

So, You Want to Judge the A&S Fair?

Quick and Dirty

Show up. Be judgy.

Better Process: Register a week or more before the Fair, after specifying your areas of knowledge. Arrive on site on time and sign in and attend the judge's meeting. Remember the entrants have busted ass for their entry and treat the entry and the entrant with respect. Be timely, provide constructive feedback to the entrant. Write comments on the judging sheet. Assign numbers based on the criteria. Do no math. Hand in your judging sheets asap after the judging timeslot is over.

Who can Judge?

Anyone!

You don't have to be a Laurel. Or an Evergreen/Willow/Silver Oak/etc. You can be brand-spanking new to the SCA. You do need to have a base of knowledge in one or more areas of A&S. That's it. The system is set up so that you are matched up to judge entries that fall within your area of knowledge. This is for the sake of both you and the entrant – the more comfortable you are with the subject matter, the easier judging will be for you.

Judging is done by panels of 3, usually all at the same time. And if you are new to judging, you can ask to be a shadow judge at your first Fair, which will place you as a 4th judge, and your scores won't count (although you should do them anyways for practice). Your comments will still go to the entrant, though, so you can still provide valuable feedback if you are shadow-judging.

Why Judge?

It's a form of service. We all love A&S stuffs, and certain things need to happen to support the continuation of A&S Fairs. Helping by judging makes the Fairs work. And many hands make light work – the more judges we have at a Fair, the fewer individual entries each person will need to judge. It's a way to give back to the A&S Community.

It's another way to learn. Examining the entries and the documentation gives you the opportunity to learn more about an area of interest. I've learned about new potential sources and timelines and techniques thru judging.

I find it inspirational. You get to see some really cool things when you judge at A&S Fairs. And you get to examine the entries closely and ask the artist about their decisions and choices made and how they found x item or how y affected the work, and so forth. I have left every Fair I have attended inspired and wanting to make more and do more and learn about all the A&S!

And, it elevates A&S as a whole in the Midrealm. By judging entries, and ensuring entrants are aware of authenticity and best practices, our representation of the middle ages is raised.

How to Judge?

The Fair site is being updated, but I assume that there will be similarities to what was previously established. The information below is based on the prior system, information from the KMoAS and the Fair Coordinator, and there may be minor changes to the process once the new system is fully developed.

Well Before the Fair

If you do not have an account in the Fair website (once it is live again), make one, and specify what areas of A&S you feel comfortable judging. Previously, this was done by selecting checkboxes of different areas of specialty.

Review the criteria. It never hurts to gain familiarity with these.

Two Weeks Before the Fair

Register to judge **at least** a week prior to the Fair. **The more notice you can give, the better!** If it is your first-time judging, and you want to Shadow Judge, make sure you indicate that interest in your account.

On or around the Tuesday/Wednesday before the Fair, the staff will match up the entries with available judges. Sometimes a bit of creativity is needed for the assignments, depending on what sorts of entries there are, but the staff do their best to pair up judges with entries that fit or are very close to the areas they indicated they could judge. So, if you indicate you can judge early period embroidery, but there is an entry on late period blackwork embroidery, and they need an extra judge for that entry, you might get assigned that entry.

Thursday Before the Fair

Generally, the preliminary judging assignments are sent out to judges on or before the Thursday prior to the Fair. This gives you the opportunity to look at the assignments and make sure there are no concerns with judging them. For example, if you are assigned to judge an entry made by your dependent or best friend, or vice versa, you may want to send a message to the Fair staff so they can redo that assignment match. This set of judging assignments is preliminary and may change to accommodate conflicts of interest like mentioned, but it's a fairly good idea of what to expect. Also, when those assignments are sent out, they usually include the contact email or phone numbers for a few of the organizers of the Fair, just in case something happens that affects your ability to arrive at the Fair on time.

The Morning of the Fair

Arrive on time. Gate in. **Sign in to the Judges Sign-In table**, so they Fair staff know you are on site. If, for any reason, you are unable to arrive on time, reach out to the people listed when you received your judging assignment and let them know what is going on, and what your ETA is.

Based on the sign-ins, both for judges and entrants, some shuffling of judging assignments may happen the morning of the Fair.

Attend the Judges Meeting. At this meeting, the Fair staff will give a pep talk, discuss constructive criticism, talk about their expectations for judging sheets/commentary/etc. At the end of this meeting, the judging assignments will be handed out, usually on a card or paper. Make sure you know what the starting time is for each judging timeslots. Also, timezones are a thing, and Midrealm includes two of them. Times given out are generally in local (event site) time.

Typically, there is a short break between the meeting and the start of judging. This is a good time to grab a fast bite to eat (some Fairs will have a lunch available, some will not). Also, if you can, scope out where the entries you will judge are displayed. That ensures you can arrive on time for your judging slot. If the written documentation looks substantial, you may be able to grab a copy of it to read before the start of the judging session. It can be useful to have a copy of the criteria and a judging form handy while reading the documentation. That way I can review the criteria while I read the documentation, and I can fill in my information at the top of the judging form, saving me time during my judging session. This year the option to use electronic judging forms is likely to be encouraged, so for those who type faster than they write, this may be a good time to ensure you have connectivity with your device.

Keep an eye on the local time, and when your judging timeslots are scheduled. It is uncommon for a judging to be judging in every timeslot at the Fair, so you may, or may not be judging in the first timeslot of the day. When it is time for your judging assignment, make your way to the entry, and introduce yourself.

During the Judging Timeslot

These sessions are about an hour long. I usually start by filling out the top of the judging form with my information if I have not had a chance to get this done ahead of time. This is the basic information about who I am, what the entry is, and so forth.

Judging is done in panels of 3, and there may be a shadow judge, as well, so you all may end up crowding a bit around the entry. Be respectful of everyone's time. All the judges need the opportunity to examine the entry and ask questions of the entrant. Both written and verbal evidence are part of the supporting documentation at the Fair, so content provided in both should be considered when scoring.

If I was able to read the written documentation before the judging session, I usually try to start with examining the entry. This gives time for the other judges to read before I ask questions that might distract them from reading. Or, if everyone has already finished reading, you can get right into asking about the entry. Ideally, the written documentation includes most of the information you need to assess the entry, and you are simply trying to flesh out details at this point, but sometimes the verbal documentation provides a wealth of additional information. Some entrants are nervous, as well, and questions can be framed to give them the opportunity to fill in details that you were unable to glean from the written documentation.

Keep the criteria in mind as you read, examine, and ask questions. At some point during this session, you need to start writing comments on the judging sheet. Different judges use different methods and timing for writing their comments, and if you have an empty time slot after the judging session, you can use some of that time to flesh out your commentary in the form. I like to write most of my comments when the entrant is nearby, because if I realize I am missing information as I write, I can get clarification easily by asking. But the one hour goes by fast when doing all the reading, examining, chatting with the entrant, and writing commentary in it!

It is important to provide constructive comments on the judging sheets. A few comments like "this is awesome!" are OK, but what really helps the entrant out are comments that provide usable feedback and comments that can help them progress in their skillset and their research. So, things like "I really like how you did x element, have you tried this other related technique?", or "impressive use of y material", or "I enjoyed the details from z source. Have you looked into this other source, w?" are good.

Referring to a discussion point you had with the entrant during the session may also be helpful, if it will work as a memory aid: “We chatted about x source – I think it would help fill in this information gap.” If something could use improvement, mention it, and provide suggestions on how to improve, or who to talk to, or what to read up on to improve. Actionable feedback is a good way of thinking about it – what actions can you suggest for the entrant to improve their work or it’s authenticity. **Entering the Fair is a lot of work for the entrant, and they have probably put some heart and soul into their project, so match that effort with compassion and kindness.**

Compliment sandwiches are another technique that is often brought up for judging commentary. If you need to provide some unfortunate commentary, try to place it in between other statements that compliment the project. For example: “I enjoyed your analysis of Crocket’s seam treatments! I wish you had chosen a linen or silk thread for this project. The stitches are made beautifully and even!”. This method works for some. I prefer to instead focus on actionable feedback, myself.

After the Judging Timeslot

Thank the entrant for their time and effort at the end of the judging session. And then finish up any remaining commentary you want to include on the judging form. Make sure you have comments and numbers for each item. If you are not submitting your judging feedback electronically, please try to write neatly – you want the entrant to be able to understand what you have written.

Do not do the math – the folks in the tally room will do that and they have systems in place to reduce error potential. Take your completed judging form to the submission point (sometimes called the Ogre) and hand it in!

Criteria

Overview

The recent update to the Fair has streamlined and simplified the Criteria used for judging. The criteria can be found on the Midrealm Library of documents, at: <https://library.midrealm.org/kmoas/asfaire/> This is the same page where the Fair Rules can be found.

A phrase I heard in regards to Criteria defined like the new set we have in the Midrealm is that **our Criteria is additive**. Scoring is done by indicating the level that has been achieved in the work, not by reducing points for perceived errors or omissions. As you are judging, you can move scores higher as different elements are demonstrated or explained that increase the level observed for that section of the Criteria.

Sections for Made Objects and Performance Entries

The criteria for Made Objects and Performance include several sections, shown here:

Supporting Evidence

This section is all about the sources, references and raw data used to support the 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 similar to the Research and Documentation section in the previous criteria.

Ingenuity

This section is about demonstrating the 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 have to happen behind the scenes.

Complexity

This section is about the variety and difficulty of skills and techniques that are needed to realize this project. How challenging are they? This is similar to the Scope section in the previous criteria.

Methods

This section is about how the entry is prepared, made, or 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 contrast sort of section, between what was period, and what is in the entry. **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 realized within the project. How well does the project fulfill its expectations? This is similar to 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 similar to 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 sited. 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?

Judging Sheet Overview

The Judging Sheet breaks down into a few sections. The top has defined spaces to write in the overhead information – entry number, date, location, judge’s name and contact information.

Below that, there are sections for each of the sections listed in the Criteria. Comments and scores are expected for each section of the Criteria. If you are hand writing your comments, you can use the back of the scoring sheet for extra space, or can request additional paper.

Summary

Judging can be a rewarding aspect of A&S participation, and when approached with a willingness to give it a try, it can be fun and inspiring.

Hopefully this has de-mystified the process and expectations of judging at A&S Fairs.