



# Costuming Guidelines

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## Welcome

This packet is to help raise the standard of costume quality and authenticity to get everyone appropriately costumed. The costuming classes are to help teach proper design and construction of costumes. Heather Billings, Sarah Randolph, and Jillian Hodge are available to assist those requesting help, from basic underpinnings to the last accessory.

All performers are responsible for their own costumes. All performers, stage shows, vendors and all shop-workers must go through the costume approval process, especially if it is a new costume. We want you to succeed and will be there to help you.

More than any other single factor, your costume visually defines the character you are to portray. Consider this in every decision you make for your costume. The design and cut, fabric and trimming choices and details of your costume will tell patrons a great deal about your character before you ever interact with them; make sure the choices you make are consistent with the character you are portraying.

Fabrics will need to be approved before the construction can begin. Do not purchase fabrics before the swatches have been approved; it may not pass approval and you will have wasted money on fabric. Final approval of character and costume will not occur until after auditions are complete and costume sketches and swatches are turned in for each character.

There are male and female figure drawings available to assist the artistically challenged (and so we won't get sketches turned in on little scraps of paper).

The decision of the costume coordinator (Heather Billings) is final. If your costume sketch or fabric is not approved, you will be told the reason why and be given specific advice, instruction and help to make the necessary changes, and you must resubmit your design and get approved. We want you to succeed and have a fun, comfortable and appropriate costume that you will enjoy wearing. We will work with you and help you design and construct your costume.

Renaissance Festivals are historically based environmental theatre, not historical reenactment. We take artistic liberty with historical accuracy in many aspects of Renaissance faire to balance practicality with historicity to create the environment appropriate to the faire. Remember that we are not re-creating history but providing historically based entertainment. If we did show up in complete Renaissance authenticity, it wouldn't be pretty, smell nice or be very fun for the patrons or us all the time!

## **I. New Costumes**

First-year performers and returning performers building a new costume must have costume sketches and fabric swatches approved before starting costume construction. The steps, in the proper order, are as follows:

- Read these guidelines and follow them in designing your costume. Use the costume sketch outline provided. If you have questions, ask the costume coordinator Heather Billings.
- Refer to 'Sumptuary Laws' and guidelines in making your decisions for your costumes.
- Submit a detailed drawing of the costume, showing all pieces including hat/headwear and cape. Keep a copy for yourself and one for your seamstress/sewer if you are not doing it yourself.
- Include on the sketch, stapled to the top right corner all fabrics and trims you want to use for the costume.
- Get approval of the costume from the costume coordinator, making notes of any changes requested by the costumers. Look for a seamstress/sewer.
- If there are any major changes have been requested which call for a new sketch, resubmit and get approved as quickly as possible.
- Buy your materials and trim as approved for your costume.
- Hire a qualified seamstress/sewer. Request a written estimate of the costs in making the costume as detailed on the approved drawing. Expect to sign a contract with the seamstress that specifies all the agreed upon details: number and description of garments to be constructed, cost per hour and final cost estimate, payment requirements, schedule of fittings, completion deadline, etc.
- Have the costume completed by the deadline and be prepared to wear it, with all accessories you will need for your character, for final approval by the costume coordinators.
- PLEASE GET SWATCHES OF YOUR FABRIC APPROVED BEFORE YOU PURCHASE IT. Please don't make the mistake of thinking, "if I've bought my fabric, they'll have to approve it" because this is not the case. If your fabric selection is not appropriate to your character or outside the established authenticity and theatrical guidelines that has been determined for the Faire, you will not be allowed to use it as a cast character of WHRF.

NOTE: All the costume sketches/swatches will be put into a big notebook so we can keep track of them. This will ensure that people aren't using the same fabrics and where everyone is on the approval process. This also helps with coordinating the look of the faire so far as costumes are concerned. This is why we are asking that sketches with fabric and trim samples be turned in.

## **II. Costume Do's and Don'ts**

*Do*

- Submit designs and swatches for approval as soon as possible so you can reserve your color/fabric choice; the competition for a particular fabric or color can get fierce! We want to avoid everyone wearing the same color combinations.
- Accessorize to suit your character's class and occupation, (i.e. belt, pouches, mug, bowl, spoon, knife, tools, basket, etc.) We will be approving accessories as well as costume pieces.
- Include a hat/headpiece in your costume design. ALL CHARACTERS ARE REQUIRED TO WEAR an appropriate head covering. If you have an unusual haircut or color, be prepared to cover it completely with a hat or dye it to a natural color.
- Make your costume appear authentic with proper finishing details, i.e. lacings, ties or buttons instead of zippers, and drawstrings rather than elastic. Do not use Velcro or modern-looking hooks for anything that shows.
- We strongly recommend that you have at least 2 chemises/shirts and 2 pair of tights/hosen or bloomers so you do not have to do laundry before the next morning of Faire and so that you have something fresh to put on under your costume. Please bear in mind that it will be hot, we will all be working hard and sweating a lot. We don't want to offend one another or our Patrons making the Faire too authentic in that manner!

- Bathe before coming to faire; use deodorant, brush teeth and use mouthwash. Again, we are not trying to be THAT historically authentic. The people during the Renaissance period may not have bathed regularly or practiced good hygiene, but we do!

#### *Don't*

- Neglect to get your sketches, fabrics and trims approved and your costume done by the deadline.
- Appear with any of these items during the Faire day:
  - Tie-dyed ANYTHING, surface-printed or calico fabrics
  - Wrap pants, waist cinchers, Victorian corsets, under-the-breast bodices or bodices with darts. (We cannot control what shops sell to patrons, but do not assume you can wear it as cast! Anything you buy at faire must be pre-approved)
  - Chemises/shirts in bright colors, sleeves shorter than ¾ length, slit sleeves
  - Bare midriffs (except for belly dancers or gypsies)
  - Scarves or accessories with metallic or glittery threads (except gypsies)
  - Multi-layered/ruffled gauze skirts, skirts shorter than mid-calf (except gypsies)
  - Animal tails of any kind as an accessory
  - Pieces from later periods of history unless specifically approved for the character you are playing.
  - Cavalier hats
  - Shirts with wide falling-band collars
  - Hoops wider than 110" circumference, panniers or cartridge farthingales
  - Vintage 60's prom dresses, Victorian-looking 'anything'!
  - Medieval period costumes; this is a whole different look and the wrong century entirely
- Ruin your costume or your character with anachronisms like tennis shoes, sweat pants, sunglasses, modern-looking hairstyles, cigarettes (although pipes are alright), paper/plastic cups and eating utensils.

### **III. Fabric Choices**

Fundamental consideration is the comfort, practicality and functionality of all your costume pieces in making your fabric decisions. The Renaissance folk had it right in some ways. They wore natural fibers (that was all there was back then, of course) but these fabrics breathe and keep you both cooler and warmer as needed. Polyester, acetate and all synthetic fabrics will both make you miserable and will not wear well under the extreme conditions that we and our clothing endure during the run of faire! Cotton, linen, wool, silk, rayon and ramie breathe and are much more comfortable to wear with the varied weather conditions we can experience during the run of faire. This means you can use, but are not limited to; linen, cotton broadcloth, gauze, gabardine or twill, corduroy, velvet, velveteen; Silk, noil, raw, tussah, dupioni, thai and some brocades. We discourage you from using satin as it is very hot and does not endure well; it scratches, snags and scars very easily. Chiffon or organza is not appropriate for anything Elizabethan.

You may not use stamped or printed cottons, chintz prints, modern patterns or colors. Do not use acetates or rubber-backed brocades. Acetate is not a period fabric and cannot easily be disguised to appear as though it might be, and rubber-backed brocades will kill you (literally) in the heat. If you must use a "shiny" fabric, silk is a good alternative to acetate, if your character could afford the tax.

Pre-wash and dry all washable fabrics so any 'surprises' will occur before the costume is constructed. For water-proof washable fabrics we highly recommend NikWax over ScotchGard. It must however, be machine washed into the fabric in a two-step procedure. You can order NikWax on the Internet at [www.nikwax-usa.com](http://www.nikwax-usa.com) or by it from a sporting goods store that sells snow skiing accessories.

We discourage using costume ideas from movies or TV shows, as they are rarely very accurate. Also be wary of commercial 'period' patterns available at all fabric stores. They are not designed with authenticity or accuracy in mind – marketability to people who have watched historically based movies. Many of them are labeled both "Renaissance" and "Medieval" on the very same pattern envelope. There is a difference of about 400-500 years involved! If you must use one of these patterns, please get the advice and assistance of the

costume coordinator to be sure you are correct in the changes that need to be made for our use. The best patterns available to purchase are Margo's Patterns at [www.margospatterns.com](http://www.margospatterns.com)

It is not recommended to use 'thrift shop' or ready-made pieces for costumes as the entire body silhouette and shape of period garments is so different from modern clothing. Also beware garments you may have purchased at faires; all garments sold at Renaissance faires are not necessarily correct for cast costume use. If you have questions, ask. Whatever you use must be approved, so *don't assume*. If something is not appropriate, you will not be allowed to wear it as a cast member, even if it is already purchased.

#### **IV. Colors**

You may use any color that could be obtained by dyes that would have been available from natural sources of the time, primarily earth tones. Yellows and bronzes from saffron or onion skin, red from madder root or cochineal. Blue was most commonly from indigo and woad. Orange came from safflower, brown from walnuts or weld (rust from soaking rusting iron in water), and green from dying yellow over blue. Colors would be vivid but not florescent or "modern" bright. Black would be worn only if your character has money enough to buy it and then maintain it. Only persons with the means to maintain it would wear pure white garments. The rest of the color guidelines are under "Sumptuary Laws."

#### **V. Lace**

The basic rule is that unless you are wealthy/merchant class/nobility you may not use lace of any kind. Lace did not come into extensive usage until the reign of Elizabeth and even then was quite expensive. NO EYELET LACE or lace fabric, period! NO machine-made-looking lace. No exceptions even for gypsies; such lace did not exist and will not be approved for character use. This is not a subject for debate. Some tatted lace, some battenburg, Brussels lace, buillion lace (made of metallic threads) and a pulled-thread sort of embroidery that is appropriate; blackwork is most definitely period. For our theatrical purposes color embroider is certainly allowable, but not for lower classes.

#### **VI. Bloomers/Tights/Socks**

Tights, hose or knee-high socks should be solid colored (no swim-suit prints) and cotton blend and should come above the hem of the bloomers. Women; if you prefer not to wear tights, be sure that the socks come up under the hem of the bloomers so that no bare legs are appropriate for your character. Wool socks are your best friends in cold or wet weather, even in hot weather they are comfortable for they both breathe and wick (carry the sweat outwards.) All women should wear bloomers covering their legs at least to below the knee; bloomers of that length are more comfortable when conditions are dry and dusty. It is *strongly* advised that women wear bloomers made of linen – it is much cooler than any other fabric. Lower classes of women can wear whatever length of bloomers they prefer according to character. You may wear bike shorts if that is your preference and if they will never be seen under your costume.

#### **VII. Chemises/Shirts**

A shirt or chemise is the basic garment; the first piece put on and the last taken off. Everyone but the lowliest beggar wears another garment (doublet) over it plus trousers. 100% linen is the most comfortable, coolest fabric you can make these from, not to mention that is what they actually used; rougher woven for lower classes and more finely woven handkerchief linen for the upper classes. You will need roughly 3-4 yards per shirt/chemise and there *are* now perfectly acceptable commercial patterns for these garments.

## **VIII. Shoes**

Try to get as period a look as possible, but keep comfort foremost in mind as you will be putting a lot of mileage on them in all sorts of weather and terrain. Women: shoes should be brown or black leather or suede, and buckle or tie over the instep. *Avoid* the thin cotton “China Slippers” as they do not protect or support your foot well and you will suffer wearing them. Try to avoid modern-looking shoe bottoms and heavily treaded soles. Clogs *are* historically accurate. Plain, low-heeled boots are appropriate for men or women, Suede boots are alright but moccasin boots must have the fringe either tucked in or cut off to look appropriate. Never, NEVER, ever plan on going barefoot out at Faire.

## **IX. Hats**

EVERYONE must wear a head covering of some kind: all classes and ages, male and female. This is a rigid social rule of the period; someone appearing without a hat would scandalize everyone. This was a health as well as a social rule. Garlands or wreaths are appropriate only for young unmarried women, as is unbound and flowing hair. If you wish to wear straw hats, please avoid modern-looking styles in the natural straw color. NO white straw hats, period.

## **X. Outerwear**

Everyone should have some sort of cloak, cape, shawl or wrap; we stay open in all sorts of weather and all folk would have such garments. *Avoid black* as it would be too pricey for most folk; also =consider that we want the village to be as colorful as possible so having everyone in black cloaks does not make a pretty picture. There are many other colors of wool or corduroy available. Use natural fibers but wool is highly recommended as it has a natural water-repellent nature. Treat your cloak to make it water repellent with either ScotchGard or NikWax. Mind the lining of all of your garments; colored cotton or linen linings will bleed onto your shirt or chemise when you begin to sweat or they get wet. White lining is the smartest idea for garments in which the lining will not show. Capes should be lined, most likely the thinnest natural fiber you can find for our weather conditions. Upper and Noble class characters should have trim along the edges of the cloak or cape. Closures can be hook and eye, frogs, ties or large buttons made of metal, horn, bone or leather. It is recommended that hems be no longer than ankle-length so as not to step on it when sitting or walking up an incline or dragging a cloak through mud. This adds substantially to the weight of an already-weighty garment.

## **XI. Jewelry**

Men and women of noble or royal class and some wealthy merchants wore pearls and precious stones, often with two or three rings per finger, earrings and necklaces. Nobles wore several gold chains at a time. Cabochon (un-faceted) stones are most appropriate, but faceted stones will be allowed within reason. Fancy items or jewelry would not have been worn by peasants or lower middle class. Any jewelry that they obtained would have been sold immediately and would not have been worn lest it was thought stolen. Remember that taxes would have been charged on any jewelry worn, so in other words, use common sense. This, of course, does not apply to gypsies who are exceptions to most of these rules; if you have a question about any item – ASK!

## **XII. Favors/Guild Pins**

Anyone who has done more than one faire has probably acquired a large collection of pin-on “favors” from friends, and more importantly from their character’s friends. You may also be a member of a guild that issues a pin or pewter badge. The preferred method of wearing such devices is on a sash or tabard hanging from the belt, so that it does not immediately catch the eye of the patron, thus adding another “layer” to your character. If you must wear them pinned to the upper part of your garb, then take care to “camouflage” them by wearing as few as possible, and as unobtrusively as you can. They should *not* be the first thing the patron notices about your costume.

### **XIII. Sumptuary Laws**

- ❖ Essentially a mandatory dress code for all classes, these laws were a means to control what each class of society could wear according to an individual's social standing and wealth. It was easy to tell anyone's standing by the cut, color, quality, trim and detail of their garments and accessories. A wealthy citizen could pay the 'tax' in order to wear the unlawful item but they did so at their own risk (punishment could be imprisonment in the stocks for up to 3 days!)
- ❖ No one is allowed to out-dress the Queen. Apart from political/social issues, it's just not smart to tick off those upon whom your welfare depends.
- ❖ The color purple and ermine and sable fur are reserved for the Royal family alone. And try to avoid the use of any of the same fabric actually worn by the Queen
- ❖ Only Royalty and Nobility may wear silver and gold metallic trims, most furs and the colors of "crimson, scarlet and (royal) blue"
- ❖ Only the French Royal family may use the fleur-de-lis.
- ❖ Velvet, velveteen or marten fur is permissible for Upper Middle Class and above.
- ❖ True black and bright jewel-tone dyes were taxed; however we wish the village to be brightly colored so we will be lenient on colors within reason. Black items had to be regularly re-dyed, so only the very wealthy could afford them. From a theatrical standpoint too many black costumes and costume pieces are dull to look at, so please make other color choices. *\*NOTE: No completely black costumes will be allowed unless specifically called for by your character choice and must be individually approved. Black is not cool.*
- ❖ Individuals in the Middle Class could wear decorative trims and embroidered trims if they were wealthy enough to afford them. The idea is to look rich enough to seem prosperous and draw attention, but not so rich as to get into trouble with those above you in station.
- ❖ Lower Middle Class and peasants would have ribbons and some simple trims on their clothing. Remember that this is the time of the year the Queen visits. Everyone would be as festively dressed as they could each afford.

### **XIV. Costume Costs/Seamstress and Sewers**

Be prepared for the cost of festival costuming; it is a part of the investment you make to do faire. They are not cheap and cannot be bought ready-made. The cost will vary according to class, social standing and personal preference. As conservative estimates for labor in constructing a costume, be prepared to pay \$50-75 for a peasant costume; \$75-150 for lower middle or working class, \$150-300 for upper middle, \$400-500+ for court costumes. This does not include fabrics, trims and accessories.

Be prepared to pay for your fabric and supplies up front (perhaps go shopping *with* your seamstress) and be available for fittings as your seamstress specifies. Seamstresses/Sewers charge by the hour and should be able to give an accurate estimate before starting the project. Be prepared to pay in full for your costume before you will be allowed to take it home. Do not take or pay for your costume until you make sure it fits and you are satisfied with it. This isn't Wal-Mart; there are not returns or refunds. The most important thing in character/seamstress relations is communication!

Make sure your seamstress is qualified, experienced and reasonably priced. Ask to see samples of the work and get references-this is not an insult but rather indicates that you are interested in good quality work. Communicate in advance about expectations, deadlines, costs, style of construction and any other details you



want to consider. You directly get what you pay for in costuming; be as wary of a too-low estimate as a too-high one. You want your costume to last through the run of faire, at the very least.

Custom-made garments should be well cared for in order to last the whole season and beyond. If your costume is washable, wash it before every weekend, please. If your costume is dry-cleaned only (as are most upper class and all court costumes) find a reputable dry-cleaner whom you can trust; there is nothing more tragic than a costume ruined by dry-cleaning. You can also use a product like Dryel for at-home dry cleaning. It is available in the laundry aisle of your grocery store.

When shopping for fabrics, bear in mind that you get what you pay for, so choose sturdy, good quality fabric what will wear well and be comfortable. You are making an investment in your costume; invest wisely. The chain fabric stores are usually aware of preparations for a Faire in the area; ask them if they have a festival discount. Do not be afraid to ask; all they can do is say 'no!' There are some local fabric resources and also some out-of-town resources in both Kansas City and Dallas. There are also some very good on-line ordering resources.

### **Finally...**

Remember that we are making these rules for the overall visual welfare of the faire as well as for the benefit of the performers. These rules assist us in portraying our characters more effectively so that we can create the environment in which our patrons can suspend their disbelief and be entertained even better. Effective costuming is simply one additional step in attempting to reach our patrons and help them to enjoy their time at the faire even more.

### **Bibliography**

Here is a brief listing of some helpful books;

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