

How to Write Documentation for Arts & Sciences Competitions



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Summary

- This is a “cookbook” style document that covers the basics of documenting research and creation of projects for Arts & Sciences competition.
- This is a “live” document and will be updated periodically. Updates are posted on studioloperyn.wordpress.com.
- The Summary gives a “highlights” overview of your documentation. You could also use the title “Overview”.
- The Summary should be no longer than one page.
- Cover all the important points of your project, with one “bite sized” chunk per bullet. Briefly answer the main questions in Appendix B.

Introduction

There is more than one way to successfully document your research and creation (experimentation, construction, practice, execution) for Arts & Sciences competition. The method described here is based on APA style used for writing experimental science research papers. It's a style that fits beautifully with SCA research and experimentation. The layout presented is best suited for A&S competitions, but can be easily modified for class handouts or articles. This document serves a dual purpose: it tells you how to write documentation and is also an example of documentation.

The purpose of documentation is to summarize your research and creation in a logical, easy to understand way so that your audience and judges can become educated from your research, follow your decisions, and learn from your results. Good documentation includes the facts in a linear way, starting with describing the object in its native setting, then method/design of the object (how it's made), ending with results and conclusion.

Scientific literature is written in 3rd person. But there are times when documenting in the SCA where you may decide to write in first person to describe why you did something. Try to avoid changing "person" within a section or subsection. It can get confusing for the reader. Primarily using 3rd person also helps to avoid conversational writing, which can add length to the document without adding substance.

The introduction is where you summarize your research. Describe the time and place where your entry could be found. If it's a dance you discuss who did it, where and why. If it's armor describe who would have worn it, who would have made it and how it would provide protection. Assume your reader knows nothing about the time/place/item. How would you explain the entry to a class of 6th graders? Why it is important? What's interesting about it?

Logically you can start your introduction either general to specific or vice versa. Most readers are accustomed to and most comfortable with a general to specific flow of logic.

Don't get into the details of construction or your results here. Your introduction will lead the reader into the next section, eager to learn more.

Organization

Unfortunately most readers, including some of your judges, will not read your entire text. Ideally we would like them to, but it's not realistic to expect it. One major complaint of entrants is they received comments from the judges that indicated the judge did not read the relevant part of their documentation. The burden is on you as the

communicator to make it easy for the reader to find answers to their questions as they evaluate your entry. Well organized documentation can help.

Your documentation should have these basic elements

- Cover/title page
- Summary
- Introduction
- Method/Design
- Results
- Conclusion
- Bibliography
- Appendices (as needed)

Each main section can have subsections, except for the cover page and summary. The bibliography would very rarely have subsections, unless you are writing a very long document (like a book).

If you have more than a couple pages of text and images, use tabs to make it easier for the reader to find these sections. Presenting your documentation in an easy to read format includes making it easy to handle. Consider a narrow binder or report cover to organize and protect your documentation.

Formatting

Choose a page margin either .75 or 1" on top, right and bottom, use 1.5" on the left to allow for binding. Line spacing is comfortable to read at 1.15 to 1.5. Add padding after your paragraphs (8 to 12 points) as well. Pick a format and stick with it. Print single side for all pages. Print graphics in color.

Choose a clean, easy to read font, such as Arial. The title on the first page should be the same size as the section headings (16 pt), center it on the page. Body text should be smaller, but easy to read (12 pt). Header and footer text (10 pt) and page number (10 pt) should not be on the first page. Each Appendix has a title page, the bibliography does not. Never go below 9 point font.

Start each major section (Introduction, Method, Results, Bibliography, etc.) at the top of a new page. This helps the reader scan through your document and makes it easy to add tabs if you have a lot of pages.

Subsections have a header that is the same size and font as the body text, with an underline. There is also an extra carriage return above the subsection to help it stand out as a reader scans the page.

Appendices should be labeled A, B, C, D, etc. along with their title on their cover page.

Citing Resources

Always cite (give credit) to your resources both at the place you quote, summarize or mention their work or idea and list them in your bibliography. There are many online resources for APA format that cover citing everything from books to websites.

In the body of your text you can paraphrase (summarize) the author's writing or quote them

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Smith & Jones (1999) suggest that using period resources, such as facsimiles of pre-sixteenth century books is a great idea.

“Use period resources, most especially facsimiles of such wonderful resources as pre-sixteenth century festival manuals and other printed books. It's a great way to get into the period person's head” (Smith & Jones, 1999, p199).

Choosing Sources

When we talk about research resources we describe how close they are to the original item (primary, secondary and tertiary). Imagine the rings of an archery target with the original in the center and the encircling rings as secondary, tertiary, etc. As you research you will look at all sources you can find, but your documentation will focus mostly on the original (if you have access to it) and secondary sources.

Definitions get a bit fuzzy, but the object itself, photos of the object and period writings about the object are the closest we can get to the true original and are referred to as primary sources. Secondary sources could be a description or drawing of the primary source. It's a step away from the original. A caveat is that professional archeological drawings of an object can be considered primary because they are so detailed (for example Janet Arnold's construction drawings of funeral clothes) and come from a well-trained source.

Build your project around primary sources and support with secondary sources if they add weight to your discussion. They could be other researchers who have formed opinions you agree (or don't) with. There is no magic formula for how many and what type of sources to use, and each source should be evaluated for its accuracy and bias. Even people in period had agendas.

Once you start thinking about how close to the true original your source is, you then have to evaluate it for accuracy. Proximity does not equal accuracy. A photo of a 600 year old dress, while amazing, is not a true representation of what it looked like the day it was first worn. It requires careful analysis to get the real picture. Same goes for descriptions by period writers. They had opinions and biases. You will have to read several sources to figure out what you what you agree with.

As you work your way through the available information, keep notes of what you have read, the important facts from each, and your forming opinion about your project. How much you research depends on how easily you can find answers to your questions. Good research develops even more good questions.

Footnotes vs endnotes

Edward Tufte (edwardtufte.com), a well respected visual communications expert, encourages the use of footnotes instead of endnotes because it reduces the interruption the reader experiences (looking at the bottom of the page vs finding a different page). Footnotes, endnotes and appendices inherently break the reading flow. Put some thought into how you present your information. Any break in the flow risks losing your reader to distractions. Do not use both footnotes and endnotes.

Method

This section could also be called “Design” or “Construction”. Choose a title that works best with your entry. A live arts entry may call this section “Redaction” or “Reconstruction”.

Here is where you present your detailed findings on how the thing was done in period and then describe how you did it. Break this section into sub-sections for each area you need to cover. For example, if your entry is clothing, have one subsection each for “Pattern”, “Cloth”, “Sewing Supplies” (such as thread, needle, thimble, scissors, etc), and “Assembly”.

Tables, Graphs, Diagrams, and Images

Graphics are a powerful way to tell your story. Use them to highlight period examples from your research, present complex data in graphs for easy analysis, and use photos of your process and finished item to support your descriptions. Insert them in the body of the document near where the text describes them. Label and number all graphics with font size either same or slightly smaller than the body text (11 or 10 point is good). The description of the item is italicized for emphasis.

Wrap the body text near the image for a professional looking document. Crop your images as needed to focus on the relevant content. A photo of your dye pot on the stove is great, but the vegetable soup in the pot behind it is distracting. Look at photos in magazines for hints on shot setup (lighting, placement, framing). Do not underestimate the effectiveness of a good photo in helping to tell your story.

If you have a lot of images and tables/graphs in the body of your documentation, consider a “List of Tables” or “List of Images” page just after the Summary, before the Introduction. It should be a separate page.

Edward Tufte (edwardtufte.com) is an amazing communications expert specializing in the visual presentation of data. His books and website are full of well designed graphs, charts and images.



Photo 1. *Description of item.* Date of item.

Location of item, City, Country.

Thinking Logically

Good documentation is like a good story. It has a beginning, middle and an end. The beginning is your summary and introduction where you present your topic of study, giving the historical and cultural background to entice the reader to be as curious and excited about the topic as you are.

The Method section describes how you planned for your journey, drew your map and gathered your resources. The Results/Conclusion describes your journey of discovery, the challenges and accomplishments you encountered and how you arrived at the end. It also wraps up your experiences with lessons learned and visions of future endeavors.

Before you start writing your text, think about the major elements of your project and how you would present them to a novice. Where would you begin? What are the important things you need to talk about?

Still stuck? List 5 things everyone should know about your project. Ask a friend to read the list and then ask them what else they would need to know to decide if it is indistinguishable from the original. Does that mean it has to be indistinguishable to be entered? Absolutely not. Just understand that it is the criteria the judges are using as a comparison for the “authenticity” part of the score.

Substitutions

Sometimes the materials or circumstances in which an object or activity is made in period are too expensive, hard to obtain or dangerous to be practical for modern day. Reasonable substitutions are acceptable, but you must educate yourself to know what is available and what is reasonable to substitute. Some entries/projects may just not be feasible or need to be reworked. A live arts entry on Elizabethan horsemanship is not possible without being able to practice with a live horse.

Reasonable substitutions allow the project to be competed as close as possible to the period version. Using non-toxic versions of illumination paints is reasonable. Using cotton instead of silk for an embroidery project is not. Changing materials can affect the texture, appearance or performance of an item.

This also applies to tools. Using modern tools can lower your complexity and authenticity scores. It may also affect the construction of the piece. Modern props or clothes used in live arts may distract from the period look of your entry and/or may affect your movement.

Develop a detailed list of how it was made in period and then compare it to how you plan to make your piece. For each difference from the original, explain why you made the substitution and how close it approximates. This is where you show the judges that you know that lead based white paint was used in period and that it's a brilliant white, but you don't have the facilities to handle lead paint safely so you did your research and found an appropriate substitute that is a little grittier in texture, but has the same luminous light quality. A well-researched, educated, reasonable substitution is respected. Using white poster paint because you had some left over from your kid's school project is not.

Building a strong case when resources are scarce

Building your documentation when resources on a topic are scarce requires a considerable amount of work, logic and problem solving. You must cast a wider net during your research to find similar objects (or movements) which are close enough in time/space to contribute to educated guesses about the thing you are studying.

A common problem is being unable to find an extant example of an object, but finding multiple images in period artwork, like a hat from 1405 Paris. You have several period images of the hat from around 1405, including one that shows the inside of the brim. The closest extant examples that look anything close are a hat from Egypt in 1425 and a 1505 hat from Paris. You will look at both for construction details, materials used and ornamentation. Then compare these against the period artwork and create theories on how the 1405 Parisian hat was made. Your documentation will walk through the materials, design and construction of the 1405 hat and for each you refer to either the artwork or the extant pieces to support your decision. Don't forget to check c1405 period texts, such as wardrobe inventories and personal letters which may describe materials used, how it was used, how much it cost and adornment.

It can be challenging work. You will need to provide enough support for each decision to convince your judges. It's an exciting part of modern archeology that recreationists are on the forefront of. But it is not something quickly recommended to a novice researcher.

How A&S Judges Score Your Entry

They rely heavily on your documentation, not only for the Documentation part of your score (5 points in Meridies), but for Authenticity (5 points), Artistic Ability (5 points) and to some extent, Complexity (5 points). They judge your entry based on the period piece(s) you are attempting to recreate.

The better you educate your judges, the better they are able to judge your entry. If you have done your research well, you are the most educated person about your entry for several hundred miles around. Stop. Read those two sentences again until the light bulb goes on. This is the *raison d'être* of documentation.

Results

This section could also be called “Conclusion”. This is where you talk about how things turned out, lessons learned and what you would do different in the future. Imagine someone is considering doing the same project, what advice would you give them? Did things turn out as expected? Did you gain insight into how the people in period did it that no one has thought about?

Historical recreationists, such as the SCA, have a wonderful advantage over academics that study the same time period because the SCA goes beyond research and attempts to create, based on what we know of period practices, the object or action. This gives us valuable practical insight. Share what you have learned.

Include pictures of the finished piece or action shots of the live arts entry. Live arts judges will especially appreciate photos of the key movements of your entry (where applicable). If you are dancing, include photos of the common steps, a musician might include a photo of a challenging chord on a string instrument. Live arts entries go by so very quickly that judges can miss things.

Wrap up your results discussion by moving from the fine details to more generalized observations, place the entry in context with your new perspective now that you have made or practiced the piece. Has your view changed on how the piece was used? Did you develop insights on the culture or history?

Bibliography

APA Style Publication Manual. (2013). Retrieved April 19, 2013, from <http://www.apastyle.org/index.aspx>

Smith, R. C., & Jones, R. R. (1999). *Period Guide to Something Period You Are Researching*. Washington, DC: Period Publishing Press.

Look online for the APA Style Guide. It will give you lots of examples of how to cite your references.

All details you got from books, articles, websites, museums, people, etc should be referenced.

Keep good notes as you research and citations will be a breeze. Create your bibliography as you go, add books to the list as you read them.

WorldCat and Google Books have the citations for many books available for easy copy/paste into your bibliography.

Appendix A

What to Put in an Appendix

What should you put in an appendix? Use it to present relevant information that is a little too bulky to be in the body of the text. This could be a more detailed description of some aspect of the project, tables, additional photos, etc. The most important photos should be in the body of the text. The appendices hold the overflow.

Do not photocopy pages of text from books or magazines and insert into your document. If you want to include a quote, put the quote in the text and cite the reference. Photo copies should be used very rarely. Printed scans have a higher resolution if you need to include an image, such as a facsimile of a book. Only include the relevant pages. Place them in the appendices, not the body of the text.

If you absolutely must show the reader/judge one or more books, you can leave them on the table with your entry, but consider them additional materials that may not be read. Anything necessary for documentation should be in your documentation, including images. Do not reference a photo in a book without putting the photo in your documentation. Scan the photo and include it in the body of the text where the photo is being discussed.

Appendix B

How to Research Your Project

Research is not that scary. It starts with finding something you are interested in. Take a class, watch an online tutorial or TV show or visit a museum. If this is your first project, choose something you are already familiar with, perhaps from modern life. If you already sew, dance or do woodwork you will find a lot of your skills transfer easily to the period version.

Develop a list of key words as you research. These can be names, time period, materials, or descriptions. You will use the key words to search for books and articles on your topic.

For example, you decide to research a period chair. The history channel had a show about 16th C Italy and there was an X-style chair in the corner of one palace room that sparked your imagination. The narrator mentions the palace is the Pitti palace in Florence, Italy built in the 1500s. You search online for the palace and find their website, which has a picture of the chair and the details of what it was made of, when, the studio that built it, its dimensions and finish. But don't stop there!

Use the key words to find books on the palace and furniture from that time period. Look for similar chairs to become familiar with construction details and tools used. Who would have used this chair? What was its purpose?

Give yourself time to marinate in your chosen topic, check out books through interlibrary loan (ILL). As you look at each resource, note the title and page numbers with the information you like. This is the start of your bibliography.

Draw sketches of the item and plan the steps of construction, this is the start of your Methods section.

Research resources

Google search	Text and image searches
Google Books, Scholar	Many books are whole or partially online for free. Amazon also has partial books online
WorldCat	Access to many libraries' catalogues around the world
JSTOR	Digital library of mostly periodicals. You'll need your librarian's help to access
Web Gallery of Art	Primarily western European art
Online libraries	British Library and France's Bibliothèque nationale have huge image libraries
Online museums	More are putting their collections online every day. Start with the Google Art Project or search for "online museum".
Your local library	Make friends with your librarian for access to online databases and ILL.
Period documents	Manuals/instruction books or inventories.
Photosharing sites	Look through people's photo albums from their trips abroad (Flickr, Picasa, etc)
Social media & friends	There are many Facebook and Yahoo groups dedicated to artisans and specific research topics. Tell your SCA friends what you are interested in.

Questions your research should answer – static arts

- What is the time/place this piece would be found in?
- Who would have used it? What was it used for?
- Place it in its cultural/historical setting: Is this an everyday item or something for special occasions?
- Who would have made it?
- What is it made of in period? What are the variations in materials across similar examples? Does it vary by region or personal preference? What are the costs of materials (cheap? expensive?)
- What are the construction details (dimensions, how it fits together (seams, joints, bindings, etc).
- What are the period tools used to make it?
- What skill level is needed to do this piece?

Questions your research should answer – live arts

- What is the time/place this piece would be found in?
- Who would have done it? Why was it done? Where was it done?
- Place it in its cultural/historical setting: Is this an everyday thing or something for special occasions?
- What are the variations across similar examples? Does it vary by region or personal preference?
- What are the details of the movements or actions or thought processes you do?
- Are there any accompanying items you use (weapons, tools, etc).
- Briefly discuss the clothes that would be worn during the actions and if that might affect movement/efficiency.
- What skill level is needed to do these actions?

Appendix C

The Dos and Don'ts of A&S Competition

Do

- Read the judging sheet before you start work on your project. Use it as an outline to develop your project plan. Review the Meridian guided documentation form.
- Include photos
 - Of the construction process and finished product for static arts.
 - Of key movements (as appropriate) for live arts. Video can also be helpful if used thoughtfully.
 - Use color images/photos, especially if the color or detail is important.
- Ask at least two people to read your documentation. Give them a red pen and ask them to eliminate conversational or vague wording. Give them the judging sheet and ask what score they would give.
- Check the number of copies of documentation required for your entry.
- Design the presentation of your project.
 - Bring a tablecloth and other items to best display your static object.
 - Wear appropriate clothes if you are presenting (live arts).
 - Remember that live arts entries start when the entrant is announced and invited onto the floor and lasts until they leave the floor. Practice your entrance, introduction, finishing remarks and exit.
- Consider a “poster board” display with pictures and limited text to briefly describe your project. Foam core poster board is bare minimum and not very attractive, look for creative and attractive solutions (like cloth covered corkboard).
- Are there items the viewer/judge needs to best evaluate your entry?
 - Plates, forks, serving ware, etc for food. Ingredients list is mandatory.
 - Light and magnifying glass for small items.
 - Body double for clothing/armor.
- Contact the organizer at least a week ahead if you will need electricity, more than 2 feet of table space or other special needs.
- If you have created tools, or used unusual tools, add them to your display.

Don't

- Don't try to document something after you have made it. Instead, do the research and make another (better) one.
- Don't bring books to display with your project. The important information will be in your documentation. Books can distract from your entry. Do not expect your judges or audience to read them, even if you direct them to do so in your documentation. It gives the impression you haven't taken the time to finish your project.
- Don't include photocopied text in your documentation unless absolutely necessary (if there is way too much to paraphrase or quote) and then very sparingly. Place it in the appendices, not in the middle of your text.
- Do not include the entire text of someone else's work in your documentation, even if it is period. If you feel you must give the judges access to the document, place it in the Appendix if small or as a separate document if big.
- Don't wear clothes/shoes/accessories that clash with the activity/time period you are representing in a live arts entry. In live arts you are part of the entry.
- Don't use color paper, it makes reading more difficult. White paper is always preferable.
- Avoid unusual fonts; keep the text clean and easy to read.
- Don't write your documentation in persona. Avoid informal or casual language. Treat it like a science lab write up.
- Don't stop your performance. If you make a mistake or forget something once you have started, keep going. Ensure you have everything you need before you take the floor.
- Don't stress about the number of pages of content (high or low). Stress about the content itself: have you answered all the relevant questions?