

SECTION VIII -- NAMES AND ARMORY -- PROCEDURAL

8) How to Be an Heraldic Consultant
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Intended Audience: Branch heralds and those interested in device consultation.

Abstract: A treatise on the basics of heraldic consultation, covering goals, materials, and strategies for dealing with various types of clients.

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HOW TO BE AN HERALDIC CONSULTANT

How to Work With The People On The Other Side of the Table
Hirsch von Henford & Iulstan Sigewealding (May, XXVI)

Some Definitions

Heraldic consultation is personal discussion of names or armory with a 'client'. A client is an SCA participant seeking advice on these topics: usually (but not necessarily) someone wishing to register a name, device, or badge with the College of Arms. Consultation is usually performed in person, but consultation via telephone, mail, and even computer are not unheard-of.

For the purposes of this article, the term 'client' will be used to refer to the person you are consulting with. This is a philosophical point - if you think of the College of Heralds as performing a service (which is EXACTLY what we are doing when we consult with people), then the people we are performing the service FOR are clients.

As a consulting herald, you are a representative of the College of Heralds, providing a SERVICE to the client. During the consultation you must place the client's interests FIRST. Remember that your words and deeds as a consulting herald reflect upon the College.

First, let's define what Heraldic Consultation is, and why it exists:

- 1) To assist the client in choosing a name and device that THEY are happy with, and wish to display at SCA functions to represent themselves. Client satisfaction is very important. If clients are not satisfied with their names and armory, they will not use them. Clients must also be able to spell, answer to, and pronounce (at least approximately) their names. They must be able to remember, recognize, and draw (or at least describe) their armory. It serves no purpose to pressure clients into registering names/devices that they will never use.
- 2) To ensure that the names and armory chosen by clients conform to the 'Rules For Heraldic Submissions.' This implies acceptable content and style as well as sufficient difference from protected names and armory. If this goal is not met, clients may become attached to a name, device, or badge which is not registerable, causing immense frustration, confusion, and wasted time at a later date.

- 3) To assist the client to choose a name and device that conform to the College's notions of 'good style' and which would not seem out-of-place in a medieval setting. For names, this means that the name reflects the practices of a single time and place within the SCA's scope. Excessively "TSCA" names, such as "Marigold the Dreamer of Dragonstorm" should be discouraged. For armory, good style means simple, unified designs with good contrast that will be easily distinguished at a distance. Furthermore, good armory follows the conventions of medieval heraldry (stillness, order, balance, and clarity) expounded in "The Philosophical Roots of Heraldic Design" (Section X.1).

The three items above are listed in order of importance. Numbers 1 and 2 are, in the minds of many heralds, interchangeable. This gets into philosophy -- the client needs to be comfortable with the name and device, AND it has to be legal. Some people might contend that it must be legal FIRST, and what the client wants SECOND. This may not matter, since if it's not legal, they can't have it. Number 3 is what the SCA is all about.

Materials

Before you consult, make sure you have all the materials you will need. If you are consulting at the Consulting Table, you can expect these things to be present, if not, you should get materials of your own.

For a name consultation, you should have paper, pencil, and name books. The exact books that you will need depend greatly on the kind of name desired by the client. Basic sources for English names are "The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Names" by Withycombe and "The Dictionary of British Surnames" by Reaney. See the list in Section IX.3 for further name sources.

For a device or badge consultation, you will want to have:

- 1) Heraldic Scratch Paper or "heraldi-scratch", pieces of paper with shield-shaped outlines for doodling. This is important since some heraldic concepts are best explained visually. (A 'blank' is in the [West Kingdom Herald's Handbook](#)).
- 2) Pencils, felt-tip color markers, a ruler, and other drawing tools.

- 3) Heraldic picture books, containing pictures of common heraldic charges, complex lines, and field divisions. Prime sources include: [A Pictorial Dictionary of Heraldry as used in the Society for Creative Anachronism](#) (sometimes called "The PicDic") by Bruce Draconarius of Mistholme and Akagawa Yoshio, [A Complete Guide to Heraldry](#) by Fox-Davies.
- 4) The SCA Ordinary, for conflict research. This will help you find any "fast" bounces. Papworth's [Ordinary of British Armorial](#) is also useful, if you know how to use it.

For both name and armorial consultation, it is desirable to have copies of the submission forms, the instructions for submitters, and a copy of the Rules for Submissions, all of which may be found in the [West Kingdom Herald's Handbook](#).

Make sure you understand the scope and organization of your sources. For instance, many name books give both period and modern forms; be sure you know which are which. Also, you should study the organization of the SCA Ordinary before attempting to do research with it.

Classification of Clients

According to experienced consulting heralds, there are three basic types of clients you will encounter.

- 1) Clients who have no idea what they want, but know that they want a name or device. These can often be the most fun to work with (a blank slate, as it were).
- 2) Clients who have some idea what they want, but don't know what's possible. ("I want a unicorn, and I like blue and white; is that legal?") Don't get discouraged if they bring you a poor initial design. These clients are delightful to work with, because they have ideas and can be steered (not pushed) toward excellent realizations of them.
- 3) Clients who know EXACTLY what they want. If it's not broken, don't fix it.

While there are clients who fit between these three major areas, for our purposes, this breakdown will do. This article will look at each with ideas on how to work with these clients.

Next, a quick note about 'catch phrases'. Many heralds have listened in at the West Kingdom consultation table, with some of the better consulting heralds, and just grabbed some of the phrases that were used, thinking they would help. One must understand the phrases for

them to be of any use at all. Do NOT just use someone else's wording when explaining things. Find out what is meant by these phrases (ask the person you got them from). Then, if they make sense to YOU, use them.

Some Basics

OK, so a client approaches you. There are a few important questions that you should ask early in the consultation, while you are sizing up the client.

If the client wants a device or badge, find out if their name is registered or in submission. Ask if this is the client's first event. (As a general rule, if the client has been in the SCA for six months or less, he or she does not yet need a device, so concentrate on the name.) If the name has not been submitted, ask the client to write it down and deal with that first.

For name consultation, deal with the given (first) name first, since that is the hardest to change later.

For an armorial consultation, there are a number of additional concepts:

Colors. Explain, if necessary, the rule of tincture (no color on color, no metal on metal-- High Contrast is one of the most important concepts.) Ask about the client's favorite colors and what colors he or she looks good in. Check this against the colors he or she is currently wearing. (Many people will end up making clothes in their heraldic colors.)

Ask them about their drawing ability. Straight lines can give some very nice heraldry if the person cannot draw. Almost *anyone* can use a straightedge (or a circle template). Show some examples from the various source books available to you (see section X.8 of the [West Kingdom Herald's Handbook](#)).

If they *can* draw (or if they are insistent that they want an animal or other complex charge), talk about types of beasts, and positions.

Show them various other charges/combinations, including some of the field divisions.

Get them started on ideas, but never try to force an idea on a client. That way lies problems that some people have with the heralds. If a client feels forced, s/he will not be happy, and will either leave, or register something that s/he does not want. Either way, the heralds end up with a bad reputation.

A suggestion to get the ideas rolling, is to give the client a sheet of heraldic scratch paper (you DO have some,

don't you?), and tell them to make drawings, and more drawings. Tell your client that it is not imperative that they register something now. Take time. One of the main points is that they will be making banners, and putting charges on things (such as shields and surcoats), and so on. Do they REALLY want to applique (or embroider) all those ermine spots? If they decide they don't like their device a year later, then they will have to go through the whole process again.

Suggest that they place color drawings of their ideas on the bathroom wall, where they will be seen often. The client will often find that they will weed out ideas on their own.

Take time to point out EVERYTHING GOOD about their concepts and pictures. Be positive and enthusiastic before you point out any problems.

Consulting Type 1 Clients

The client approaches, and says something like: "I want to register a device, but don't know anything about heraldry. Can you help?"

What do you do? This is where you start the question and answer period (see above). Show off a few books. Sketch a few ideas out, once you and the client have some. Play with them. Show the client variations. Discuss them. Talk about any disadvantages (e.g., a white field versus an ermine field - all those SPOTS on things). Don't necessarily attempt to talk the client OUT of something, but discuss ideas. Talk about things. Tell this client that they might wish to spend some time thinking about it, and not rush in. Try variations. Have them put these somewhere that they will be seen a lot. They may decide that they don't like most of the variations but might like one that hadn't originally come up. Suggest they spend some time in the public library looking at books.

Consulting Type 2 Clients

A client approaches who has some ideas: "Hi! I want to register a device, and was thinking about having a blue field with a unicorn and ..."

For a name, find out where the client got each element from; where they made-up, just heard, or taken from a book? What book? Ask why he or she chose THAT name in particular. Does the client want a particular sound, language, meaning, or spelling?

Sometimes the client has impeccable taste, with a wonderful design. Research it. The only unfortunate aspect here is that **sometimes** it is such a wonderful design that it was registered 600 years ago (mundane), or even 10 (SCA). However, do not discourage the client.

Tell them that they have wonderful taste. Discuss the charges and/or colors. Find out what is really the important part of that device they presented. Sometimes it's just the colors. Sometimes it's just the charge(s). And, sometimes, it is the whole thing (which is more difficult - see below). The most important thing to do here, is to work with the client. Don't chase them away.

Other times the client has design ideas that are not exactly medieval in design. (This is where Mistress Hilary's article is a wonderful thing to have studied.) A discussion with the client on medieval balance and design, as opposed to modern balance and design, is good. Most clients that fit in this category have no idea of what constitutes medieval design, and are willing to learn.

Remember: steer, don't push!

Consulting Type 3 Clients

Finally, a client approaches and says "I want to register this!" They want it SO badly, that they may have already made a banner, painted their shield, and so on. Many times people don't realize that there are rules governing the registration of heraldry in the SCA. Also some do not realize that there is an heraldic style that governs the design of heraldry. Make it clear which problems are serious and which are minor.

This kind of client may be the most difficult. Many times you can explain things in such a way that they will understand and be more than willing to work with you. Unfortunately, there are those VERY few who remain intransigent. Usually they don't realize they are being that way. What do you do? Well, one of the easiest things, especially if your patience is getting thin, is to call for help. If you're working at a consultation table, there are normally several other heralds around. Sometimes another herald will have just the right point of view to show the client what you were trying to say.

What if you are working by yourself, and this person is being difficult? Well, you could take the easy way out, and just walk away. Or, you could take a deep breath, and start with the simple questions: What is important about this device? Is it the colors? The charge(s)? and so on. Try to be patient. When all else fails, do **not** blow up in the client's face. Tell them that this is difficult for you ("I've had a long day ..."), and perhaps they should approach you at another time. If in doubt, suggest that they try to register it (send it upstairs). If there are problems, then Vesper will be the one rejecting it and it's not your fault.

Some Final Notes

These are just some ideas to assist the herald to work with clients. Being a consulting herald is, in many ways, one of the most difficult aspects of heraldry. However, it can often be one of the most enjoyable. Listening to a client walk away from the table exclaiming over what you and they just worked up is a joy. Occasionally the client will remember that you were the one to assist them, and when they get their letter of acceptance from the College of Heraldry, they may hunt you down and thank you. That is the best feeling of all. It's what keeps some of us doing this. Over, and over again.