

SO YOU WANT TO ENTER PENT!

A slightly irreverent FAQ for entering A&S Pentathlon in the Kingdom of Ealdormere

By Dame Asa Gormsdottir

DISCLAIMER: This is a “living” document. Ealdormere’s A&S practices change from time to time as the kingdom evolves. So, in time, the answers above may change.

1. What is Pentathlon?

Pentathlon, or Pent, is a special competition included as part of the annual Kingdom Arts & Sciences (A&S) Competition in Ealdormere. Pent entrants each submit a set of five entries that are judged as a group by previous Pent winners and the Crown. The winner of Pentathlon is known as the Kingdom Arts & Sciences Champion for the year and is presented with regalia at that evening’s Court.

2. Do I have to hold a paid membership in the SCA to enter Pent?

Yes.

3. How do I choose what five entries to submit?

You want to enter 5 items that you have finished within the last two years. Ideally these items show the range and breadth of your artistic skills.

4. Why do we no longer have 5 official categories?

In the past, Ealdormere used a category system to classify the different arts and sciences. Pent Entrants had to submit entries from at least 3 categories, with no more than two entries from each category, to encourage scope and diversity in entries. Based on feedback at the A&S Moot, the Kingdom is moving to a more open system that will allow Pent entrants more freedom in what entries they submit.

5. Does this mean I can now submit five research papers?

Yes. Or five buttons. Or five cups.

However, it is important to keep in mind that Pent is about challenging yourself, about scope and stretch of the artist and about competition. Entering multiple pieces that speak only to one’s comfort zone is not really comparable to exploring unfamiliar areas, learning new skills and gaining confidence. Pentathlon judging includes project scope and level of difficulty. That means the five doohickeys will have to be pretty darn fabulous in their individual research and execution to overcome another entrant’s more aggressive scope.

6. Do my entries have to have a Theme?

No, although it can be a helpful rallying point when choosing entries or making your presentation.

7. Can I submit a dress and have the cut, the embroidery and the cast pewter buttons I made judged as three separate entries?

Yes, but all entries of this nature will be accepted on a case-by-case basis. If accepted, each of the elements requires separate documentation provided to the judges in advance as for any Pent entry.

8. How important is documentation?

Pretty important. A well-written document that traces the steps and decisions you took with an entry really helps the judges understand how much work you did and how well you understand the piece.

However, documentation doesn't mean a 30-page dissertation (though that can be amazing). It can be 2-3 pages supported by photographs and sticky notes in reference books. It can be a Bristol Board display. It can be a strong verbal presentation. The point is to effectively communicate what you have learned about the medieval context and choices surrounding your entries

9. When do I have to send in my Pentathlon documentation?

The deadline to submit one's Pentathlon documentation electronically to KMoAS is at least 2 weeks in advance of the tournament.

10. Can I enter something I previously displayed at Queen's Prize Tourney?

Absolutely. In fact, entering QPT is a great way to get feedback on entries you are developing and to get comfortable with the entry process. Remember, QPT accepts entries that are complete, incomplete, damaged or a total loss.

11. Can I enter something I previously entered into a Baronial A&S Champion Tournament.

Yes. In fact, entering local A&S Competitions is a great way to get feedback on entries you are developing and to get comfortable with the entry process.

12. Can I enter something I entered in a previous KA&S?

No. Pent entries must be new entries that were completed within the last two years and which have not been entered at a previous Ealdormerean kingdom-level competition (bearing in mind that QPT is not a competition). It is acceptable to submit entries that have been previously judged at out of Kingdom events.

13. Is there any point in Pent if my entries are mostly at the beginner level?

Absolutely. Many beginner entries are very well documented and executed.

14. Do my entries need to be "shiny" or "blinged out" in order to win?

No. Judges are looking for the understanding and research behind an entry. While silks and jewels and other expensive materials are beautiful and may create a stunning effect, the judges are looking for thoughtful entries that are well-researched and executed. The right materials in the right context do

make a difference. A beautiful Norse ensemble crafted from wools and linens with the right weave, loom width and thread count, adorned with handmade trims and embroidery, etc. may not be very “shiny” next to a late period dress made with stretch velvet and Mylar gold trim, but the judges can tell the difference.

15. What is the “WOW” factor?

The “WOW” factor or x-factor is that extra little something that makes an entry or a suite of entries exceptional. It’s taking the extra steps, doing the extra work that elevates a piece from good to great. Maybe it’s the spit and polish on the documentation. Maybe it’s the pigments ground by hand, or the strands of reeled silk. Maybe it’s months spent growing each individual herb used in a dish.

16. I’m having trouble understanding the process. Am I allowed to seek advice regarding my entries and the Pent process?

Indeed. Please reach out to former Pent winners and other artisans in your field of interest for guidance and mentoring, whether or not they have a specific arts award. You may have questions on the overall Pent format, how to write your documentation, how to display your entries (“Should I bring a cooler?” “Is there a microwave on site?”), etc.

As a warm-up, try to participate in Queen’s Prize Tourney (QPT, normally held about 6 months before KA&S), where Crucibles and Laurels are expected to mentor as many artisans as they can in the process of preparing an entry for review and competition.

While mentors can’t physically assist you with the work, they can provide you with resources, ask useful questions and help you bounce ideas around. Mentoring and guiding people through arts and sciences projects is strongly encouraged in Ealdormere – in fact, it’s a part of a Laurel’s job description.

One comment – a Pent or KA&S judge who has assisted you in this way normally sits out of the judging for that entry, to avoid bias.

17. I’m afraid I will make a total mess of things at Pent. Who can I talk to?

Every single Pent entrant is going through the same process and feelings as you. Every Pent Judge has sweated over their entries, struggled through late nights, trembled at the thought of speaking to a circle of unfamiliar faces, worried that despite their best efforts their entries are doomed to failure.

This is the time to reach out to your friends and mentors, to help you over the rough spots and get you to the event on time. If you need assistance at the event, bring a buddy, or tell the A&S table that you need a bit of support and they will help you find someone to vent to for a few minutes.

Even though many candidates believe they are poor speakers, when their turn to speak comes, their enthusiasm and joy in their work comes shining through.

18. Can children enter Pent?

Yes, absolutely. Children receive the same respect and encouragement as any other entrant. In fact, children often field very good Pent entries, which helps inspire the Kingdom as a whole.

Unless the child specifically requests to be judged as an adult against other adult entries, children's entries are judged separately from adult entries.

The KA&S Minister and staff try to find ways to recognize and encourage child entries, and Child Pent Winners have been named in the past.

19. How long does it take to prepare for Pent?

A maximum of 2 years.

Some people decide to enter Pent immediately after attending Kingdom A&S for the first time. They might spend the better part of a year researching and pulling together their entries.

Some people decide to enter Pent two months before the event. This is possible, but puts pressure on completing documentation in time for judges to read.

A successfully completed Pent entry requires a certain degree of project management. However you choose to plan it, you'll probably find yourself very busy in the last month or so before the event.

20. What if I don't completely finish my Pent entries?

You can still submit entries that are partially incomplete. Those entries will fare better if their documentation is strong.

21. What I I need to withdraw from Pent?

Life happens and this is a hobby. Do what you need to do. There is no penalty for withdrawing.

22. How do I withdraw from Pent?

Just send an email or PM to the KA&S Minister that you need to withdraw from competition. Try to do so as early as you can, so that event space can be reallocated.

23. If I withdraw from Pent, can I still enter individual entries?

Absolutely. Please follow the registration process and timelines to ensure judges are assigned to your individual entries.

Remember, Pent entries are judged both as a combined Pent effort, and individually.

24. Can I enter more than 5 items into KA&S?

You can enter a suite of Pent-entries and other, individual entries. It is up to you to register which 5 of your entries are counting towards your 5 pent entries, and which are extra being entered into KA&S. The judges will not pick 5 for you.

25. How early should I arrive at the KA&S event?

Please plan to show up early, when the event opens. Pent presentations are now held early in the day when everyone is fresh, before the regular judging rounds begin.

26. Where do my Pent entries go?

Please tell the A&S desk that you are a Pent entrant. They will give you your paperwork and point out where Pent is taking place. Table space and a chair will be reserved for you to position all your entries together. This is to help avoid confusion between the single entries and the Pent entrants, as well as to save you the frustration of trying to be five places at once.

27. How does the Pent Presentation work?

Pent presentations now take place early in the day. Each Pent entrant makes a short verbal presentation ("The Big Reveal" - 5 minutes or so) describing their entries and research process to the judges, who listen and ask questions.

After the Pent presentations are complete, the event moves to the regular rounds of judging, in which your entries also take part. As well, Pent judges may come up individually and ask for additional clarification or to review your documentation.

28. Are Pent entries also part of the regular entry judging?

Yes. They are eligible for Best in Show, Crown's Choice(s) and other sponsored prize categories.

29. Who are the Pent Judges?

The judges are a group of previous Pent winners who have gone through the same process as you are undertaking (maybe last year, maybe ten years ago) and the Crown. As a result, they understand the massive effort you have invested and are sympathetic regarding the fatigue and tension you are feeling.

30. How do the judges make a decision?

Near the end of the day, once all the judging rounds are complete, the Pent judges retire to a quiet room and review the strengths and skills exhibited by each set of Pent entries. They pool their combined knowledge and experience to identify the top two or three candidates, before seeking consensus on a winner. This process can take up to an hour, but is usually about 20-30 minutes.

Once consensus has been reached, the judges make their recommendation to the Crown, as the Crown-has final decision on the winner.

31. What if I have a poor judging experience?

If you are unhappy about the judging process, PLEASE tell the A&S table, and the Kingdom Minister of Arts & Science as soon as possible. While judges do their best, a miscommunication is always possible. Many issues are very easy to solve.

32. Do the judges use the collected marks on the individual entries?

No. Marks given by individual judges on individual entries are used to determine prize category awards. The Pent judges do not have access to this information and do not use a formal numerical scale.

33. If one of my entries wins an individual prize category, does that affect the Pent entry overall?

If one of your entries wins an individual prize category, that means it strongly impressed those who judged it, whether or not they are involved in judging the Pent entries.

Winning a prize category is unlikely to affect the overall judging of your Pent entry. The Pent judges generally do not know which items have won individual prizes, as the tabulation of individual entry scores is usually not complete until shortly before evening Court. However, a strong entry is a strong entry, whether it is entered in Pent or as an individual entry.

34. Do I have to be a Crucible before I can win Pent?

No. You do not have to have any award to participate in and hopefully win Pent.

35. If I win Pent, will I get an Arts award?

No. But entry in Pent as in any other A&S competition or presentation means the public can see and appreciate your work and research.

36. How is the Pentathlon winner announced?

The Pentathlon winner's name is announced at the evening Court. The previous year's winner will present the new A&S Champion with the silver Champion's bowl crafted by Mistress Brenaith ni Naoimin, which by tradition the Kingdom is to keep "ever full". There may also be a baldric. Sometimes the previous winner also presents a gift of their own to congratulate the new Champion.

37. What does the A&S Champion do? Do they stand in Court with the other Champions?

The role of the A&S Champion is up to the ruling monarchs of the day, but generally the title is just a title, with a pretty bowl to drink from for a year and perpetual bragging rights.

38. Is there a maximum number of times I can enter Pent?

In order to encourage the greatest flowering of Arts and Science excellence, we permit anyone, including past Pent winners and Laurels, to enter Pentathlon as many times as they desire.

