**Your First Entry in Northshield’s A&S Competition**Eithni ingen Talorgain eithni@gmail.com

So you have heard about Northshield’s Arts and Sciences Competition and you are thinking about entering, or even just attending. While everyone’s experience at A&S is different, we aim for it to be a positive place for constructive learning and an opportunity to celebrate the greatness of all the artisans of the Kingdom. This guide will help you understand what to expect, but please reach out to your local Minister of Arts and Sciences, the Kingdom A&S event staff and/or the Kingdom MOAS with any questions! We look forward to your joining us at this excellent display of the talents of the Populace!

**Registration**

Unlike many Arts and Sciences Competitions, Northshield’s Kingdom A&S requires that entries be preregistered. (Check each year to see what the current deadline is!) The reason for this is simple – it is no fun to judge something you know little about and it is no fun to have judges who don’t understand your art. By requiring early registration, the event team is able to make every effort to pair each entrant with judges that are appropriate to their entry. There is a registration form available on the Northshield website with only a few easy questions. Just fill it out, hit send, and you’re officially doing this thing!

**Research and Documentation and Creating and Documentation**

If you have not already begun your project, you should always start with the research. This allows you to make good decisions regarding the materials, tools, and techniques you use while creating your item. It is much easier to choose the right thing than to have to justify it later. Your documentation should start in the research phase, but information about your process, including pictures, should also be included, so documentation is often completed shortly after the project itself is completed. Make sure you print enough copies of your documentation that each judge can have one and you will still have at least one available for the general populace. Bringing a one page summary of your documentation to hand out to interested gentles, or at the very least some business cards with your contact information on them, is a great idea and will help you follow up with new contacts after the event. You may also want to make and bring some small tokens to share with other entrants who impress you. This could be as simple as a few interesting beads or a tasty cookie. More detailed guides on research and documentation are available at [www.eithni.com/research](http://www.eithni.com/research)

**Advance Submission of Documentation**

Some entries to Kingdom A&S, mostly research entries and those with long documentation, are required to submit their documentation or research article in advance. This allows your judges to have ample time to read the work in advance, think about it carefully, look up additional sources, and otherwise come prepared to the judging session. Each session is an hour long, but that’s not long enough to plow through a forty page treatise, so be kind to your judges and submit early if you are asked to do so!

**Checking in and Setting up**

Plan to arrive on site as close to when site opens as possible, but in no case less than 30 minutes before the first judging session begins. When you get to site, there will both be a Gate table where you pay your entrance fees and a Registration table where you pick up your information about being a judge and/or contestant. Visit the Gate first, then stop by the Registration table. They should be able to give you whatever paperwork you need, answer any questions you may have, and direct you to the area where your entry should be displayed. Your display should be thought out in advance – while presentation is not something you will be explicitly judged on, having a nice display helps create interest in your project and hopefully attracts more people for you to talk to about your flavor of nerd. More on this is found in the Entering/Judging A&S materials. Once you are all set up, walk to the populace’s side of the display and review it critically, adjusting anything that is awkward or difficult to view from that perspective. Remember to get yourself a glass of water – today will involve a lot of talking!

**Discuss with the Populace and Other Entrants**

Assuming you did not draw a slot in the first judging period, you will either now have time to sit with your item and talk to interested gentles or to go visit other entrants’ tables to see what they have entered. (It is a good idea to visit only a few other entries and then check back in with your entry, in case there is someone waiting there who has questions for you.) This is often one of the most interesting and rewarding portions of the event because you get to tell other people about your exciting project and see the projects that everyone else has been working on. It is a good idea to think about what you could say as a 30-60 second basic introduction to your piece. This will let you concisely summarize it for the casual observer, but then you can go into greater detail if you have an interested audience. Remember to get contact information from anyone who might be a good resource in the future or even those gentles that you just enjoy talking to. Hand them a copy of your documentation summary or business card so they can contact you as well.

**Judging**

Judging is often the component that first time entrants are most concerned about. While no system is entirely perfect, the Northshield judging system strives to be fair, constructive, and supportive. To promote these aims, entrants are judged face-to-face by a panel of three judges over about 45 minutes. We feel that the face-to-face judging allows the entrant to provide some verbal information about the project that may not have made it into the documentation and provides some real-time feedback on how the entrant feels about the judges’ comments and scores. The panel of three judges means that you’ll never just draw the “mean judge” – there will always be spectrums of experience and personality on your judging staff. Judging sessions are usually set up to be an hour long to provide enough time for a real and detailed dialogue with the entrant and for the entrant to ask any questions that might have for the judges as well.

The judging itself has two components – a numerical score and text comments. Generally, the comments will include the judges’ rationale for specific scores and can include suggestions of additional references and contacts that might be helpful to you. The scoring aims to be tough, but fair. Each judge is provided with a rubric that guides their assignment of scores and helps ensure that there is some consistency between judging teams. The judges’ role is not to nit-pick or tear down the work that’s been done, but to discuss the projects with entrants and show them where growth is still possible. Even projects by people who have been doing this for decades will have places where they could improve – be open to the idea of using the judges’ comments as a learning experience and you should walk away with some new resources, some new perspectives, or some suggestions to make your next entry even stronger. If you have any concerns at all about scores or comments, DO address them with the judges! Try to do so during your session or at the event, but don’t just remain silently confused or unhappy with your score or comments - get a good explanation from your judging staff.

Even as a new participant – and possibly *especially* as a new participant – you should consider offering to judge as well as enter. Being involved in the judging process from the other side of the table will give you important insights into the process. Identify yourself as a new judge so you will be paired with more experienced judges and read the judging rubric in advance. Consider either taking a judging class or reading the judging handout at [http://eithni.com/referencedesk/Entering\_and\_judging\_A&S.doc](http://eithni.com/referencedesk/Entering_and_judging_A%26S.doc). Even if you do not feel comfortable judging someone else, consider asking to sit in on someone else’s session so you can see what it looks like when you are not personally invested in the process. Another excellent practice is to get a copy of the judging criteria and carefully, critically examine your project and judge yourself. This can help set expectations for your judging session and perhaps bring to light some topics you should discuss with your judges.

**Court**Often Kingdom A&S will include a short court after the judging sessions.

**Follow Up with Judges, Event Staff, and/or New Contacts**

After the event, make sure to follow up with people who either made your experience worthwhile or who could have made it better. Contact your judges about suggestions they made, particularly if them mentioned additional resources you should look at or people you should meet. Remember that their goal is for this to be a positive learning experience and they are often an excellent resource for you in the future, since they are now familiar with your art. Follow up with the event staff, particularly the Kingdom MOAS, and give feedback about how the event itself was run. Northshield’s Kingdom A&S is still a new event and there is room for there to be improvement and refinement. Being new to the process is not a reason to not comment – we are all new to it and your voice is important! Make sure to also follow up with anyone you might have met over the event who shares your interests or who was just fun to geek out with. A&S Competitions are as much about meeting other artisans as it is about seeing the entries!

**Future Goals, Research, and Entries**

After the event it is also worthwhile to spend some time reflecting on your entry. What did you learn? What did you discover you still want to learn (either about your entry or some other neat thing you saw at the event)? What would you like to research next? What would you like to enter next? What about your process should you refine before the next year? Setting some goals and starting early will mean you are in good shape when the next Kingdom A&S is held.

**Wait… what about the winners?**

Yes, there generally are winners of various sorts announced at Kingdom A&S, however, winning is not the ultimate purpose of the event and not winning does not make you a loser. Keep in mind that it is difficult to judge so many entries across so many arts with so many different judges. There is inherently an unfairness in judging an arrowhead against a pie against a dance, but unless we all take up pie-making, it is just part of the game. If you get called to receive a prize, kudos to you, but even if you do not, focus on what you learned and gained during the event – those are the *real* prizes to entering.

Hopefully, this introduction to Northshield’s Kingdom Arts and Sciences Competition has made you feel prepared for what you will encounter. Do not be hesitant to ask any questions if you have any concerns whatsoever. We’ll see you at the next Kingdom A&S!