

# UPDATING SCA DEMOS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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## WHY WE DO DEMONSTRATIONS:

1. **Just for fun.** Demos are a great excuse to put on our garb, do some schtick for the public, and end the day with a picnic, potluck feast or to invade a local restaurant in garb.
2. **Education.** The SCA is incorporated as a non-profit educational organization. Sure, we educate each other, but public education is implied by the very nature of demos.
3. **Recruiting new members.** Growing local group numbers is very important, but general demos are rarely successful for recruiting. Most attending guests will be merely curious, or expecting to be entertained at a “free renfaire”. *Targeted demos*, aimed at recruiting from specific populations, are likely to be more successful.
4. **“Showing the flag” and gaining “good will”.** Our demos are a contribution to the cultural richness of the communities in which we live and practice our hobby. Demos for scouts, library reading programs, school visits, or demos for the general public can show that we are good citizens.

## TYPES OF DEMONSTRATIONS:

1. **“Mini-renfaire” demo.** Either outdoors or indoors. Chiefly a recruiting demo.
2. **Informational demo.** Minimal presence at a non-SCA such as a renfaire, community festival, etc.
3. **Solo lecture with a static display.** This is a good format for scouts, schools, or library reading programs. Youth demos are not good for recruiting, but are good opportunities to “show the flag”.
4. **Specialty demos.** An all-dance demo might be targeted toward local dance clubs for recruiting purposes, or just networking. An archery demo with actual supervised shooting would be great for scouting groups. A demo related to a film or play (such as the Shire of Isenfir’s demo at a rare screening of the 1938 *Adventures of Robin Hood*) is another way to “show the flag”. Why not march in a local parade, set up at a local fair or festival, or make a planned visit a senior care or disabled youth facility?
5. **Non-garbed activities for community “good will”.** Consider assisting at animal shelter adoption days, working phone banks for public TV or radio fund drives, collecting school supplies for disadvantaged children, contributing to local food pantries, or donating toys to Toys for Tots. Most of these services would not be done in garb, but hopefully can be credited to your SCA group. They will require coordination with the charities, and providing enough members for maximum impact. TV or newspaper publicity is valuable, but the Kingdom Deputy Seneschal for Media Relations must be informed in advance if the media is invited and given a follow-up report after any media contact.

## **IDEAS FOR RUNNING A GENERAL DEMONSTRATION:**

The most common SCA demo is a “mini-renfaire”. These are usually held outdoors. As much as possible, guests should be invited to participate in our activities if they can do so safely and within SCA rules.

At both outdoor and indoor demos there should always be a staffed greeting table at the entrance to meet guests and briefly explain what your group is doing. The greeters can offer guests your group’s local illustrated brochure, and if outdoors, a map of the demo area showing a suggested route marked with arrows. The greeting table should be separate from the “information table” to be described later.

At outdoor demos there are usually one or more tents shading tables with static displays of weapons, archery gear, or crafts. Weaponry should be kept in racks behind tables and tended by a member. Tents may also host live-action craft displays, such as spinning or weaving. A spinning wheel can be a hazardous machine, and should be kept well away from guests, especially children. Use display tables as a safety barrier. Drop spindles are much safer, and guests can be invited to try them. Inkle weaving (without cards) is another simple craft guests can try.

There will often be a list field for combat (“battlefield” or “fighting ring” might be better terms to use for the non-SCA public). A voice herald or other member can explain the bouts to the guests and introduce the fighters. Guests can be encouraged to cheer for their favorite combatants. After the fighting, guests might hold cane or real steel weapons under close supervision (actual hitting of anybody by guests is strictly forbidden by SCA rules).

Dance can be offered indoors or outdoors, and definitely should feature live musicians. Choose simple dances with only a few steps and invite guests to participate.

Outdoor games such as quoits (ring toss) or boules (on short courts) are an excellent activity for both adults and youngsters. More modern games with a period flavor such as a bean bag toss also work well. A proctor is a must to hand out gear, explain any rules, and see that all children get a fair turn. Indoor demos are less likely to include throwing games due to space or possible damage to the building.

Table games are an indoor staple, and guests should be invited to play. Choose fast and simple games like *Fox and Hounds*. The *Game of Goose* can be played by several guests at once, and because it is entirely dice-driven, a 5-year-old child has as much chance of winning as an adult. Another multi-player game, *Shut the Box*, is popular in many SCA groups. Period variants of modern games like chess, checkers (*draughts*) or backgammon (*tables*) are less likely to attract attention, and period rules may be confusing to guests. If you are using church property, avoid casino-type games such as *Crowns and Anchors*, *Gluckhaus* or other games with betting, unless approved in advance by your hosts.

Game rules should be explained to guests, and having the rules printed out for reference is a plus. It pays with any game you play to make a few bad choices to increase the chances a guest will win. Be prepared to step back and act as referee for multi-player games.

At all such demos, there should be a staffed information table, preferably not right by the entrance/exit, but sited far enough inside that guests will have seen most of your displays and activities before reaching the table (hence the afore-mentioned map with the arrows). The information table should include more copies of your group's brochure. A separate give-away flier can list locations, times and contact information for your practices and work sessions. Other handouts are a nice touch — various printable brochures and a bookmark are available from the SCA Inc. web site. Information table staff should not be too pushy. Instead they should engage the guests to find out what they found most interesting, then politely suggest that the guests would be welcome at those practices or activity sessions. **Keep a “Guest Book”, log sheets or use a computer to record the names, email addresses, and particular interests of guests who agree to further contact.** Consider giving those who show serious interest a back copy of *Tournaments Illuminated* with your group's contact information on the inside cover.

**Approximately one week after your demo, your Chatelain should contact anyone who expressed interest in further contact through the guest book.** This is a vital step for showing guests we have an interest in their participation. Each contact should receive a personally addressed email, thanking them for attending the demo and inviting them to the next practice or activity in which they showed interest. Keep guests in a separate email list from your regular members, but send them reminders of activities for the next two months. Always end messages by offering to delete them from your contacts list if they wish. If guests don't attend an event within two months, drop them from your list.

## **PUBLICITY FOR YOUR DEMONSTRATIONS:**

Your demonstration will be a waste of time if you don't attract some guests. There are a number of ways to call attention to your demo.

Some local newspapers have a free, or low-cost, “coming events” section into which you can insert a brief description of your demo. This will usually be limited to three or four short sentences. Don't overlook similar listings in local “arts” newspapers, or free weekly “shoppers’ greensheets”.

An even better use of newspapers would be to work with them on an illustrated feature in the run up to your demo. Guidance from the Kingdom Deputy Seneschal for Media Relations would be required.

Many communities and neighborhood associations have email lists where a notice can be posted. If you are using church property, they may allow a message in their members' newsletter. Many churches and some schools have signboards with moveable letters and might be willing to announce your demonstration there.

Flyers posted on community bulletin boards are rarely effective (and will probably be quickly covered by someone else's message). Flyers posted on telephone poles or traffic signs may be illegal in your community, and are hard to read from a moving car anyway. Merchants will probably not allow flyers to be taped to their windows. Game and hobby stores, however, might have an inside bulletin board where a notice could be posted, and game stores especially are hangouts for potential members.

On the actual day of your demonstration, large signs could be put up along streets near the your event site. Isenfir has two substantial wooden A-frame signs with moveable arrows for this purpose. They are designed to be spiked into the ground in case of wind. Flags and banners can add to the visual impact.

## **HANDLING THE MEDIA AT DEMONSTRATIONS:**

Whether by invitation, or by chance, news media may show up at any public demonstration. Proper handling of a media visit can result in valuable positive publicity. It can also end in an embarrassing failure if not done properly. Most media organizations today are looking for colorful “feel-good” stories, and are rarely out to malign a group like ours. However, reporters will pounce on any problem or oddity that they find interesting, and may already have heard about SCA controversies through web searches.

If you plan to invite any media, send their senior editor a press release and an invitation letter about one week in advance. Media should be met and escorted by your Seneschal, Chatelain, their deputies, or other senior members who are familiar with SCA and kingdom policies. They should be allowed access to all areas, activities and members, as much as safety and SCA policy allows.

Participating members should be briefed in advance to talk only about their interests, projects and personas. As much as possible, we want to present a positive image of our groups and our hobby, emphasizing safety, courtesy and honor, historical research and “learning by doing”. Avoid commenting on any SCA problems or controversies. Sensitive questions should be handled by senior members, or they may refer media representatives to the Kingdom Seneschal, the Kingdom Deputy Seneschal for Media Relations, or similar SCA Corpra-level officials. Senior members should have this contact information available in case it is requested.

Whether the media is expected or not, at every demonstration the group should have several “press kits” ready — folders containing a well-written one-page story about the event, a one-page fact sheet about the SCA and your local group, a copy of your group’s brochure, and your Seneschal’s or membership officer’s contact information (business cards will do). These materials must be pre-approved by the Kingdom Deputy Seneschal for Media Relations. Reporters for both television and print media are usually under considerable time pressure, and are likely to simply use parts of your text for their stories or voice-overs. This gives your group considerable control over how you will be portrayed.

After any media visit, a report should be sent to the Kingdom Deputy Seneschal for Media Relations, including the names of any reporters and the media they represented (get their business cards!). If available, a copy of a printed story or a link to an electronic version should be included.