

Heraldry: How to Create Your Arms

The Sword Conservatory (TSC)

Heraldic Arms - a pattern of colors and objects – were first created in order to identify knights on the battlefield, whose identities would otherwise have been concealed by their armor & helm. Originally, each knight would have different heraldry, so you could tell which individual you were looking at. So, the heraldry that a knight used was a description of who he was: brave, rich, loyal, etc. Only later did individual heraldic arms become associated with a family which was passed down from one generation to the next.

At TSC, we create heraldic arms that says who we are as individuals, just like the original knights. And just like the original knights, every one of our heraldries must be different. So, when you have a design, it must be approved to make sure that no other knight already has heraldry that is the same (or very close) to yours.

This guide will tell you about how heraldry is created: the colors, patterns, and some rules. If you do further reading, you will find more patterns and many, many more rules. Don't worry about them! (Unless you want to.) Over it's 900 year history, heraldry has become extremely complex. We just need to worry about the basics, which are more in keeping with what the early knights would have used.

Glossary

- **Blazon** – A written description of a heraldic arms . It uses medieval French to "paint a picture" with words. If you know how to understand a Blazon, you can picture it in your head. Don't worry too much about this, the rules for Blazoning are complicated. It's much easier to draw a picture.
- **Charge** – A symbol used in heraldry. These can be geometric shapes, letters, animals, objects or pretty much anything else you would like.
- **Device** – Your personal symbol. See also, Charge.
- **Dexter** – "Right" as in the right-hand side.
- **Marshalling** -- "Marshalling" or "Marshalling of the field" is a complicated set of rules about how heraldic arms get combined, such as when a woman gets married. We ignore all of these rules because everyone gets to create their own heraldry.
- **Proper** – This is the heraldic term to refer to a charge that is in it's "natural" color. For example, if a tree were to be drawn "proper", then its trunk would be brown and the leaves green (or whatever color(s) they would be if you saw the tree for real). The other way to color the tree would be to make it all the same Tincture.
- **Sinister** – "Left" as in the left-hand side.
- **Tincture** -- A general term for the colors, metals and furs that are used in heraldry.

Tinctures

"Tincture" means the three "types" of colors to choose from: Colors, Metals, and Furs. One of the first things to decide on are what tinctures you like. Two or three is best. More than that can become very busy. Having only one Tincture is challenging but doable (there were only a couple historical cases of this).

Choose which is your primary (most important), which one is second most important, etc. This will matter when you need to decide which part of the field each color goes.

Colors

Colors are just what you'd expect. The traditional colors are red, dark red, blue, black, green, purple, and orange. If you want a different color, that's fine too. You can take any color that exists in nature and use it. Sky Blue, for example. These are called Irregular Tinctures and historically were only used on the Device. We are a bit more relaxed and see no reason you can't use an Irregular Tincture anywhere in your heraldry.

In TSC for example, Dame Lori's colors are Pink and Gray, but she calls them Salmon and Stone. And Dame

Carol uses Carolina Blue as one of her colors.

Metals

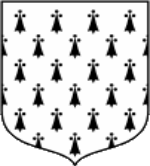



There are two metals: gold and silver. Gold is represented in heraldry by yellow, and silver by white.

Furs

Furs appear somewhat more rarely. Clothing would often be lined with animal furs, which is where this comes from. These get complicated quickly, but the basics are: ermine, ermines, erminois, and pean.

Meanings

Tinctures can have meanings. Feel free to use them, but don't get too caught up in the "official" meanings. What a tincture means to you is the most important thing. You can also choose tinctures just because you like them! Here's a list of tinctures and their historical meanings:



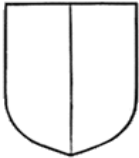
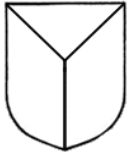
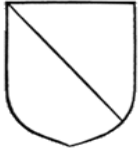
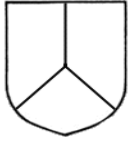

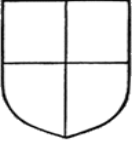
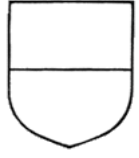





English Word / Description	Blazon	Sample	Historical Meaning
Red	Gules		Warrior, military strength, magnanimity
Dark Red / Blood Red	Sanguine		Patience in battle, fortitude
Blue	Azure		Truth, loyalty
Black	Sable		Wisdom, constancy
Green	Vert		Joy, hope, abundance
Purple	Purple		Royalty, justice
Orange	Tenee		Ambition
Silver / White	Argent		Peace, sincerity, purity
Gold / Yellow	Or		Generosity, elevation of mind, wealth
Ermine Black Spots on White	Ermine		Valor, justice, dignity
Ermines White Spots on Black	Ermines		Valor, justice, dignity
Erminois Black Spots on Gold	Erminois		Valor, justice, dignity
Pean Gold Spots on Black	Pean		Valor, justice, dignity


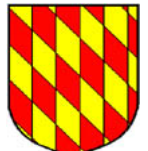


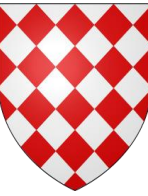

Partitions of The Field

The Partition of the Field is how you divide your shield into areas that will have different Tinctures. This is what gives your Heraldic Arms a particular look. These can get very complicated, but my recommendation is to keep it relatively simple so that it is easier to paint your shield when it comes time to. Also, overly complex patterns can tend to be not as attractive or distinctive.

Here are the basic Partitions and a few of the more interesting complicated ones.

Partitions


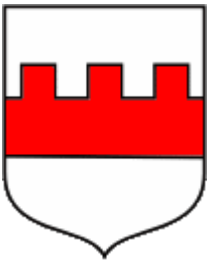



Partition Name	Example	Historical Meaning / Notes	Partition Name	Example	Historical Meaning / Notes
Chief		Dominion, Authority, Wisdom	Pile		Construction
Pale		Military Strength, Fortitude	Pall		
Bend		Defense	Pall Reversed		
Bend Sinister			Quarterly		
Fess		Honor	Saltire		Resolution
Chevron		Protection	Barry of 4		You can have more or fewer Bars too: 6 and 8 are usual.
Gyronny of 8		You can also have Gyronnys with more or fewer sections: 6 and 12 are usual.	Chequy		The checks can be bigger or smaller than this.

Pally of 6		You can have more or fewer Palls by making them skinnier or wider..	Paly-Bendy		This is just a combination of a Pally and a Bendy.
Bendy		You can have more or fewer Bends by making them skinnier or wider.	Chevrony		You can have more or fewer Chevrons by making them skinnier or wider.
Lozengy		A Lozenge is a single "diamond-shape" (or a square turned on its end. Lozengy repeats the Lozenge enough to cover the field.	Bordure		The main field (blue) of the shield has a border (yellow).

Lines of Divsion

The lines used to partition the field in above can be simple divisions between sections of the Field, such as is shown in the examples of Pale, Pall, and Bend above. But note that they can also be wide, such as is seen in the Pally, Barry, and Bendy, even if you use just one. If they are wide, then they have their own Tincture, which is a great opportunity to make a very interesting looking design. Feel free to combine multiple Lines of Division.

But, lines do not need to simple straight-edged lines; they can have a pattern to them too. Here are just a few of many different types of lines that you can use. These can look great when done well, but they can also be hard to make, so make sure you can pull it off if you want to use one of these.

				
Cotised	Embattled	Engrailed	Rayonee	Wavy

No matter how you have divided your field, your Primary Color must be in the Dexter Chief. This can be a little confusing depending on how the field is divided, however, being higher is most important. In the examples above, here are which colors are Primary:

Barry, Gyronny, Chequey, Pally, Lozengy: White

Paly-Bend, Chevrony: Yellow

Bendy, Bordure: Blue

Bordure may be a litte bit of a surprise. The reason that it is still blue, is that the Bordure (Border) is assumed to be "around" the field. So the Dexter Chief is still within the Blue area, not the yellow.

Charges (Devices)

Choosing Your Device

The Charge(s) (aka Devices) that you choose will be your personal symbol(s). For inspiration, browse the links at the end of this document and/or do your own reading and internet searches. There are hundreds of charges that were used in medieval times and modern heraldry has brought in even more. Choose a good one! Like the Tinctures, it should be something that has significance to you, so do not feel obliged to rely on historical symbols and their meanings.

Since we are living in modern times, you can use just about anything that you like, including modern objects that aren't listed in catalogs of historical charges. For example, Sir Aaron used a parachute release pin as his device since he likes to skydive, and one of Sir Cowl's devices is a pumpkin. Parachutes didn't exist in medieval times, and the pumpkin hadn't been discovered by Europeans yet since it was only in the Americas. These are charges that a medieval knight never would have been able to choose!

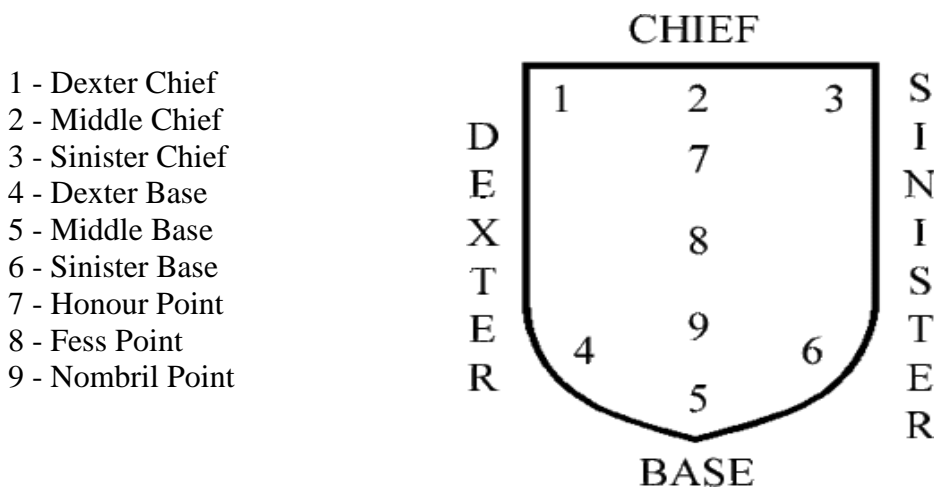
Tinctures for the Charge

You have a couple choices for how to apply color to your Charge. One way is for it to be the color of one of your chosen Tinctures. For example, if your colors are gold and blue, you could have your device be blue on a gold background. That's very common in medieval heraldry and can be the easiest to paint.

The other way is to allow the Charge to be its natural color(s), no matter what it is and no matter how many colors may be needed to depict it. When you do this, the Charge is said (in the language of heraldry) to be "proper".

Placing the Charge

Your charge(s) may go anywhere on your shield that you would like, though the most common locations for charges are in the diagram below. Each position has a name:

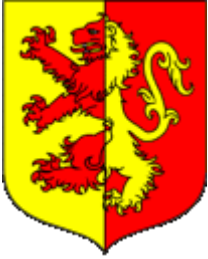


- 1 - Dexter Chief
- 2 - Middle Chief
- 3 - Sinister Chief
- 4 - Dexter Base
- 5 - Middle Base
- 6 - Sinister Base
- 7 - Honour Point
- 8 - Fess Point
- 9 - Nombril Point

You may also repeat charges to create a line (in a bend or a fess, for example), change their facing, flip them upside down, etc. There are really no limits on this. The goal is to make it look good, and be unique.

Counterchanging

When a charge crosses a line of some sort, you have the opportunity to counterchange it. This means that the charge is one color on one side of the line, and a different color on the other side. This can be a bit complicated to make, but is visually very interesting. Here are some examples:



This is a nice simple example. The lion is counterchanged across a field divided in half vertically (per Pale).



Maryland's state flag is a great example of two types of more complicated counterchanging.

The black and gold quarters are each a Pally that has a counterchanged Bend going through it. In other words, start with alternating columns of gold and black. Then, draw a Bend from the upper-left corner to the lower-right corner. In the spaces where the Bend intersects a gold column, it is changed to black. And wherever it intersects with a black column, it becomes gold.

In the other two quarters, the red and white crosses are counterchanged quarterly.

The Rules: Putting it All Together

Heraldry has MANY rules, but we want to make this a fun project, not a 4 hour reading assignment. Here are the rules that we follow at TSC. They're based on the actual rules of heraldry, but greatly simplified:

1. Rule of Tincture: Do not put a metal on top of a metal.
2. So, you can't put a charge that's a metal on a metal background.
3. The loophole for this is that a naturally-colored charge (i.e. a Proper charge) is always allowed.
4. Furs are also exempted from this rule. So you can put a fur on a fur if you want. However, it is very unusual for there to be more than one fur used. The reason being that it can be visually distracting to have multiple complex patterns such as furs.
5. Your primary color is the one that is in the shield's upper-right-hand corner (i.e. the dexter chief).
6. You may only use purple if you can document that you are descended from royalty.
7. Family members must share an element in their heraldry. This can be a Tincture or a Charge. This is an TSC rule that's a nod to the tremendously complicated set of heraldic rules around how coats of arms are combined by marriage and how they are inherited (known as Marshalling).
8. Charges should be in good taste and not contain anything potentially offensive or controversial. Please do not use overtly political or religious symbols.
9. Your heraldry must not look too much like any other TSC member's heraldry. We will review your submission and let you know if there's a conflict.
10. Your heraldry should be easily recognizable from a distance. Remember, this is what would identify you on the battlefield, and if you join the medieval demonstration classes, your tabard/surcoat will contain your colors and device too. You will want to stand out!

TSC Heraldry (Some Of It)

			
<p>Dame Elizabeth Single Charge on an unpartitioned Field</p>	<p>Sir Wes A complicated device, but made by using a stencil.</p>	<p>Dame Lori The Charge is not exactly Counterchanged, but it is close.</p>	<p>Sir Ben Charge is "Proper"</p>
			
<p>Sir Cowl Two Charges on a Bordered Field</p>	<p>Sir Craig Nice use of the shape of the Charge (a comet) to emphasise the Bend</p>	<p>Sir Richie, Sir Cowl's nephew, took his same design but reversed the colors</p>	<p>Sir Eric Gyronny of 8 with the charge in the middle to avoid having to paint a very delicate intersection of 8 lines.</p>

Heraldry from some recent students:



Good Web Sites

<https://www.heraldsnet.org/saitou/parker/index.htm>

Particularly useful is the index of charges (devices).

<http://www.rarebooks.nd.edu/digital/heraldry/index.html>

<http://www.internationalheraldry.com/>

This has a lot of the detailed rules of heraldry.

There are also a lot of examples of coats of arms.

<http://www.gamedecor.com/abasworld/heraldry/basics.htm>