

SPINNING AT A RENNAISSANCE FAIRE

Here are a few handouts on history, phrases, forms of address, and fiber (of course!) that might help you as you prepare to spin at a Renaissance, Fantasy or whatever kind of Faire.

Spinning at a RennFaire is a bit different than spinning at a demo. Usually, a time period for the Faire is set (Henry the VIII, Robin Hood, Camelot, etc.) that everyone adheres to, whereas some faires have a mishmash of time periods and themes, and some may not have much of a unifying theme other than “We’re Vikings.” Instead of pillaging and looting the patrons as they come through the gates, remember that you’re basically there to be educational and demonstrate this fine art of ours in a nice sort of “good day to thee, mi’lord and mi’lady, how fare you this day?” sort of way.

Most people have this concept of RennFaires in their head as vaguely 1200-1600s, with rather garish colors, turkey legges on a stick, warm beer on tap and “Huzzah” to everything instead of specific periods and different cultural personas, somewhat period food and “Vivats!” Some SCA people have a hard time making the transition, but we’re spinners – it will be a breeze for us. Just kind of go with the flow.

Here are some points and tips, in no particular order:

- When an actor approaches you, remember that they are in character – address them as such, and don’t make them break character by asking them un-characteristic questions (man, what do you think about that crazy woman in the green dress, do you know what attendance is today, etc.)
- When patrons are in front of you watching you spin, try not to talk about personal stuff unless it’s in character for whatever scenario (“my, Sven’s looking rather dapper today” is fine, “my wasn’t Lord Stickjock a total jerk at Novice” isn’t.) Believe me, they’ll either think you’re rude, or want you to explain then and comment on what they’ve heard, and you’ll NEVER get rid of them!
- When the patrons who think they’re o-so-clever and ask you wittily “Can you spin straw into Gold?” “Are you really doing that?” “Is your right foot bigger than your left?” “When you stand up, do you walk in circles?” “You know, you can buy that much cheaper at Wal-Mart.” And “Where is the thing that Cinderella pricked her finger on?” Just smile, gently and politely correct them, and roll your eyes or laugh once they’ve moved on. Remember, they REALLY think that you’ve never heard that one before. (Bless their little hearts!)
- Some people will just want to look at you for a few minutes, then move on – they won’t want an explanation other than “I’m spinning wool into yarn.” If you try to talk to them, they’ll freak out, or they won’t stop talking. If after you tell them what you’re doing they ask questions, that’s fine – feel free to go into whatever spiel you wish. But if they just want to sit and absorb, just let them and enjoy your quiet spinning time!
- If you put it on display, be it nasty fiber off the stinkiest sheep or the finest needle lace, expect people to touch it, ask you questions about it, and (unfortunately) how much it costs. If you do not have a merchancing license, you usually cannot sell anything on display. If someone asks how much something is and you don’t want to part with it, tell them it has a lot of sentimental value and you don’t want to part with it. If someone is really pushing you on something you don’t want to part with, tell them the truth – tell them how long it took you to make it, and put a minimum hourly wage on it plus cost of materials, transportation to get materials, etc. and tell them the sentimental value is priceless – most people will stop at that point. If they don’t leave you alone at that point, name an outrageous price, and tell them that’s what it’s worth to you and you won’t sell for less – don’t let anyone bully you into parting with something you don’t want to sell!
- If you want to sell something or do commission work for someone, give them a piece of paper with your contact info, and have them contact you after the Faire is over, and work out the price and exchange with them then! Just make sure you don’t sell yourself short!

- Be sure and bring feast gear with you to eat out of when you're there, or at least a goblet and wooden bowl – it's less jarring for the patrons, and helps you keep in the proper mind frame for some reason. It is however, perfectly acceptable to purchase things from food vendors and plop them into said wooden bowl and goblets, esp. when chocolate is concerned!
- While it's good to let children see and experience things, please don't let them spin on your wheels or spin your wheel for you. As elitist as this sounds, our SCA kids are special, and we know them – I have seen more spinning wheels damaged, children cry and parents be mad over the stupidest things that result from spinning on a wheel, especially if there are a bunch of children around – you will get a line at your wheel, they'll all be fighting over it, and some parents will drop their kids off and leave them unattended while they go see a show and come back later to pick them up, expecting you to babysit them. This is no joke, I speak from experience. There is nothing worse than a parent who gets mad and complains to someone from the Faire because their child stuck a finger in the flyer assembly and got a slight cut in the ir finger from one of the hooks after you told the child several times not to do that. It's stupid, but it happens. Let them touch things in the booth, touch the fiber you're spinning, maybe even give them a short piece that they can twist between their fingers and take with them (expect more children to come up and ask you for some during the day – monkey see, monkey do principle), but tell them spinning takes a bit of practice, and a lot of time to learn, and that you need to finish what your spinning, or something gentle like that
- Never leave the area unattended – if you want to have a look around or go shopping, be considerate – only one person go at a time (try to leave at least 3 people at the area, for security and solidarity), and try not to be gone too long so others have a chance to go.
- Remember, this is not an SCA event. It's unfortunate, but people have had display items stolen from them at Faires – this is another reason to have several people at the booth at once, to help keep an eye on our stuff. It also keeps patrons from messing with unattended spinning wheels and damaging them or messing your spinning or the display up.
- Most importantly, HAVE FUN and ENJOY YOURSELVES!