

# SECTION X -- ARMORY -- TECHNICAL

## 9) Counting Complexity in Devices and Badges

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Abstract: An unofficial look at using the College of Arms' Rule of Thumb for Complexity. Reprinted with permission.

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## COUNTING COMPLEXITY IN DEVICES AND BADGES

An Unofficial Look at the Complexity Rule-of-Thumb

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The rules for submission provide a guideline for determining whether a design may be excessively complex. Specifically: "As a rule of thumb, the total of the number of tinctures plus the number of types of charges in a design should not exceed eight." (RfS VIII.1.a). What does this mean?

Think of it this way: If you count up the total number of different charges and different tinctures in a device, and the number comes up more than seven, be aware that you're pushing the envelope of what is normally allowable. Does this mean that a device with five different charges and three different tinctures will be returned for being too complex? Probably not. What about a device with six charges and three tinctures? Very possibly (but not, and I repeat myself, not necessarily).

### Let's go through some examples:

*Gules, on a mullet between flaunches argent, a roundel sable.*

(A roundel sable may also be blazoned a pellet, or sometimes an ogress). What is the complexity count, using this rule-of-thumb? Six. (gules, argent, and sable are the tinctures and there are three types of charges: the mullet, the flaunches (even though there are two of them) and the roundel). Well within the rule-of-thumb.

### How about:

*Sable, on a mullet between flaunches argent, a pellet.*

Answer: Five. With only 2 different tinctures (sable and argent) and the same three different charges as before (mullet, flaunches, and roundel).

### A more difficult one:

*Per pale embattled ermine and azure, three roundels counterchanged and on a chief Or three roses gules.*

Well this is certainly more complex. Ermine (and all its variants such as pean, erminois, "argent ermined gules", etc.) is a special case. They are always counted as a field (for the purposes of complexity and conflict checking: keep that in mind). In other words, ermine is different from argent (which are both counted as one for the purposes of complexity). It's also different from argent, semy of lozenges sable (which is already three in complexity: one

for the lozenges, and two for argent and sable). Knowing this, we can see that the complexity of this device is at seven. The tinctures used are: ermine, azure, Or, and gules. The charges are roundels, a chief, and the roses. (Notice that I didn't count the ermine spots as "charges"). Okay. Seven's not too bad, right? Well, right, but this design is still pretty complex. It has a complex line of partition in the field, and the bottom roundel is counterchanged very strangely (it's effectively a roundel per pale embattled azure and ermine). This doesn't change the "complexity count", but it is something to keep in mind. If someone presented me with this design I'd probably suggest losing a colorsomewhere, either change the chief to ermine, the ermine part of the field to Or, or the roses to azure. Getting rid of the complex partition would also be a very good idea, but if the person really wanted it, it's legal. In fact, if the person said "This is what I really want. I like it." then I'd tell them that it's a little on the complex side, but we can certainly send it up and see what happens.

### Last one:

*Sable, a wolf rampant argent charged on the shoulder with a trillium gules, on a chief ermine three roses sable.*

Answer: This one's at 8. The charges are the wolf, the trillium, the chief, and the roses. The tinctures are sable, argent, gules, and ermine. That's the highest one we've seen so far, but I'm less concerned about it than I am about the previous one. Why? Well, the elements are all reasonably simple, there's no funky field division or counterchanging going on, and the basic arrangement of the device (a charged primary charge and a charged chief) isn't at all uncommon in period heraldry.

Okay, what am I trying to say here? First I explain how to count how complex a device is, and then I show all these exceptions. What's the deal?

First, I'm not trying to show you how to "count how complex a device is". There's no way to look at a device, add up the elements, and reliably say that it is or isn't complex (well, okay - if you add up all the different charges and tinctures, and it comes to fifteen, yes it's too complex). What I've tried to do is show how to use the "complexity rule-of-thumb" (often referred to as the "complexity count"). This can be important, since it is a part of the rules, items can be (and are) returned for being too complex, by this rule-of-thumb. However, it is not an end-all and be-all for determining whether a device is or isn't too complex. Basically what I'm saying is "Here's this yardstick. If you know how to apply it, it can be helpful in advising people as to whether something they've suggested will pass or not. But be aware that there are exceptions. If you don't know what the exceptions might be, that's okay. Just as long as you're aware that it's not a hard and fast rule, you won't go too far wrong when advising people about their devices."