Building A&S Documentation:
An Audience-Based Approach

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Agenda

- Introduction

- Audience: Who is actually reading documentation, and what are they looking for?

- The Business Problem we are Trying to Solve

- What sorts of sections might each type of audience need?

- Document Layout and Structure

- Including images & graphics

- Presentation

- When to write & refine documentation?

The Business Problem We Are Trying to Solve

- We are putting an item or items we've created in an A&S display or competition.

- We won't be present/able to speak to everyone who looks at the piece, so we need to convey certain details about its construction and inspiration in written form.

- Different readers of the written element - our documentation - will have different needs and goals. They are **different audiences**.

The First Question: Who is your Audience?

- I usually think of 4-5 different audiences:

  - Casual browsers

  - Intrigued Fellow Artisans

  - Experienced Artisans in this Form

  - Order Members/Award Recommendation Writers

  - A&S Judges

- Each audience has different goals when reading documentation, and I have different things I want each audience to take away or goals I want from them.

Casual Browsers

- Casual passers by. Might go so far as to stop and look at each A&S display, but don't have the time or energy to read 10 pages of documentation.

- **Their Problem**: They want to know basic details about the item as quickly as possible.

- **What I want from Them**: To remember who made the thing and what it was, and maybe take away one other interesting fact or tidbit about it.

- **My Solution**: An 'executive summary'. I start every piece of documentation with one. In a competition where E-Z doc is specified, this is what I'd put on the E-Z doc. Straightforward, simple, and to-the-point - 1-2 paragraphs.

Intrigued Fellow Artisans

• Individuals who are curious about this kind of work or who work in the same art form or something adjacent.

• They want to see how I made it to see if there are lessons they can take home for their own work.

• They might also be looking for new primary sources of information or references, or to learn where I sourced my material or tools.

• **Their Problem**: They want to become better artisans.

• **What I want from Them:** To have a solid conversation, artist-to-artist, about what I did and how I made the thing.

• **My Solution**: Include a step-by-step construction guide if appropriate, including images. Make sure my references and footnotes and/or bibliography are clear. Have a section that talks about successes and failures or lessons learned - and don't skimp on pointing out the failures! Sometimes beginners need to hear that experienced folks mess up too.

Experienced Artisans in this specific craft

• Folks who are highly experienced in this art and are interested in sharing their knowledge and experience with fellow artisans.

• **Their Problem**: They want to advise you on how you could improve. To do that, they need to know your process, problems you encountered, what seemed to work and where you'd like to improve.

• **What I want from Them**: Engagement. I want them to help me solve problems I encountered when I work on my next project. I want recommendations for primary or secondary sources I don't know about, and where and how to get better materials or tools.

• **My Solution**: Clear statements on what worked and what didn't. Adding clear process logs, including photos. Including any future plans for the style or art form. A section or content around historical references and influences also serves this audience well. All of these elements turn into opportunities for engagement

Order Members, Royals/Baronage, and Award Writers

- For artisans aiming at higher-level recognition, these are a specific and identifiable set of individuals which include Royals, Landed Baronage, Companions of the Order of the Laurel, and Companions of the Order of the Pearl. It also includes individuals not in these orders who might still write award recommendations which will be considered by those Orders and the Royals who receive the Orders' recommendations.

- These individuals tend to be interested in both the level of your craft and the historical accuracy of your work. They will want to know about ways you adhered to exemplars and the ways in which you diverged from them (and why). They'll be interested in your thought process and decisions you made in constructing the piece.

- **Their Problem**: They need to understand where you are in your artistic journey. This means getting specifics on techniques you are using and how those techniques fit into the historical context. They also may need to share your work to others who are not present, so having an online version can be incredibly helpful when aiming at higher-level awards.

- **What I want from them**: Endorsement. I want them to come away with the best possible understanding of my work, my process, and where I am as an artist. I want them to remember my work if my name comes up in discussion, or even put me forward for discussion if appropriate. If there are things I could work on or improve on, I hope they will let me know.

- **My Solution:** Detail. This group will be looking to understand detail on historical inspirations. I'll make sure to call out sources, especially primary sources.

- I don't want to overwhelm them or members of other audiences. This means I need to organize my document carefully - pulling all that specific detail into its own section so folks who really want it can dig in while others can skim it and know they won't miss out on the information they need.

- This is a group that will be VERY interested in your future plans. If you've got a big project on the horizon, mention it in your documentation. Hopefully they'll keep an eye out for that project at a future event.

A&S Judges

- This is the easiest audience to write for… if there is a rubric for the competition.

- In the absence of a rubric, write to the Atlantian Rubric (or your kingdom's equivalent). https://moas.atlantia.sca.org/judging-and-event-forms/.

- Make what level you believe you achieved on that rubric clear. Any statement you make should be backed up by the rest of the documentation.

- Make it easy on your judges by making the answers they need clear and easy to find.

- **Their Problem**: They need to answer certain questions about your work for their judging, and compare it to that of other competitors.

- **What I want from them**: The highest score possible for my work, with everything I've done (and haven't done) accounted for.

- **My Solution**: I use a few techniques for this.

  - I include surface-level answers to the rubric questions in my executive summary.

  - I'll then make sure to back up those statements throughout my documentation in relative sections.

  - This is another audience that tends to like seeing detail and process photos. They might also respond well to statements on what worked, and plans for next time.

Sections for these audiences

- Remember, your sections may vary greatly from these. They will change based on art form as well as audience. These are meant as an example of what I've found useful for sewing and bookbinding projects, and are not an exhaustive list of sections you should or must include in your work.

- **Title Page**: Has a title or name for the object, an image if at all possible (sometimes you're still working on the thing/for garments haven't gotten a good photo of it all together yet, that's OK), your SCA name & title, your local group, and contact information/website/social media if you have it and want to share. *All Audiences*

- **Executive Summary**: A basic 'here's what this object is'. Probably has something about the date/time, a simple description, a quick list of the types of material, and a sentence or two around how accurate it is. *Casual Browsers, Intrigued Fellow Artisans, Award-writers, A&S Judges*

- **Inspiration and Goals**: Answering the 'why'. Why did you want to build this thing? What is the impetus of the project? This is a great place to add a bit of humor or personality - for example, I've had an Anne Boleyn gown recreation on my wishlist for a while but actually started it when I found some gorgeous faux fur that I just had to work with. In this section I might also go into the historical inspirations, ideally with primary sources, images, etc. Basically set the framework of what you plan or planned to make at the start of the project. *Intrigued fellow artisans, Experienced artisans, Award-writers, maybe A&S judges and Casual Browsers*

- **Period Examples**: For some projects, I might want to take the images and analysis from extant pieces into their own section for more in-depth analysis. *Experienced Artisans, Award-writers, A&S Judges*

- **Design Decisions, Pattern, Historical Accuracy**: I tend to use this section as a simple summary of how I built the thing. I'm not going into full detail of every step - that can come later - but for someone looking for an overview of the design and construction decisions I made, this is where to look. If it's a piece for competition or high-level award judging I might call out the **reasons** for non-historical decisions, like a time crunch due to a deadline to wear the outfit. *Intrigued fellow artisans, experienced artisans, A&S Judges*

- **Materials & Tools**: Pretty simple - this is a list of every material I used in the project, including approximate amounts. This is useful both for readers AND for myself - if I am ever planning a similar item it's a record of the amounts of materials needed. Where possible I try to include the source for materials, because that's of interest for some of my audiences. *Intrigued fellow artisans, experienced artisans, A&S Judges.*

- **Construction Techniques or Construction Process**: This is where I'll go into detail on specific techniques used, if appropriate. It's also a good place to put progress/process photos. If I'm doing a full 'how to' somewhere else in the docs, I'll save a step-by step for that but for simpler projects that might go here. *Intrigued fellow artisans, A&S Judges*

- **Final Conclusions & Next Steps**: This is a reflection on the project. Did I achieve what I set out to do? What are the things that worked, and what didn't? What do I want to improve the next time I make one of these? Are there any conclusions I can draw from the finished piece that are surprising or not what I expected? Is there another project I'm planning to work on soon in this art form/time period/style?. *Intrigued fellow artisans, experienced artistans, award-writers*.

- **Appendices**: If I include a full step-by-step guide to creating the item, I'll do so as an appendix - something added to the end of the documentation. While useful, it is a level of detail that most readers won't need or be able to parse during an event, so putting it as an appendix allows folks to know that it's there but they won't be missing something important if they skip it for now. *Intrigued fellow artisans, experienced artisans*.

Points for Style:
Document Layout and other Diverse Matters

- Think about grouping and containing different kinds of information together. Put each group under a heading. Those headings should be clear and descriptive.

- **Table of Contents**: Different audiences are looking for different sorts of information. Make it easy to find the information someone is looking for with a Table of Contents.

  - Make it it's own page.

  - This also means you need page numbers. They can go in the header or the footer.

- **Footers**: Include page numbers, date, the event, and maybe a version number if that's helpful to you.

- **Spacing**. Don't be afraid to add breathing room to your document. Lines don't have to be packed tightly on the page and space between paragraphs makes things easier to read.

- **Fonts**. There is a time and a place for COOL, old-school fonts. Your documentation isn't it. Use a standard, professional font.

- **Images and Graphics**. Use them.

  - These days when I'm working on a project I try to snap shots on my cell phone as I go. They don't have to be amazing. I have folders for projects on my computer and just drop the images in, so they are ready in case I need them for documentation later.

  - I've also started finding I have stock images for common steps. EG I sew eyelets in the same way each time, so I can usually use an older eyelet-sewing image rather than taking a new one for each garment I construct.

  - For reference images, MAKE SURE YOU HAVE PERMISSION BEFORE ADDING IMAGES TO YOUR WORK! Many libraries and institutions will have a license listed or even a way to request a license for academic/research purposes. Take this step and obtain permission.

Presentation & Your Display

• Consider how you want your audience to interact with your documentation.

  • Will you have copies for folks to take with them, or do you need to keep all copies? Can you offer digital options? Do you have enough copies of the documentation that when the judges come through every judge can have their own copy?

• My current method:

  • 1 fancy 'bound' copy (spring-clip binder). Looks good and is a copy folks won't usually walk away with. It's also hard for the wind to blow it around or destroy.

  • ~2 additional printed copies of each piece of documentation. 2 makes it clear that I intend folks to pick it up and page through the content, and that by picking it up you aren't depriving someone else of a chance to read it.

  • If there is A&S judging, I'll try to have enough copies for the judges, ideally enough that even if they take copies it won't leave my table bare/they can have copies to keep or scribble on.

  • QR code to a digital copy of the documentation for folks who prefer that form, or want to have a copy at home

Process, or: When To Write

- I tend to research ahead of time, determining my exemplars and approach. I take notes and save images as I work. But I don't draft documentation until the item is complete, usually waiting until the first time I'm going to put it on display or enter it in competition.

- Your audience changes by event. The audience at a small, local event that isn't on the royal Progress is different from the audience at Kingdom or Known World A&S. So I can't really write documentation until I know what event it will be used at.

- I modify documentation for every display - or at least consider doing so and take a pass through it to consider my target audiences and ensure I'm serving each of them as best as I can.

- But I AM setting myself up for success before I write the documentation.

  - I keep a folder on my computer with project inspiration images, and make sure to include sources so I can give credit.

  - I take notes on my process and any ideas for improvements or challenges along the way, because 6 months later as I write documentation I won't remember those details

  - I photograph my work as I go and include those images in the project folder. Sometimes I also take video, which can be useful to put on my website/digital documentation.

  - If I don't display an item for a while after it's completed, I might do a quick write-up just to give myself a skeleton for when I AM ready to display the piece. If I want to put the piece on my website I might write full documentation, considering the audience that comes to my website just as I would the audience at an in-person event.