

# SUGGESTIONS FOR CHATELAINS

By Elise Fleming (Alys Katharine)

Without new members, any group will become stagnant and stale. Without appropriate education, newcomers may neglect to follow the ideals of courtesy, honor, and chivalry. The Society would then eventually become a group of “modern-day folk” who play “dress up.” Education, preparation and acclimatization of newcomers is, therefore, vitally important to the continued growth and strength of the Society for Creative Anachronism.

## ***Enticements to Meetings***

- Provide a sign-up list at demos for people who would like further information, or to attend a newcomer evening. Put one or two “starter” names at the top. People are more likely to continue a list than start a list. Leave spaces for address, phone number and e-mail address.
- Contact people promptly, or give them some idea at sign-up time when you will be contacting them. Also provide a schedule of local practices and meetings.
- Send letters, postcards or an e-mail message of introduction to people who sign-up. Include contact information, times of regular meetings, etc.
- If sending something in print, always use a readable font. Avoid fancy calligraphy fonts.
- Provide a chatelain table at events to which the public is invited. Include a sign-up sheet; the SCA’s *A New Member’s Guide*; web site information for membership and groups in other areas, etc., local and kingdom newsletters, *Tournaments Illuminated*, *Compleat Anachronist*, handouts and any other items that might be helpful to those who know little about your group and the SCA. Have business cards to hand out. Make sure your contact information is on all handouts.
- Develop or use an on-line example for simple handouts on what you think might entice someone to actually come to the meetings (or join one of your group’s “specialties”). For example, “How to Get Started Fighting” might include where and when the training takes place, what equipment will be needed, what “authorization” is, who Knights and Masters are, etiquette on and off the field, do’s and don’ts to avoid feeling embarrassed, and contact numbers for further information.

Do a similar handout or web article for dance, music, archery, cooking, armoring or chain mail making, or whatever you think might draw someone in. Newcomers need all the information they can get before setting foot in the SCA.

- Try a recruitment campaign if your group is interested in attracting new members. Decide the length of the campaign – two weeks for an average size group, more for larger groups. Tiny communities might need only one week. Decide how you will

advertise: posters in stores, libraries, laundries; public display cases; community calendar in newspaper or on local radio and TV; a demo. While a prospective member may be interested after seeing one item, he or she is more likely to actually show up if several publicity reminders have been seen or heard. Every publicity item should include contact information. All publicity should lead to a climaxing event such as a new member meeting, revel or mini-event.

## ***Orientation and Acclimatization to the SCA***

The purpose of this section is to offer a variety of different ways that you and your group can use to help newcomers through the awkward phase of “learning the ropes”. Some suggestions are directly contrary to other ideas. Discuss and decide which will work best in your community and with the age group you are attracting. Experiment and be flexible so that you can meet the needs of the new SCA member.

- Offer an informal newcomers’ night in a neutral location such as a church or library. Keep it small in attendance. Provide SCA pictures to show the various activities. Discuss a specific topic. Introduce the officers. Keep the atmosphere low key (no “brass hats”) and informal. Give a pizza party, especially for college students. Help newcomers make garb, or loan SCA clothing to them.
- Offer an “at home” meeting. The chatelain or designated person invites several newcomers to his or her home for snacks or pizza and invites some established members as well. In a modern world setting, titles and precedence don’t become so weighty as at an SCA meeting.
- Have a “movie night” where newcomers and experienced members can watch films set in the Middle Ages. Even bad movies can be a learning experience. Experienced members can explain why certain movies are inaccurate.
- Offer a fancy newcomers’ mini-event with formal, fancy clothing worn by the “experienced” members. Include “brass hats”. Newcomers are shown how to act in that milieu and experience the re-creation of a period atmosphere in a controlled setting.
- Offer small workshops to newcomers: making garb, learning a specific craft or skill, etiquette at events. Other workshop topics could include what to do court, introduction to martial arts, awards and titles (with a focus on your local area and kingdom), your first event, and so on.
- Provide newcomer meetings at the regular meetings. Give a formalized introduction to topics newcomers need. This can include a demonstration of the group’s specialties such as costuming, fighting, music and so on. See the previous item for additional suggestions for topics.

- Provide fosterage. A newcomer is “fostered” to an established member for “x” months. This member teaches, goes to events with the person and generally gets the person comfortable with the SCA. In some groups, the newcomer is encouraged to provide assistance at events. One group has a ceremony which ends the relationship with the exchange of small gifts between the foster member and the newcomer.
- Provide a newcomers’ household, perhaps headed by the local chatelain or a deputy. Members stay in the household for “x” months. The household head assists the newcomers with SCA orientation and includes them in a place to stay at camping events and a place to sit at feasts.
- Provide a “graduation” ceremony where the newcomer is accepted as an active member of the group. One barony provides a small crystal symbol of the group to each “graduate”.
- Develop and show 10- to 15-minute videos on specific segments of SCA life. On a web site, include links to a variety of SCA activities and information.
- Bring a library of “look at it here” or “rental” books to meetings.
- Develop your own local handbook for the web or in print. Items you might include: definitions of common SCA terms and vocabulary, etiquette: at local meetings and events, on the fighting and archery fields, at feasts, at court; special interest groups with their meeting times and places; local households.
- Write a list or make a web link of the different awards available; make a “brass hat” pamphlet of how to recognize and address those who wear them. Awards articles by Jessa d’Avondale are online at <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahlj/jessa/kingdoms.html>.
- Compile a “persona pack” in print or on the web. Cover one specific time period (Celtic, Norman, Tudor, Arabic...) and tell briefly how to achieve the “look” in clothes, behavior, vocabulary, books or web sites to read, etc. Consider starting with the common personas in your local group.
- For relocated SCA folk from other kingdoms, a brief explanation of some of your kingdom’s differences is helpful.

## ***Publicity and Public Relations***

There is some overlapping among the sections dealing with enticing members, publicity and public relations, and demos. Look at each of the sections to see what ideas might best serve your group when recruiting new members and when educating the public about the Middle Ages and the SCA.

- Put on a Twelfth Night or medieval feast specifically for the public. If you have the people-power, the price could include a simple cotton tabard with the group's device painted on it. And/or the public could be invited to come in "costume". Or, have loaner items available, including feast gear. Make sure to have tapestries and other hangings to decorate the hall.
- Contact local groups and churches that do their own medieval feasts. Offer the services of talented SCA people to add flavor, provide atmosphere or authenticity, or just plain help out. Negotiate for a variety of things such as free advertising of the SCA group, fees, possible future site use, etc.
- Contact locally-run Renaissance Faires. See if your local SCA people can add "color", possibly for free admission, and find out if local handouts can be distributed by hand and at the information booth. Check to see if a note can be put into the Faire Guide for those interested in contacting the SCA. Include contact information for both the local SCA representative and the Society website.
- When holding an event at a school or a church, be sure to invite the teachers and/or parishioners. Offer a reduced rate or let them in free. At schools, offer free or reduced rates to a certain number of teacher-recommended students in history, art, theater, and/or English classes. This can be an excellent source of good will and free publicity. Provide loaner clothing and feast gear if necessary.
- Donate copies of the *Known World Handbook* and the SCA's *A New Member's Guide* (available from the Stock Clerk, [www.sca.org](http://www.sca.org)) to local libraries and schools. Include a sticker or card with contact information. Or, include a card listing the name of the group that donated the item as well as the web sites of the SCA, kingdom and local group.
- Arrange for public service announcements (PSAs) about your local group on local radio stations in the USA.
- Have local group meetings announced under Club Announcements in local newspapers. Have the meeting notices updated regularly. See what is available on public access channels in the USA. Coordinate any publicity with the kingdom media person.
- Display crafts, armor, garb, paper castle collections, etc., in a variety of places such as library display cases, and colleges. Provide sample scrolls and/or illuminations for display in bookstores that carry "period" books. Make sure you arrange for handouts with contact information.
- Work at the local PBS channel's fundraising nights in garb.
- Volunteer as a group to work at charities such as "walk-a-thons". Go in garb. Participate in local parades in armor and garb; do pick-up fights during parade stops.

- Use an “assistance” card – a small card saying something like: “You have just been assisted by Hortense the Helpful, a member of the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), a group that re-creates the best parts of the Middle Ages, including courtesy and chivalry. For further information, see [www.localgroup.org](http://www.localgroup.org) or call Sue at 555-1234.”
- If you contact the media, use material available on the SCA web site whenever possible. Be prepared to provide appropriate background materials such as the SCA’s *Newcomers’ Guide*. If the media contacts you, get in touch with your kingdom’s Media Relations Person for advice and assistance.
- Choose your group’s contact person carefully. The seneschal is the legal, modern world representative. In most kingdoms, the chatelain is a deputy of the seneschal. Any deputy who talks with schools, libraries, etc., should be able to talk well and represent the SCA effectively. Always avoid the term “mundane”. Use “modern” instead.

## ***Demos***

Demos can be used to recruit new members or to educate the public, especially school children. For new member recruitment, see the first section as well as suggestions from here for demos in general. Refer to the SCA’s Demo Policy (in the *Seneschals’ Handbook* or contact [chatelaine@sca.org](mailto:chatelaine@sca.org) for criteria governing demos in general. If possible, hold a pre-demo meeting with those who will be participating. Confirm directions, time, topic, site rules, schedule, etc.

- Develop a curriculum appropriate to the audience. Sketch out an outline on 3x5 cards of topics to be covered and key phrases. This way, whenever the demo is done, the same material can be covered but will still allow for individual variation.
- Plan it out; don’t just “wing it”. Incorporate variety and change of pace. Include as many facets of the SCA and the Middle Ages as you can, such as a fashion show, dance, music, fighting, craft or skill explanations, food samples, and so on. Keep the segments short. Break up long topics into two segments with a different activity in the middle. Balance active and passive activities, both in terms of the presenters and those attending the demo.
- Do a demo “in persona”.
- To avoid “unprofessional” confusion, make a list of who will do which dances; who will go first and talk about which topic; who will show what. While this may seem over-organized to some, it can eliminate the hasty mumbling and discussions of “You go first. No, you go first!” that detracts from the “show”.

- Bring adequate supplies of handouts. See the [Enticements to Meetings](#) section for suggestions. Give a copy of *A New Member's Guide* to the school teachers and librarians.
- Don't hesitate to speak up and be heard! A demo is a time to let everyone hear your voice so don't whisper! Remember to speak loudly and articulately.
- Bring eye-catching books for children and variety books for adults: books on cooking, herbs, embroidery, illumination, armor, and so forth.
- Bring things to try on, touch and handle such as hand woven materials, pottery, armor pieces. Involve the onlookers. Let them feel and experience the Middle Ages.
- Develop a dress and conduct code for demos. Avoid the situation of the person dressed in chain mail mini-skirt and bikini top at a religious elementary school demo.
- Set aside a "de-stress" room for SCAers to attend to personal, modern needs during long demos.

### ***Loaner Clothing and Gear***

- Consider loaning basic armor to newcomers who would like to try fighting.
- Provide loaner bows and equipment to fledgling archers.
- When loaning out clothing, take adequate contact information. Avoid the situation of loaning something to Horace, a friend of Hortense, who says she'll see that it gets back later. Be able to contact the person who is actually using the item. If loaning material for one day only, take a driver's license or keys as collateral to be sure you receive the items back at the end of the day.
- If items are not coming back, or have been in poor condition, request a rental fee or deposit to ensure its return and good conditions. Explain the reasons to the "renter".
- If the clothing is difficult to clean, keep a cleaning fee.
- Use a newcomers' sewing night or an A&S class to repair clothing or make new pieces.
- Bring a portable clothes rack to events on which to hang loaner clothing. Boxes are messy, encourage wrinkles, and aren't as "classy" as a clothes rack. At outdoor demos and events, tie a rope between two trees to act as a clothes rack, or use a tree with many limbs!

- Take loaner clothing and gear to meetings and events. Avoid waiting for someone to request it before you bring it.
- Put the group's name on a sewing label and put it inside the clothing to minimize loss. Or, appliqué or paint the group's device or badge on the front of the item. Besides helping effect the return of the garment, it identifies the wearer as a new person. ("New member, handle with care!")
- Make identical tabards to loan out. Use the group's badge or design on the front.
- Make a simple feast gear setting from a thrift store. Put it in a drawstring bag to take to events and loan out.
- For loaner clothing, make an entire outfit to give out – pouch, belt, veil for women and so on.

### ***Helping Established Members***

While the chatelain, hospitaller or Gold Key generally assists new members, that officer also needs to help established members in working effectively with new people. Established members often forget how difficult it was to learn all the rules of conduct. Newcomers are very sensitive to careless comments that an established member might make about clothing or behavior. Established members need to keep in mind that newcomers generally don't intend to act rude or discourteous, but that their newness can sometimes be interpreted as discourtesy.

- Distribute copies of *Advice to Established Members* (in the Chatelain section on the SCA web site), reprint it in the group's newsletter, and/or add it to the group's website.
- Have a "buddy system" for attending events. The newcomer is partnered with and taken care of by an experienced member who also sits with the newcomer at any feast. Refer to "fostering" in the section [Orientation and Acclimatization to the SCA](#).
- Before demos, events, and periodically at meetings, remind the members to avoid the use of SCA jargon, especially "newbie" and "mundane". Use "newcomer" and "modern" in place of those terms.
- Avoid talking about local group, household or guild politics. Provide gentle reminders to members to avoid horror stories and gossip when talking to newcomers or prospective members. They'll hear about the "bad" things at their own pace!
- Recruit the experienced members (Peers, former Royalty, guild heads) to write articles for the newsletter or for some of the handouts or web articles that were

suggested earlier. Ask a local expert to write an article or to dictate one to a “ghost writer”. Ask an appropriate regional or kingdom officer to contribute. Keep past articles and handouts from classes in a binder to copy for future newcomers, or include them in a section on your group’s web site.

- Ask experienced members to buy an SCA membership for a new member. When the new member has been around for a while, it becomes that person’s turn to buy a membership for a newcomer.

## **Miscellaneous**

- Begin your own collection of web articles, links, etc. With appropriate permission, add them to your group’s web site. Make a special section on the web site for newcomers which includes links to useful web pages.
- Begin a file of reputable merchants for people who are looking for period items. This includes local merchants. (See the next suggestion.)
- Make a list of local sources such as stores for fabric and trim, leather, art supplies, etc. Make a list of people in the area who are resources or who teach skills and crafts. Create a Domesday Book that contains the contact information.
- Subscribe to *Tournaments Illuminated* yourself as well as the *Compleat Anachronist*, if you have the funds, or ask for them as a gift! Keep past issues as resources for newcomers. Your group might wish to have a subscription just for this purpose.
- Organize trips to art galleries and museums. Call and ask if any upcoming displays fit within the SCA “world”. Offer to be a part of a “living art” demo at that institution. Do your research carefully on what you will present so you show your group to advantage.
- Post local SCA information at area science fiction and gaming conventions. Lots of people are “looking” for the SCA but can never “find” it.