

WRITING RESEARCH PAPERS IN THE SCA

By HL Melisande de Frayne
Kingdom of Ansteorra

Many people enter Arts and Sciences competitions in the SCA and receive positive commentary on their documentation. Judges' comments on lengthy documentation, such as "this would make a great research paper" may lead one to believe that it would be easy to convert written documentation into a research paper for the SCA. This is not necessarily true, as the research paper is an entirely separate category in the Kingdom of Ansteorra Arts & Sciences competition.

There is a great deal of information available about writing a collegiate level research paper but not all of it is applicable to the SCA. This lack has led to many questions about what constitutes a research paper, how it should be written, how long the paper should be, what type of format should be used, and so on. This paper will, hopefully, clarify those questions for anyone entering a research paper in a Kingdom of Ansteorra Arts and Sciences Competition.

I. REVIEW JUDGING FORM. Ensure that the paper takes the questions cited on the form into consideration. This form was recently updated and can be found on the Internet at: http://moas.ansteorra.org/forms/research%20jdg%20form_ansteorra-aug2007.doc.

II. CHOOSE A TOPIC. Most Arts and Sciences entries focus on recreating a period item or performance. The SCA research paper, however, is intended to explore a medieval topic from a modern point of view. Ensure that the paper relates to period (generally considered to be 600-1600 A.D.) and is well defined and clear to the reader. It may be helpful to choose a topic is interesting to members of the SCA. Other topics that might garner attention are those that are original or have not been substantially explored in SCA literature. If you explore what might be a well-known topic, try using a new viewpoint or a fresh approach to the topic.

III. CHOOSE THE TYPE OF RESEARCH PAPER. The three categories of research paper acceptable at the Kingdom Arts and Sciences competition are:

- A. How To/Instructional. Papers which teach or inform the reader on how to create an item from period. For example, an instructional paper might present how to make finger loop braids.
- B. Persuasive/Argumentative. Papers which serve to convince the reader of a theory. The writer sets forth a premise(s) and draw conclusions from that premise. For example, a persuasive paper might present the premise that the Black Death was a result of an outbreak of anthrax, not the bubonic plague.
- C. Historical/Expository. Papers which give a detailed presentation of a historical subject. For example, an expository paper might explain the influence female writers had on medieval thought and morals.

The two styles of research papers that could be used in any of the above-referenced categories are:

- A. Analytical. The introduction presents an open ended research question, the body explores the evidence, and the conclusion sets forth a response or answer to the question. For example, what was the effect of climate on agrarian practices on the Iberian Peninsula?
- B. Persuasive. The thesis is clearly stated in the introduction. The body of the paper contains the research and arguments supporting the thesis. The conclusion summarizes and supports the thesis. For example, foods eaten in 16th Century England were more influenced by class or position in society rather than by religious beliefs.

IV. The Ansteorran Judging Form. Each paper submitted will be graded on Technical Structure (5 points), Complexity-Depth and Breadth of Research (20 points), Workmanship/Skill (15 points), and Overall Impression (10 points). A more in-depth explanation of each category follows.

- A. Technical Structure. Bibliography/Consistent Citation-must include a bibliography. Additionally any quotations, facts or paraphrasing that comes from another source (in the bibliography) should be footnoted, end noted, or listed in “Works Cited” format, any clear and consistent citation format is acceptable. There are four basic types of formatting styles used, as follows:
 1. APA (American Psychological Association). Generally used in psychology, education, and other social sciences.
 2. MLA (Modern Language Association). Generally used in literature, arts, and humanities.
 3. AMA (American Medical Association). Generally used in medicine, health and biology.
 4. Turabian (may also be called Chicago format). Based on Kate Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations 6th ed. 1996*. Her manual was based on *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Generally, this style is used in many different subjects, but most particularly when the research paper is written for a college-level class and not for publication.
- B. Complexity-Depth and Breadth of Research. To what extent does the writing demonstrate an understanding of knowledge of the topic? To what extent does the writing or presentation indicate an understanding of the correct materials and techniques (sources) that would be appropriate for the period of research? To what extent is the process/thinking logical and critically valid? To what extent does this add value to the SCA? To what extent does this demonstrate understanding of the difference between speculation and fact?

There are three types of sources for research:

1. Primary-An item written or produced in period
2. Secondary-An item depicted or referred to in a historical or scholarly book. Use care to refer to only sources whose conclusions are based

on primary sources. A painting or photograph of a period item is considered a secondary source.

3. Tertiary-An item, drawing, or writing that is two steps removed from the primary source. For example, a tertiary source would be a website article written by a member of the SCA on Elizabethan Sweet Bags.

It is important to note that while primary sources are probably “best”, not many of us get to handle an item in places such as the Victoria and Albert Museum. In some cases, primary sources, particularly in the textile world, no longer exist. A secondary or tertiary source is not “bad” as such. The important thing to keep in mind is the reliability of the source. Check the author or artist’s background, training, and schooling. How long ago was the article or book written? Does the author or artist cite reliable sources and/or images? Have you found the work of this author or artist to be substantiated in or by other sources? If possible, talk to experts in this field: What do they think of the author?

Many artisans ask how many sources should be cited in a bibliography or reference section. The answer is, as many as are needed. That may seem flippant, but it is a truthful answer. Some judging forms *require* a minimum of three sources of information and this is likely a good “rule of thumb”. Citing only one source may call into question the credibility of your research. On the other hand, if too many sources are cited, it may appear that the bibliography is being padded. A Laurel recently told me to cite only the sources at which I found a rabbit, not all the sources that led me down the trail to the rabbit...Good Advice!

There are several approaches that can be taken in writing a research paper. The approach will likely dictate the points awarded for complexity. They are:

- a. Regurgitation. The paper recites facts primarily from a single source, or from sources whose provenance cannot be validated. There is little attempt to reorganize or analyze the material.
- b. Summary. The paper collects facts from a numbers of sources and organizes them in a logical and useful fashion, but new ideas are not developed.
- c. Synthesis. Data is collected from a variety of sources, it is analyzed and an attempt is made to draw a logical conclusion.
- d. Thesis. The researcher proposes a question or opinion, collects and analyzes data, and draws a well-supported conclusion. An original idea is presented, with a good attempt made to prove (or disprove) the idea.

C. Workmanship/Skill. To what extent is the work clearly and adequately organized? To what extent does the work orient the reader? To what extent does the work educate the reader? Thesis statement (if appropriate)-is the purpose of the paper clear? Conclusions. Supported Arguments. Spelling and Grammar.

1. Format. Focus on clarity and ease of reading. Use fonts and formats that are easy to read. Double space the paper.
2. Check for grammar, spelling and punctuation. This is easy with current software programs, so judges are likely to be quite critical of mistakes.
3. Ensure the paper “flows” from introduction to the body of the paper into the conclusion. Is the conclusion supported?
4. Have a friend, or friends, proofread the paper. If they have questions, likely a judge reading the paper will have those same questions. Do not assume that the reader will have an extensive knowledge level of the topic!
5. Has the same style/format been used throughout the paper? Ensure that the style is consistent throughout the paper, including the bibliography/references.

D. Overall Impression. These points are awarded at the judge’s discretion and this is a bit harder to quantify. This is the judge’s reaction to the aesthetic effect and appeal. Some might call this the “wow” factor. Here are some ideas that might help garner points in this category.

1. Develop a unique or interesting approach to an old topic
2. Investigate a new or relatively unknown topic
3. Conduct in-depth research into a topic
4. Present research that melds two seemingly unrelated topics and draws a conclusion.

V. USING THE INTERNET FOR RESEARCH. There are many good articles on the Internet about using websites to do research. It is a good idea to search the Internet for basic information when first getting ready to write a research paper. It is easy, quick, and can be done at home. The Internet gives access to things one might never see in person. However, there are downsides to using the Internet as a source for a research paper. Here are some tips garnered from a recent discussion with a Laurel regarding Internet sources:

- A. If an article is found online, check the references and/or bibliography section to see if you too can reference their primary or secondary sources. These are always an improvement over a tertiary source.
- B. Extensive reliability on internet data may lead the reader to question the reliability of the data. Anyone can post a paper or article on the Internet and appear scholarly. Do the research. One way to start an

authentication process is to check the Uniform Resource Locator (URL). This will help identify the type of organization disseminating the information. For example an academic institution (.edu) may have more validity in the mind of a reader than that of a commercial entity (.com).

- C. If a museum or similar website is accessed for photographs or drawings used in the research paper, either separate those items from other Internet sources in the reference/bibliography section, or better yet, cite the source directly in the body of the paper. For example, the caption “14th Century Cope created by the Sisters of Mercy, currently displayed at the Museum of Fine Art in Copenhagen, Denmark.
- D. Ensure the website link is functional immediately prior to entering the paper in a competition. If the judge is unable to verify sources, this may affect the score.
- E. Cite the entire website reference according to the formatting style chosen. Ensure that the link cited takes the judge or reader directly to the page from which the information was drawn, not to the main website page.

VI. SUGGESTED STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS FOR WRITING

- A. The Preliminaries
 - 1. Choose a topic
 - 2. Begin preliminary reading
 - 3. Restrict the subject
 - 4. Develop a preliminary thesis statement
- B. Gathering Data
 - 1. Compile a working bibliography
 - 2. Prepare the bibliography on 3 x 5 cards in the correct format
- C. Taking Notes
 - 1. Develop a preliminary outline
 - 2. Evaluate your source material-primary, secondary, tertiary
 - 3. Begin taking notes on notecards
 - 4. Avoid plagiarism
- D. Writing the Paper
 - 1. Develop the final outline
 - 2. Prepare to write-put notecards in order.
 - 3. Write the rough draft
 - 4. Check your documentation carefully
 - 5. Revise and rewrite
 - 6. Check format of the text
 - 7. Proofread
 - 8. Write the final paper

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