple perspectives and sources can help develop a multi-dimensional understanding of the work in period.

One way to find more sources is to read general books on your topic and look at their bibliographies and works cited lists for additional places to seek more information. It can lead to a research rabbit hole, and these rabbit holes can be full of information. Chat with other experts on the topic, both here in the Midrealm and further afield in the SCA or other living history groups. If an article by an academic leaves you with questions, there is little harm in reaching out and sending them a message to see if they would be willing to converse. Some may, some may ignore the message entirely, but there is no way to know without trying.

The same principle applies to museum finds – if you know of an item in a museum’s collection and want to see it from an angle not provided in the online collection, or, if the museum does not have said item included in its online collection, send a note to the museum and ask if they have any high-resolution photos. They may require you to sign releases, and they may limit the audiences to which you can show the photos, but they may be happy to provide them once the releases are signed. Some even get excited to learn there are people interested in one of their collection items.

It is worth mentioning that museums and academics, while they may respond to these types of inquiries, they may take a long time to send that response. I have had it take several months, with one museum, but they were happy to give me permission to use the photos once I did hear back from them.

For web-based references that you intend to use for your project, I would recommend that you print them, or print to PDF if you want to do electronic records, and make sure it has the date of printing listed on it. Some citation styles include an “access date” as part of citing web-based references. Additionally, by having a local copy, I can then bring those references along for my display when I enter the Fair. I also tend to bring along any print or photographic sources I have as part of my supporting elements for my Fair displays. Even if I do not display them on the table, I have had an occasion where I could confirm a discussion point with my judges by referencing one of my sources during judging.

There are various options for capturing your research. There are apps and web-based tools that let you include citations and references and capture bits and pieces of research. I tend to go old school with physical copies of books/articles/etc and use post-it notes to mark important details in them. **Use what works for you.** Keep track of your sources as you go. Also, remember that you are building a whole picture of your project – sometimes small details from a source that initially seems unimportant can span a gap elsewhere in your research. It is easier to reduce references and citations as you finalize your documentation than it is to go back and find that source again. Annotated bibliographies are your friend.

## Writing your Documentation

**Ideally, start your documentation \_before\_ making your entry, or laying out your performance.** Doing so allows you to think through the decisions that will need to be made for your project, and determine experiments that need to be undertaken, as well as considering what processes and techniques you will need to draw on for your entry. This may help save your work from (as many) false starts, or hard lessons before getting into the heart of the project, saving you time and the heartache that can come with those lessons. **Also, it is \_much\_ easier to figure out what photos you may want to take of your project in progress if you have already started the documentation.** Photos can provide many details about methods and processes and clarify details of those for your judges.

Midrealm A&S Fairs allow for verbal supporting evidence. However, judging is limited to a set amount of time, and there can be many details to discuss, so written documentation can be a great way to gather it all together for ease of communication.

**At its most basic, documentation is meant to describe what the project is, how it would have been made/done in period, and how you have created your project based on that information.** And you want the documentation to describe as much of that as you can and provide a list of the resources you used to figure all of that out.

**Reference a copy of the judging criteria while working on your documentation.** Use this to guide the inclusion of information in your documentation. It is what the judges will use, and it is available to everyone, so it is a good tool.

There is no formal citation style required for Midrealm A&S Fair documentation. But it is good to be able to indicate the source for statements of fact used in your documentation, and to be consistent in how you do this within a given document. For ease of doing this, I have used one of the default ones built into Microsoft Word (there is a references menu up in the top bar worth exploring – particularly the Citations & Bibliography section of it). I don't know the difference between APA and Chicago and whatever other styles are out there, but I suspect there are loud, raucous debates about which is the best style to use among scholars. Some folks really like to use footnotes, some prefer endnotes, some prefer to do their best to avoid both. The main purpose of documentation and whatever citation style you choose to use is to get the information across in a manner that is readable and understandable.

**Pick a style and stay consistent.**

I find it useful to lay out my documentation in a process-style. Most of my projects are made objects, and so I list each step in the process of creating the entry, and then describe how that step would have been done in period, and how I did it, and explain any differences between those. This helps inform my photo usage in my documentation, as well. Make sure to get photos of your work at each stage of that process. If you have images of extant items, it can be helpful for comparison to frame your process/project in a similar fashion to the extant item.

Alternatively, it may also be useful to lay out the documentation along the lines of the criteria. Frame up an outline for the documentation with a section for each of the criteria sections, and then fill in the details. This can be helpful to you as you work, so that you know you are providing information for each section. And it can be helpful during judging, as it clearly indicates to your judges where to find information for specific judging sections.

**Midrealm is big on experimental recreation.** Test swatches, samples, mockups, practice sessions, etc can be part of the process of figuring out how an item might have been made or done in period and including discussion of that effort in your documentation is a good thing. This can inform several of the criteria sections and shows the depth of work and understanding of the project.

**Please take lots of photos of the progress on the project!** With digital photography, it is easy to take lots and lots of pictures, and the cost is merely a few seconds of time. Those photos can be very useful when describing the stages in project development/completion. These can be worth their weight in gold, and I can speak from experience that it truly sucks to realize, after finishing a project, that you should have taken photos during a specific part of the project but neglected to do so.

I like to place a short summary of my project at the start of the documentation, although it is often one of the last parts I write. I find this helps provide focus for the rest of the documentation. I think of it a bit like an abstract from a journal article. If possible, including a photo of the project on the first page of the documentation can be a nice touch.

Color printing is more accessible now than when I first started in the SCA. I like to include my photos in-line with my documentation and print the whole thing in color. But, if that is difficult/expensive for you, I have seen entrants create a binder or booklet with all their collected photos/images/etc., and then

have the written documentation printed in black ink. Documentation is meant to be practical, so readability comes before aesthetics.

**Finally, make sure you put your name on your documentation!** I like to use a footer with my SCA name, the page number, and my email address as a point of contact, like what I have used in this handout. I leave space to add an entry number which is typically received close to the Fair.

**Get friends and family to read thru your documentation.** They can spot things that you might not be able to see in your own writing. Also, try reading your documentation out loud to catch where the phrasing is awkward or where your visual reading skimmed over a missing word.

Finalizing documentation should happen after your project is ready to present at the Fair. Last minute details may be added to it once you have your timeslot assignment, so it is best to wait to print out your documentation until shortly before the Fair, if possible. Also, it can be worth your time to spend some time thinking about an “elevator speech” for your entry, as some judges ask you to give a quick synopsis to start the judging process at the Fair. This can be a great opportunity to highlight specific details that you want the judges to notice.

## Making your Project/Planning your Performance

Ideally, your documentation has already been started, and you have a good idea of how your entry would have been found in period. Generally, it is best to stick as close to how that was done as possible for your entry, barring safety or budget concerns. **If substitutions/modifications are made for safety or budget, explain what the original would have been, and what you did to make it safer/affordable.** Consumables (food, brewing, etc) need to avoid ingredients that are listed as prohibited in the Fair Rules. Performance entries would need to practice the performance of their entry – choreography, voice, music, etc.

Keep your samples and mockups and notes from various practice sessions and test runs. All of this can be helpful if the judges are curious about how you came to certain decisions in your project.

Finally, finish your project on time. Fair entries are meant to be completed items, so make sure you finish with ample time to do whatever finishing/polishing/ironing/etc is necessary.

## Signing up for the Fair

The A&S Fair is held May long weekend, on Saturday (the day prior to Crown Tourney). Pre-registration is required, and I would recommend signing up at least two weeks prior to the Fair. You will want to have a title for your entry, along with a short description of it, the primary techniques or skills displayed in it, along with a timeframe and location in which it would have been found in period.

Midrealm uses a web portal for signing up, and a link to it will be available closer to the event. It will likely be published on social media and will also be linked on the KMoAS page of the Midrealm website.

It is worth mentioning that the Fair can often use additional judges. With three judges for each entry, the numbers of required judges quickly add up. Please sign up to judge if you will have time to do so at the Fair. The organizers will be sure to avoid double-booking your time, so you will judge in the timeslots when you are not having your item judged.

## Getting Ready for the Fair

### A week or more prior to the Fair

Prior to the Fair, it can be useful to do a test setup of your entry. The Fair rules indicate you should get at least a 3'x3' space to display Made Objects, but sometimes you get more, sometimes the space is tight and you get a bit less. **Practicing a display layout ahead of time will make your setup more efficient and less stressful.** I would recommend having a tablecloth under your entry, and I usually go with a solid color, to not distract from what is being displayed. Contemplate ways of displaying your entry and information/samples/tests/etc that is pleasing to the eye. Using boxes under the tablecloth can raise up parts of the display that you want to highlight. Small table-top easels can be used to prominently show photographs that are part of your source material.

For Performance entries, practice! And practice the small things – how you enter the space/performance, how you move within it, how you engage physical items that are part of your performance, how you begin and end your performance, and how you exit the space/performance.

I also gather up my source materials. If there is space, or time, I like to have them handy at my display, or have them near the performance, just in case I want to reference one of them during judging. Once I have done dry runs of my entry, I pack all the necessary bits into a tote bin (or two). This way I know I have everything contained together for easy transport to site on the day of the Fair.

If you think you will need more than a 3'x3' tablespace, or more than 20 minutes to present your entry, it is asked that you contact the Fair Coordinator ahead of time, so space and time can be arranged. This might include things like needing space for a floor-standing dress form to display a garment, or an entry that is physically too large to fit within 3'x3', like a wooden bench, or a sword, or a performance that takes longer than ten minutes to perform.

Then, make arrangements to attend the Kingdom Fair!

### The week of the Fair

In the days leading up to the Fair, entry numbers and a preliminary schedule for judging will be sent to entrants. I like to include my entry number on my documentation, so once I receive mine, I will add it and print up 5 copies of my documentation. Typically, there are three judges for each entry at the Fair, so this allows for one copy per judge, one for me to reference, and one spare.

Doublecheck that you have everything you need for your display, including your entry.

## The Day of the Fair

### To Begin

Arrive on time. Go thru the gate process to sign in for the event, and then find the Fair Sign in Table, where you should sign in as an entrant, and, if judging, as a judge.

Bring along some munchies and beverages for hydration. There may be lunch and/or munchies available at the event, but it is not guaranteed. There may be food/liquid restrictions in some parts of the event site, but those should be well posted ahead of the event.

## Judges and Entrants Meeting

There is a mid-morning meeting for the judges and entrants, scheduled after the sign in table closes and before judging is scheduled to begin. At this meeting, the Fair Coordinator, KMoAS, and others will provide any last-minute needful information. Also, the final schedule is handed out at this meeting, including your entry timeslots, and any judging timeslots you may have. Once the meeting is complete, it's time to chill out until your scheduled timeslot(s).

## Judging of Your Item

EEK! Judging!

Yup, it's nerve wracking. I get nervous before my judging timeslot, both as an entrant and as a judge. I think this is normal, as discussions with other folks seem to indicate they feel the same.

The goal of this is to present your entry and convey information about it. The judges are there to learn and see what all you can inform them about your work. They will read your documentation (some may try to snag a copy earlier in the day, and read it ahead of time), and then you and they will have a discussion. They will ask some questions, maybe get clarification on something from the documentation, allow you to fill in any additional information, and so forth. Sometimes those questions may seem a bit out of left field, but the judge may simply have a different perspective on some element of the work. Sometimes there are predictable questions. I have often had a judge ask me for the "elevator speech", or a short, concise synopsis of my work, which can be handy to think about or prepare in advance. Most judges I have dealt with seem to be trying to draw information out of me, to learn more about what my knowledge base is. And that part is kind of cool – this is the key element here – we are sharing knowledge. **Ideally, you enjoyed the project, so talking about it will be enjoyable once you get over the nerves, too.**

## Judging Other Entries

It is common to sign up to judge at the Fair when you are entering an item. So, you may find yourself having to be judge as well as showing off your own entry. This can lead to a full day. I find it helps me to avoid fussing about my own project as much if I have other things to concentrate on like helping with judging other entries.

## Results Announcement

At the end of the day of judging, the A&S Fair officers will tabulate scores and collate commentary for all the entries. This is often done at the same time as having the displays open for public viewing (there may be public viewing earlier in the day, however many folks are reluctant to wander around and look at entries when they see some entries being actively judged).

Enjoy this time – all your responsibilities, short of packing up your display, are done! You may find, if you've been away from your display for a while, that there are some little trinkets and such on or around your display – some members of the populace show appreciation for A&S endeavors with small gifts of largess.

At some point, the open display portion of the event will end, and you should be ready to pack up your display and entry at this time.

After the judges have collated all the information and figured out all the scores, there will be announcements about the top scores, and a general disbursement of judging commentary sheets. This may be included as part of court, or it may be a simple announcement from the Fair Staff.

### Summary

It can feel nerve-wracking, or overwhelming, to enter the A&S Fair. Documentation sometimes scares people. But it is a heck of a feeling of accomplishment to take a project from inspiration thru to completion and get to show it off. You get to geek out about your A&S interest with a receptive audience, and that's super-cool!