

Documentation: The Four Questions

by Ariel de Courtenay

1. Did I do enough **research before** I started my project?
2. Is my documentation **brief** enough or does it have a brief, clear **cover page** summary?
3. Does it **educate** readers, even if they know next to nothing about my subject?
4. Do I acknowledge all my **departures from period**, to show I know what would be right?

Level of Effort:	What Works:	What Doesn't Work:
Minimal, but Perfectly Acceptable:	Verbal citation of period source with brief explanation of presentation choices: what you are and are not recreating (and why not - time, etc.) Educated judges give better scores.	No explanation of choices. Descriptions of period practice with no mention of sources -- "Everybody knows that..." or obviously unperiod work.
Pretty Easy:	Copies from book(s) with citations, applicable parts highlighted. Enough sets for all judges. Name, dated, stapled.	Copies of pages from unknown book(s), nothing highlighted. Not enough copies. No name -- gets lost.
Some Effort:	Copies from book(s), applicable parts highlighted, notes in margin saying how highlighted parts support presenter's choices (complete sentences not necessary).	Obscure highlighted parts which may even contradict presentation choices (I've seen this, no kidding). Sources which support piece, but don't prove it period.
Basic Amount for Scoring High Points on documentation:	Very short paper (1 page or less) quoting from book(s) including bibliographic citation(s), copies used only for images, clearly labels as to what aspect of piece they demonstrate.	Short paper which makes claims but which doesn't quote or cite sources for support. Snowstorm of copies of text passages which could have been summarized.
Likely to Score High Points:	Paper of any length (1 or few copies) quoting as above, with big section headings, along with enough copies of cover sheets for all judges, outlining paper in brief, with notes directing reader to supporting sections of paper.	Long paper with no road signs, which judges can't possibly read in the short time available, or which they don't even get to see because there aren't enough copies. Points obscured by mass.
Very Likely to Score High Points:	Paper as above, which includes sections on 1) historical background, 2) period examples, and 3) presenters choices about presenting -- your process, how you interact with history.	Long paper with lots of historical information, and no indication of how that information contributed to, or influenced your choices in preparing the piece.
Excellent Preparation for Competitions (as well as personally inspiring learning experience):	Paper as above, with copies of period work including notes on how each justifies various aspects of piece, as well as an honest listing of departures from period techniques and why (cost, modern equivalents, etc.)	Examples of period work with no indication as to what aspect of the piece they support. Major aspects left out (i.e., color choice but not fabric). Hoping that departures from period won't be noticed.
Highest Level Necessary for Competitions:	Paper as above with primary reliance on original source material. (Sources written or painted, etc. during the period you are studying.)	Throwing shallow primary source references in to get a longer bibliography. (Like a list of cook books without discussing recipes inside).
Above and Beyond You've Fallen In Love With the Topic:	Paper as above, suitable for publication in Tournaments Illuminated or the Compleat Anachronist, or which makes an original scholarly contribution to the field.	Writing a great article that is so technical and obscure or lengthy that no one will want to read it. Making readers feel criticized.

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