

Courtesy and Etiquette in the Modern Middle Ages

Etiquette in the medieval times was serious business. The Royal Courts were filled with dangerous landmines. A careless remark, the wrong curtsy, the wrong accessory, could cause great disfavor in court or even severe punishment. Thankfully the modern middle ages are not quite so dangerous but there are some courtesies that we would all do well to remember.

I. Titles, Ranks, and Addresses:

In the SCA, titles and ranks are earned through martial skill, artistic skill, or service. While at an event, it is nice to use the correct title or rank when talking to others, as it shows respect. Even if you dislike the individual, you should still respect the title, since that is a large part of our game.

Kings & Queens: Your Majesty
Prince & Princesses: Your Highness
Dukes & Duchesses: Your Grace
Counts & Countesses: Your Excellency
Barons & Baronesses: Your Excellency
Peers: Sir, Master, Mistress, Dame
Non-titled: My lord or My lady

Dealing with royals at an event: When you are at an event and you see the King, Queen, Prince, Princess, Landed Baron, or Landed Baroness, please show reverence. If they come into a room, stand. If they approach you while walking around, make a quick curtsy or bow. When you walk past the thrones, bow or curtsy. No it is not a rule but it is all part of the “show” of an event. Even if you are buddies with the royals, if they are in public and at work, take a moment to respect their rank. This a) helps newer folk learn our traditions and b) keeps the magic happening. If you are not sure who someone is, always go with the higher titles. My suggestion is to err on the side of higher, not lower. No one is ever insulted by being considered respectable.

People get awards because someone has seen and recognized their skills or service. A great way to get deserving people awards is by writing a letter of recommendation. You can write letters to the landed Baronage or the Crown. When writing a recommendation letter please make sure you include: your contact info (SCA & mundane); the basic info on the person you are writing about (SCA name, real name, SCA group); what award you think the person deserves; why they deserve the award (specifics please); and what events that person will be attending soon. I would suggest that your letters be pleasant and positive, not “OMG, why has this person not been recognized! You should be ashamed!”. You get more flies with honey....

II. Events

a. Reservations: If you know you will be attending an event, go ahead and make a reservation. This allows the hosting group to make appropriate preparations. Also, if you know that you have a special need, a reservation allows you and the autocrat to communicate about this. Do not assume that if you show up on the day, that the group can change their menu, their cabin assignments, or field spaces just to suit you. If it is a cabin event or tenting event where you want to stay in a group, make sure your group reserves. That allows you to be with the folks you choose.

b. Checking in: There are some basic rules that you must follow about checking in. These rules apply no matter who you are in the SCA. You must check in to the event. When you check in, you must show the membership card. If you do not have a membership, you must sign a waiver. There is no point in getting frustrated when you are asked for these things. The person checking you in did not make up the rules. They cannot change the rules. Be prepared. This is how the SCA tracks fees and surcharges for the groups and the numbers must be tallied at the end of each event. This is also used for insurance. Trying to avoid checking in, will get you removed from site. Conversely, if you are working at check in and someone gives you a hard time, get the head troll or the local seneschal. You are doing what is required by the organization. You do not have to deal with someone being ugly. If every person remembers that we are here to have fun and every person working at the event is a volunteer, then things move more smoothly.

c. Field space: If you are attending a popular or large event and want to put a tent up on the field, make sure you reserve space. Many of these events will have a field space coordinator, who will need your space requirements, in order to organize the field. Once you are allotted space, do not expand past that space. Set up and break down your tent during the assigned times. Be a good neighbor. Don't leave trash everywhere. Make your space look nice.

Large events like Pennsic, Gulf Wars, War of the Wings, etc. offer the chance for group encampments. In camp, respect your neighbors. Don't expand past your assigned space. Pick up your trash. Follow the camp rules. Also, remember when you visit

someone's camp, you are visiting their home. See if it is convenient for you to visit; pick up your trash; respect their rules; thank your host. These niceties show that you respect their hard work in putting together a nice camp.

d. Dealing with Merchants: At many events there will be some sort of merchants row, where you will have the opportunity to purchase items made specifically for the SCA. Often these folks are SCA members themselves and this is not their full time job. Most merchants will have their prices clearly marked on their items. If that is the case, do not try and haggle for the item. If their prices are not marked, you can certainly ask if they mind haggling, but do not assume that is the case. Sometimes the merchants will allow a barter or some sort of deal but it is not required, so be nice if they say no. Also remember when ordering a custom piece, to determine the cost of the transaction at the beginning of the deal. Give the artist enough time to make the item you want. If you have a set time frame, tell them up front, so they can let you know if they can meet it.

e. Court: Courts can be exciting, especially if you know someone getting an award. They also can be stressful, long, or confusing if you are not careful. Get to court on time. If you are not interested in what is happening, go somewhere else. Let other people hear what is happening. If you are going to talk to your friends, do so quietly.

If you are called into court: Don't wear a bunch of weapons. The basic rule is no weapons in the royal presence unless you have at least an AoA. However, there is not really a reason to be heavily armed in front of the royals, so keep it to a minimum. Walk up to the court, when you get a few feet away, stop and bow or curtsy. Then proceed to the kneeling pillows. If you cannot kneel, tell the royal that and then stand respectfully. When it is time to leave, stand and walk facing the royals until you get a few feet away. Then bow or curtsy again. After that you may turn around and walk back to your seat.

If you would like to present something to the royal in court, you must speak with their herald. If possible, speak to the head retainer prior to the event and explain what you are doing and how much time you will need. They will help you get onto the court docket and find the herald. Do not be insulted if the head retainer or herald asks to see what you are presenting - Inside jokes, embarrassing gifts, etc. are not always appreciated in a long court so they can help you judge what is appropriate and when is the best time to give your gift.

f. Feast: If you have food allergies, reserve to the event early. In your reservation, explain what your allergies are and ask if they can assure you that it will be safe. Some kitchens do not have the space to separate ingredients in a manner that means you will be totally allergen free. Cooks will do their best to help you but if they cannot accommodate you, understand their limitations.

Many events will have a seating chart that they place out so people can claim seats. This allows you to sit as a group. If you have a large group, claim your seats as early as allowed. Don't rearrange others just so your group can sit together. Once at feast, be prepared to share dishes. Often they bring one dish per table, so don't just assume that dish is only for your group. When the feast is over, clean up your table, don't leave a bunch of trash and a mess for others to clean up. It is a good idea to bring a plastic bag to put dishes in. You cannot be certain there will be space in the kitchen for you to clean your dishes. Once feast is over, the hosting group and their volunteers are working on cleaning the kitchen and the hall. So demanding that they take extra time to clean your dishes specifically can be troublesome. If they do offer to clean people's dishes, do not bring them something that is irreplaceable. If the dish is that special to you, don't let it go. Clean it yourself.

Often during feast there will be a toast. These toasts are orchestrated and done by order of precedence. When the person starting the toast speaks up, stop talking and listen. Toast with them and cheer the folks being toasted. Sometimes there is a short court held during feast, often to honor the cook and their staff. When court is opened, stop talking and participate. These people have worked very hard to create a tasty meal and deserve a shout out.

g. Breakdown/Clean-up: Often by the end of the weekend we are all tired and ready to go home and relax. Most events will have a closing time. Try to get out by that time, so you do not delay the staff in getting off site. As you pack up remember to police your cabin/field space. Pick up any trash and take it to the approved trash dumpster. If you are in a cabin sweep up and leave the cabin clean, so someone else does not have to clean up after you. Once you have packed up all your stuff, see if the staff needs help. Often the same people running the event all weekend are the ones cleaning up. Offering to do one job helps the whole group get off site quicker and is greatly appreciated.

III. Local Activities: Often small groups hold activities in private homes, while the larger groups have the option of larger, public spaces for their activities. If you are interested in attending local activities, see what your group has to offer. Most groups will try and hold regular business meetings, art nights, and fighter practices. Some do social meet-ups as well.

a. Activities held in private homes can be intimidating. Often this happens in small groups where the people already know each other well. Do not be intimidated about attending. These people will do their best to help you get involved

and sometimes you get a chance to learn really interesting things about your fellow players. As always, if you are a guest in someone's home, please be polite. Ask in advance if people are bringing things to the meet-up so you are prepared. If you have allergies or are scared of animals, please tell the host in advance, so everyone can be prepared and help you.

b. Anytime an activity is held in a public space, consider it a demo of sorts. People will often be drawn to a group of laughing and interesting people. Remember at this time you represent the SCA. Avoid fighting (off the field), excessive drinking, or breaking the law. This will not leave a good feeling about the group in the community.

c. Practices are an integral time for our fighters to learn and improve. However, it can be a great time for art/science lessons or social activities. If you are not a fighter, please consider coming out to a practice anyway. It is a great opportunity to meet people. If you go to a fighter practice, use common sense. Don't walk into the fighting field and keep children and animals away. Again, fighting in public attracts people. Keep an eye out for someone standing around who might be interested in the group. If the idea of speaking to a stranger terrifies you, point them out to someone who does not mind talking. If the practice is a social activity as well, keep an eye on your children. Don't assume that other people will take care of them. If you or your child has a life-threatening allergy or medical problem, please make sure your group is aware. Practices can be loud and chaotic and there are lots of chances for little ones to get in trouble.

IV. Social Media

Social media is a constant companion to our lives. Groups advertise their events on social media; people love to post pictures, summaries, and gossip from events. As always, there are a few niceties to remember.

a. Pictures: Not everyone wants their picture taken. If you want to take a picture of someone you do not know, ask them first. Tell them you are planning on posting it and let them say yes or no. Be aware of your surroundings while taking pictures. Don't go into the fighting areas, try not to ruin other people's views, and no flash photography at court. Also, please note, the SCA has specific rules about drones. Do not assume your drone will be welcome. Ask the event steward or local seneschal if you can bring and use the drone. If they say no, don't bring it.

b. Problems: If you have a problem with a person at an event, I would suggest you deal with that person directly. Complaining about that person online, never ever makes it better. If you witness something that you find ugly, don't post about it unless you a) know exactly what happened and b) have all the participant's approval. Small fusses can become huge dramas with online chatter; and misunderstandings become horrible arguments on social media.

c. Gossip: We all enjoy some gossip now and then. Just remember posting rumors that you hear or making insinuations online, often ends up creating drama. Think about it first, would you want someone saying that about you?

IV. Alls Well that Ends Well

There are a couple of final notes that are useful across the board: Smoke only in the designated smoking areas (that includes vaping). If the event does not allow alcohol, don't bring it. Flash photography is not allowed during court. If you bring your animal, keep it under control, do not let it run wild. If you bring your child, keep an eye on them. Don't assume others will be able to look after your kids.

Ultimately, everyone who participates in the SCA, attends because they want to have fun. We attend activities to interact and enjoy ourselves. That being said, sometimes problems do happen. Understanding how the SCA runs, helps you identify who you can go to when a problem does occur.

The seneschals are the legal representatives of the group. If a problem occurs that requires the police, fire department or an ambulance, report it immediately to the seneschal. The sooner they know about a problem, the better equipped they are to help you. Seneschals also are the ones who can listen if you have a problem in your local group that you want addressed (ie an officer not doing a job, you want to hold an event, etc).

Chiurgeons are people who are trained in first aid. In Atlantia, the chiurgeons are a guild and can be identified by their badge. These are people willing to help others in a medical emergency. If you get injured at an event the chiurgeon can help you locate medical supplies or send you toward local medical care if necessary.

Chatelains are newcomer representatives. If you are feeling lost or confused about what is happening, then they are the people to talk to. They can help answer your questions and introduce you to people.

The Marshalls are in charge of fighting. If you have a problem on the field, this is who you would report it to.

Autocrats are the people in charge of specific events. They are the people who arranged the event and are the contact with the site. If something on site is damaged or broken, or if you leave something on site, these people are who would address the problem.