

Arts and Sciences Documentation Questionnaire

If you are new to the idea of documenting your arts and sciences project, or just not comfortable with writing documentation at all, this questionnaire is designed to help you. By going through the questions and answering them as you research your project, as you work on it, and after you have completed it, you will end up with a good, basic piece of documentation. It will help competition judges assess your work, help others who wish to do something similar, and most importantly, help you keep track of your research and provide a stepping stone for more in-depth projects.

Think of your documentation as a way of explaining your project to someone who is not an expert in the field. This means that you might need to provide some general background information and explain any unfamiliar technical terms. It also means that you need to keep your writing style easy to read, have it follow a logical sequence, and include photos, diagrams, timelines and any other explanatory material that will help the reader understand your project.

There are many different styles and levels of documentation. It can be a very basic outline and description of your project, a how-to guide for someone else to make a similar item, or a detailed academic dissertation. You may wish to produce different versions of your documentation for different audiences.

It is very important to keep records of your source material. It is extremely frustrating trying to find a particular picture or quote when you have forgotten where you first saw it. In the case of a book, it is helpful to note where you got the book from - was it in your own collection, in a library, borrowed from a friend? For an internet page, which may change or be taken down in the future, it is a good idea to save an archived version of the page to your own computer, along with the highest resolution digital images you can find.

One thing you will almost certainly discover is that you will need to keep researching during the construction phase of your project. Often your best guess based on the information from your initial research will need to be modified because it doesn't work properly, or because you have learned more about the item and discovered that some of the initial assumptions you made were incorrect.

This particular set of questions is aimed at projects that result in a physical object. There is another version of the questionnaire being developed for projects such as dance, music and theatre, along with advice on audiovisual documentation for these projects.

Questionnaire

Description (this information will be needed for competition entry forms)

What is the item you have made?

What country/culture is it from?

What time period is it from?

Background information

What was the inspiration for your item eg a period item (either one you have seen in real life or photographs of one)? a picture in a period manuscript or painting? a written description in a period manuscript? a reproduction made by someone else? your imagination?

Write down the source of any ideas or inspiration for your project (see the section on referencing at the end for how to do this).

Materials

What materials did you use to make your item?

Are these the same as would have been used in the original?

How do you know? (list sources of information)

How do your choices compare with the materials that would have been used in the original?

Discuss the reasons for your choice of material(s) eg cost, availability, safety.

Have your choices affected the process or the results? eg green oak is easier to carve than white pine; linen and wool garments hang differently from synthetic fabrics.

Techniques of construction

Discuss how you made the item (use progress photographs or drawings if possible)

What tools did you use?

Are these the same as would have been used in the original?

How do you know? (list sources of information)

How does this compare with the way the item would have been made originally? (both the techniques and the tools)

Discuss the reasons for your choice of technique(s) and tools eg safety, time constraints, expertise, affordability, legality.

Have your choices affected the process or the results? eg using an open fire will give a different result from using a gas burner.

Context

What was the intended use of your item?

What sort of person would have owned or used this object?

Did the overall design or choice of materials in the original(s) have any special significance?

Did the decoration on the original item(s) have any special significance? Examples would be heraldry, religious references, and wordplay or jokes in images or text on the item.

In the item you have made, have you copied an existing item fairly closely, or have you developed an original design based on what you know about similar period items?

Have you personalised the item in any way?

After the project

Have you used the item since you made it? Has it performed as intended/expected?

Have you modified it, or has it changed, since completion?

Would you do anything differently next time?

Do you have any advice to pass on to someone else making this item?

Referencing

Reference material might include information on specific period items or techniques, general background information (which could include films or lectures), modern technical information such as instruction books, other people's documentation or reconstructions, and personal discussions with an expert in the field. Include photocopies or printouts of the source material in your documentation if you have them.

For books or journals, note the title, author(s), publisher or name of the journal, date of publication, and relevant page numbers. The book's ISBN is optional but handy. For web pages write the web

address and page name, the date you accessed the page, and save an archived copy of the page if you can. If an item is from a particular museum or collection note that as well. If you are using unreferenced material provided to you by an expert, you can describe it as “personal communication with (name)” and describe their particular qualifications or expertise.

Presentation of your documentation

Documentation is usually written. If your documentation is particularly long it is a good idea to provide a single page summary of the key points. However, writing up your documentation is not the only way - you could make a poster, a slideshow, or a film.

The key things are:

- keep it relevant, and
- keep it interesting.