

Planning a Court Agenda

Part of preparing for any court is taking the list of business to be done and arranging it in a suitable order. Every court is unique, and there is no objective way to decide on the ‘best’ possible court agenda. The agenda should adapt to the awards and other business taking place, the people who will be called up, the style of the Crown, and the needs of the event. This guide does not offer firm rules, or an outline of how court ‘should’ go. Instead, for each general type of court business, it discusses the considerations that may affect its placement in a court agenda.

A Note on Timing

In almost all circumstances, court should take half an hour or less. Different items of business take different amounts of time (with peerage ceremonies often taking more than fifteen minutes each), but this often works out to a maximum of 10-12 items of business.

If you are unsure how long things will take, put some ‘sacrificial’ items in the second half of the agenda that you are willing to move to a later moment, and task a member of the household with letting you know when you are two-thirds of the way through the planned time. If you have not reached the second half of the agenda by that point, you’ll know you need to postpone those sacrificial items for another occasion.

Awards

Awards of Arms

Awards of Arms often happen fairly early in court, to prevent them being overshadowed by ‘bigger’ awards. Because it will be most recipients’ first award, particular care should be taken to make it a special moment. If there are multiple Awards of Arms to give, these should only be given together if they are recognising deeds the recipients have done together. Generally, it is better to space multiple Award of Arms ceremonies out over the length of the court, using non-award items of business (like presentations and appointments) as ‘spacers’ between the Awards of Arms and any ‘bigger’ awards that come before them.

Mouse Guard

The best timing for the Mouse Guard is going to depend on the children involved. It is always a good idea to speak to someone who knows the child about how they are likely to react to being in court. If they are likely to be uncomfortable in front of the full populace, it may be better to do a special mini-court for just the Mouse Guard ceremony wherever the children are gathered at the event.

Unlike other awards, where it is usually better for each recipient to have a separate ceremony, if there are multiple Mouse Guard awards to give in a single court, it is best to group them together. The children can be called up as a group or one at a time, and the Crown can speak to them individually, but the formal litany, summoning of the guard, and proclamation should only happen once.

The placement of this ceremony in court should take into account that the later it is, the longer the recipients have had to be on their best court behaviour before they get called up. However, if it happens early in a longer court, it may be best to give the Mouse Guard permission to depart if they wish at the end of the ceremony, so they don't have to stay on good behaviour up the front for a long period of time.

Other Common Awards

Most of Lochac's armigerous and non-armigerous awards have a similar cultural 'weight' and can be treated similarly in court planning. (For exceptions, see 'Rare Awards' below.) They are a step 'above' an Award of Arms, but a step 'below' a rare award, and usually fit well in between them, as a way of building up from one to the other.

If there are multiple people receiving the same award in a particular court, there are three approaches that can work well. If the recipients are being given the award for something they did together, they can be called up together and spoken to as a group. If the court is pressed for time, the opening litany for the award can be read once, then each person can be called up one at a time to receive words from the Crown and their award token, before the proclamation is read for the whole group. However, the most common approach is simply to do the whole ceremony for each individual, but space the ceremonies out between other items of business, so that the populace never has to listen to the same litany twice in a row.

Rare Awards

The presentation of a Court Barony, an Augmentation of Arms, the Lochac Order of Grace, or one of Lochac's grant-level awards (Red Wyvern, Silver Pegasus, and Cockatrice) is a rare and special occasion. The ceremonies for these awards are emotionally intense, and can easily overshadow items that come after them. It is generally best to build up to these ceremonies with some more common awards first, and to follow them with a 'spacer' item of business (like an appointment or a presentation) to help reset the mood if court is continuing afterwards.

Peerage Invitations

An invitation to the peerage is a very significant emotional moment, and just like the rare awards, it can easily overshadow what comes afterwards. If it isn't the final item in a court, it may need a 'spacer' item after it, such as a presentation or appointment, to help reset the mood. If there is the opportunity to call the recipient forward for something else and then keep them in court for an invitation to the peerage, that can be excellent theatre.

Peerage Ceremonies

Peerage ceremonies should almost always be the last item of business in a court. They are long, they overshadow almost anything else in intensity, and they also usually end with a large group of people taking turns to hug the recipient right in the middle of court. If a court must continue after a peerage ceremony, the herald will need to verbally instruct the recipient and the Order they have joined to move the embraces to one side while court continues.

Non-Award Crown Business

General Addresses

Sometimes the Crown may wish to address the populace with some general words, such as a welcome to the event in Opening Court or a thanks for the event in Closing Court. These words generally work well as the first or last item of business in court, unless there is a particular connection to some other item of business.

Announcements

Formal announcements in court include changes to Kingdom Law, conditions for Crown Tourney, information about Baronial Succession processes, and other similar items. Because of their importance, they may work better near the beginning or end of court rather than sandwiched in the middle.

Appointments

Appointment of a new Kingdom Officer, members of the Royal Household, or other appointments by the Crown (e.g. champions, generals, royal entertainers) can occur at any time during court. If one of the people being called up is also receiving an award, it can be excellent theatre to call them up for their appointment, then stop them from departing and immediately transition to the award ceremony. Otherwise, appointments can act as useful ‘spacer’ items of business after a more intense emotional moment.

Fealty Renewal

At almost every event during the reign, there will be at least some attendees who wish to renew their fealty and haven’t already had an opportunity. The usual custom is to give them the earliest possible opportunity to do so, by placing the Fealty Renewal ceremony as an early item of business in the court agenda for the event.

If there will be Barons, Baronesses or Greater Kingdom Officers in attendance who have not yet renewed their fealty in person, the order of precedence for fealty renewals is Baronages, then Greater Officers, then all other Peers. At a very large event (especially early in the reign), where there may not be room for all Peers at the front of court, it may be helpful to split them into Royal Peers, Peers of the Martial Orders, and Peers of the Peaceable Orders, as is done in the Coronation ceremony.

Other Business

Acknowledgement of Country

The Kingdom of Lochac exists on the lands of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and Māori people.

In Australia, it is currently considered respectful practice to recognise this with an Acknowledgement of Country as the first item of business in Opening Court. This should take place before any other addresses or welcomes, and can be conducted by any person who feels comfortable and able to do so. Because this is a floating responsibility, it should be discussed between the Crown, court herald, steward, and any local Baronage before Opening Court, so everyone knows who will be doing it.

Best practice for Acknowledgements of Country has changed over time, and is likely to continue to change. Rather than providing specific advice here, we direct you to <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/acknowledgement-of-country> and <https://www.reconciliation.org.au> as starting places for your research. AIATSIS (<https://aiatsis.gov.au/>) has resources that can help you identify the traditional owners of the area where an event is taking place.

For a virtual event, or an event with attendees from across Lochac, it may be appropriate to follow the acknowledgement of specific local traditional owners by extending respect to all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, and the Māori people of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

To the best knowledge of the writers, at the time this guidance was compiled, there was no equivalent custom in Aotearoa/New Zealand of formal acknowledgement of the Māori people.

Heralds and others are advised to watch for changing practices in this space, and adapt to what is currently considered respectful by their local indigenous communities.

Stewarding Team Announcements

In Opening Court, the steward often asks to speak to the populace to welcome them and offer information about the day. In Closing Court, they often wish to speak in court to thank their team. At more complex events, the steward or members of their team may at times ask to speak in court to share information for the populace.

Words from the stewarding team may need to step outside the shared fiction of the game (e.g. to talk about parking), so they generally work best at the beginning or end of court rather than in between other business. The steward's words of welcome in Opening Court should usually be early in that court (typically just after any welcoming address from the Crown or the local Baronage). Other announcements from the stewarding team often work best at the end of court, as that makes it easiest for the populace to remember the details when court is over.

Baronial Court

If the local Baronage has business in court, it should occur as a single section of the court, but that section can be placed at any point in the agenda. If a person is receiving an award in both courts, that may be a useful transition point. If the Baronial Court and Royal Court both include items around the same area of endeavour (e.g. both have archery awards), it may work well to cluster those items near each other.

Presentations

Presentations include any gift being given in court, such as a scroll being presented by the College of Scribes, a gift from a local group to the Crown, or a gift from a guest Baronage to the local Baronage.

These items of business are often late additions to the court agenda, with the givers tracking down the court herald during the event to let them know. In this situation, the court herald should tell the giver they will consult with the Crown, and let the giver know later what has been decided. It is always the Crown's prerogative to refuse to include an item of business if the court is too busy. An alternative for presentations is to make a public moment outside Court for the item to be presented, such as during a feast.

If presentations are included in court, they can occur at almost any point, and can be useful 'spacer' items between ceremonies that are more emotionally intense.

Prizes

Prizes for tourneys and competitions are sometimes given by the local Baronage, sometimes by members of the event team, and sometimes by the Crown, and their placement in royal or baronial court can also float. As such, it is important to clarify exactly who is responsible for this item of business (and who has the prize tokens being given). Prizes are usually considered local business, with the exception of prizes for Kingdom A&S Competitions, which are generally considered to fit better in royal court.

If a member of the event team is giving the prizes themselves rather than providing a list for the Crown, Baronage, or their heralds to use, it can be helpful for the court herald to check in with them and get a sense of how much time they think they will need. This should take into account both the number of prizes and the amount of ceremony attached to each one: calling up a list of ten people for a single cheer, with tokens given out later, can take less time than presenting a single prize with words about the deeds of the recipient and the history of the token they are receiving. If there is a large number of prizes to be given, and it is important to give each one some ceremony, it may be necessary to split up the prizes across multiple courts.

Prizes don't have a fixed position in court, but tend to occur late in the list of business, as they are part of 'wrapping up' the event. However, if there is someone receiving a prize who is also on the list for an award, it can be excellent theatre to move the prizes earlier, then ask the recipient to remain after their prize and launch straight into the award ceremony.