

Teaching in the SCA

What could I possibly teach? Who would be interested in learning something from me?

The SCA is an **educational** organization. Every time we share information about the Middle Ages, we are **teaching**. **All** of us are teachers; some just don't realize it!

If you teach it, they will come!

The purpose of this class is to share with you some suggestions that will hopefully help you to feel more comfortable sharing what you know. We will focus on teaching a class within the SCA, although much can be transferred to other teaching situations, such as demos, workshops, even writing a how-to article for your local newsletter. I welcome your questions and suggestions, and I encourage you to share your experiences.

Good classes don't just "happen"; but bad ones do!

Contrary to what many people think, you do not need to be an expert to teach a class. Thorough preparation is much more important than an all-encompassing knowledge of the subject. Even if you know everything there is to know about a topic, if you don't adequately prepare for your class, you will not successfully convey to your students what you know.

*“Getting ready is the secret of success.”
-- Henry Ford*

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1. Planning

Decisions, decisions, decisions....

Several months before the class, make decisions about the class:

- Content -- What will the class be about?
- Audience --Who is it for?
 Beginners; intermediate students (have some knowledge); or advanced
 What prior knowledge or materials, if any, should students bring to the class?
 People learn in different ways. Some learn best by seeing and reading; others learn best by listening. Some learn best by moving and doing. Talking, writing, observing, and reflecting are all good ways to help people learn. Think of how you might include these different ways of learning in your class.
- Purpose – What will attendees get out of the class? Why would someone want to attend this class?
 Will they learn information about your topic?
 Will they produce something?
 Will they learn techniques/tips on teaching this topic (do’s and don’ts)?
- Scope of class
 Survey -- everything there is to know about the topic
 Focus -- emphasis on one particular aspect of topic
- Type of class --
 Lecture -- you tell students everything you know about the topic
 Discussion -- you provide direction, students share what they know
 Demonstration -- you show students how to do it
 Hands-on -- students try it for themselves
 In-persona teaching/discourse – teach in the manner your persona would have
 * **Don’t be afraid to try something new!** (Ex.: in-persona teaching, discourse)
 * **Don’t be afraid to use modern AV technology!**

Not sure which type of class yours should be? Consider:

- Which type would you be most comfortable with?
- Is your class topic limited by any factors (for example, classroom size, available time, etc.)??
- Which type is most appropriate for your topic?

	Pros	Cons
Lecture	Don’t need to bring as much “stuff” Can be a large class	Can be dull Do you have enough material?
Discussion	Never the same class twice! Don’t need to bring as much “stuff” Can be a large class Everyone learns something	Can be difficult to “control” Easy to get “off-topic” Harder to plan for audience level Inaccurate information may be presented
Demonstration	Students enjoy seeing skills/techniques Smaller classes work better	Facilities may be a problem Need to bring a lot of “stuff” Need sufficient time
Hands-on	Students enjoy learning new skills Smaller classes work better	Facilities may be a problem Need to bring a lot of “stuff” Need sufficient time

Consider these limitations which may affect your class:

- **Materials**
Choose materials that are inexpensive; convenient to transport, use and clean-up.
If students need to bring materials, they will need advance notice.
If you will provide materials, will there be a fee? (How will you let them know?)
Be sure to charge enough to cover your expenses.
- **Facilities –**
Do you have special needs? If so, you will need to inform the class-o-crat.
“Special needs” might include: electricity, sink or access to water, whiteboard or chalkboard, long tables, overhead or projectors, no/few stairs to classroom, etc.
(If appropriate, you may want to bring your own extension cord and adapter, dry erase markers or chalk, slide carousel, etc....)
- **Time limits/constraints**
Demonstration and hands-on classes generally need more time.
If the process you’re teaching is time-consuming, consider videotaping or photographing (slides or still photos) the process to show to your class.
(Think about how TV cooking shows use the “magic oven” to condense time: the cook puts the food in the oven, and seconds later, it’s done!)
- **Skill level of students**
- **Class size**
Affected by type of class, facilities, time limits, skill level of students.
(If your class is for beginners, keep the class size small or have helpers. If the class is advanced, it will probably be small, anyway.)
- **Set-up**
How long will it take you to set up for the class on that day?
Will you require assistance?
HINT: If your class requires a lot of set-up time, request the first time slot of the day or – if there is a lunch break -- the first slot after lunch. Or, ask for an extra-long time slot: 1.5 hours instead of 1 hour, for example.
- **Clean-up**
How long will it take you to clean up after your class ends?
Will you require assistance?
Will you need to bring any clean-up supplies (garbage bags, paper towels, cleaning fluids, etc.)?
HINT: If your class is messy, consider covering tables with contractor-size garbage bags, vinyl tablecloths, old shower curtains, or newspapers to protect surfaces and speed clean-up.
HINT: If your class requires a lot of clean-up time, request the last time slot of the day or – if there is a lunch break -- the last slot before lunch. Or, ask for an extra-long time slot: 1.5 hours instead of 1 hour, for example.

Class	Calligraphy through the Ages	Early Gothic Calligraphy
Content	how calligraphy has changed from 500 to 1500 AD	the style of calligraphy used in the 11th and 12th centuries
Audience	anyone	beginners to intermediate students
Purpose	Students will learn the important characteristics of 5 hands (Roman, uncial, Carolingian, gothic, and italic) and why styles changed over a thousand years.	Students will learn the basic letter forms and techniques for writing this style of calligraphy
Type of class		
Scope		
Class size		
Time limit		
Facilities/ Special Needs		
Supplies		
Handout		
Set-up Time		

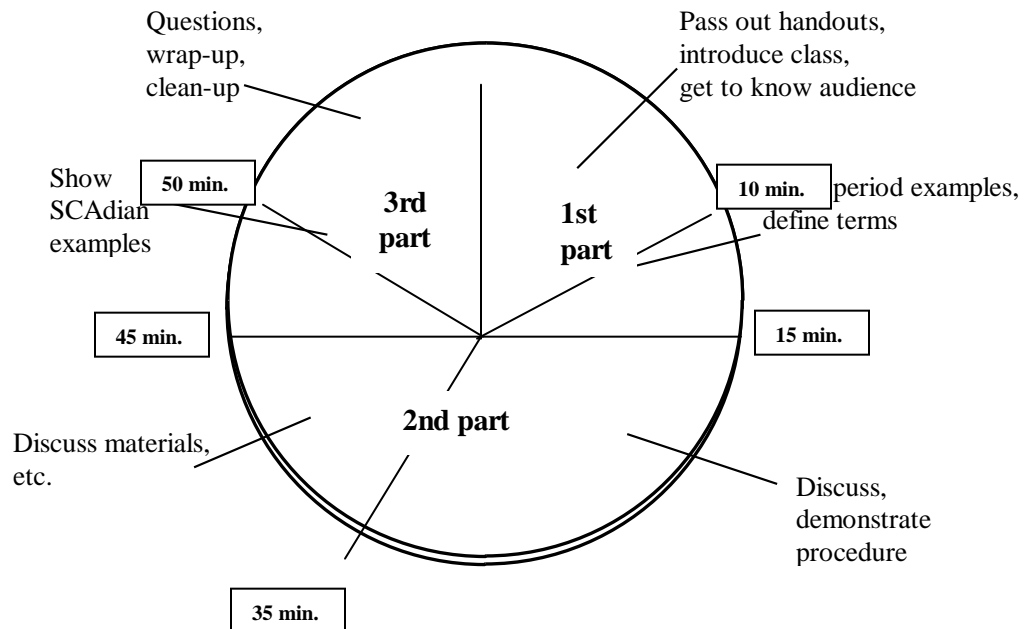
Budgeting your Class Time

Many people believe that they couldn't possibly teach a class for an entire hour. That's because they don't think about how they can break those sixty minutes into more manageable segments.

Instead, think of your class in 3 parts:

1. Tell them what you're going to tell them. (And maybe why it's important to know/do ...)
2. Tell them.
3. Tell them what you told them.

HINT:
Budgeting your time in this way allows you to monitor your pace. If you're running behind, it's much better to shave a minute or two from each "part" than to rush the end. And if it looks like you'll run out of material before time, you can either slow down or add more as you go.



A typical class is made up of several activities. Some possibilities include:

- Introduce yourself: "I've been doing this for 5 years." "I do this for a living."
- Introduce the class: what you intend to cover/accomplish.
- Get to know your audience; find out what they want to learn.
- Help students connect what they already know to the new information you are presenting.
- Show period examples in books, etc.
- Define terms you will be using.
- Discuss step-by-step procedure, demonstrating techniques if possible.
- Teach skills needed for self-evaluation: how to evaluate success, problems to look for.
- Discuss materials: what's best and why, where to get them, how much they cost.
- Discuss tricks, pitfalls, horror stories, etc.
- Show examples you or other SCAdians have made that demonstrate the information or techniques you discussed.
- Question-and-answer period. (Always leave 5 to 10 minutes at the end for questions or comments. Try to anticipate questions ahead of time, so you can be prepared to answer them. Common questions include:
 - What was done/How was it done in period?
 - Who did it (certain classes? men? women?)
 - What are some good reference sources?
 - Where can I get the necessary materials? How much do they cost?
- Allow sufficient time to clean up before next class. (Ask for help.)
- If class is longer than an hour, you might consider having a break midway.

So, as you can see, an hour really isn't all that bad. In fact, you may have trouble fitting in everything you want to cover!

2. *Publicity*

Contact the class-o-crat. Provide her/him with the following information:

- title of class
- a brief description of the class (1-2 sentences)
- audience level (beginner, intermediate, advanced)
- any special needs/facilities or scheduling requests
 (“Don’t schedule my class opposite ___”; “Don’t schedule it in the morning,” etc.)
- class limit, if any
- fee, if any
- amount of time needed
- your name (SCA and modern), street address, and phone number; e-mail address
- a brief bio about you/your persona

Your “blurb” is your primary chance to SELL your class! If you want people to attend your class, your “blurb” needs to

- sound INTERESTING!
- make it CLEAR who the intended audience is and what the class will be about.
- indicate what people will GET OUT OF the class.
- tell what TYPE OF CLASS it will be.

(Other publicity options include websites, social media, putting a small display/sample/poster near troll or near sign-up sheets for limited classes, word of mouth, etc. ...)

“Bad” blurbs

- are vague
- don’t indicate the class’s scope or intended audience.
- don’t tell what level of skill or experience is expected.

Here are some “blurbs” from an old Pennsic book. How successful are they?

Diapering

A discussion and history of the art of “diapering” in illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages. Diapering is an intriguing, mostly geometric, background decoration technique in “historiated capitals” and manuscript miniatures.

Authentic Underwear

Bring one or more yards of cloth and leave with a piece of underwear cut out and ready to sew. Some cloth will be available for purchase.

Catena d’Amore

Master XXXX introduces dancers to the “Chains of Love,” whipping them into shape to face the discipline of 16th century dance. Catena is an intermediate dance level by Cesare Negri which bears similarities to both Trenchmore and the Tangle Bransle.

English Country Dance 101

The basic steps of the English country dance.

Reversible Blackwork Embroidery

This counted-thread embroidery technique was popular during the 16th century. Learn history and technique by working on a small project adapted from a Renaissance pattern. Beginners and “lefties” welcome.

Mathematics for the Fifteenth-Century Italian Merchant

Are Roman numerals slowing down the tally of your inventory? Come and learn the wondrous new Arabic numerals! Quick techniques for performing complex price calculations, double-entry bookkeeping, and multiplication with your fingers. Beat the competition with the latest scientific advances! An in-persona discussion.

Roots of Islam, History and Theology

An outline of the early history of the faith and how it has evolved over the centuries. For non-Moslems, looking at the theological roots of Islam should be helpful in dispelling some of the modern myths surrounding this religion.

An Introduction to Catharism

Ever wondered how souls got into those troublesome bodies and separated from God? Come learn about the fascinating new spiritual movement that’s sweeping the south of France! Hear an actual survivor of the massacres by the Papal troops of non-resisting men and women! (Taught in persona.)

3. Preparation

Get ready!

- Make a list of supplies/materials you will need to take. Gather them and keep them *in one place*.

HINT: Plastic totes, file boxes, and rolling crates are great for storing and toting your things.

- Prepare samples or visual aids. Include **intermediate stages** as well as finished products.

*VISUAL AIDS ARE GOOD! Show-n-tell is **always** a good thing!*

Visual aids should be large enough to be seen by everyone in the class. Bright, contrasting colors are best, especially when trying to show how parts fit together.

Possibilities include photographs, slides, or a videotaped demonstration, as well as actual samples.

HINT: Check out Alton Brown's cooking show, "Good Eats," for the **Best Visual Aids Ever!**

- If you will be passing things around for people to look at, label or mark them.

Don't pass around items that are fragile, valuable or dangerous. If you are going to worry about them, just show them from the front, or ask someone to carry them around to show to class.

- Prepare your handout. Include (at minimum):

- class title
- your name (SCA and modern), address, phone number or e-mail address
- event and date when taught
- outline of class (include major points you will cover)
- (if appropriate) materials/supplies -- recommendations, suppliers, cost
- (if appropriate) bibliography of useful books, including period sources, and websites
- permission to copy (if you don't mind)

When preparing your handout:

- Write it. Put it aside for a couple of days.
- "Tweak" it. Revise as needed.
- Ask a friend to look over it.
- Revise again.

If your handout is large or contains many color pictures, consider putting it on a CD.

I generally include enough detail that someone who didn't attend the class would know what to do from reading the handout. (This is especially helpful for those times when you get sidetracked or delayed by a "chatty" person in your class!)

- Think about questions people might ask. Try to find answers to them.

If possible, bring sources that provide answers to important questions.

- Close to the class date, confirm with class-o-crat:
- time of class
 - any special needs
 - If you need help, will someone be available to help you carry and set up your things?

- Make copies of your handout. Put them with your supplies/materials.

To figure out how many copies to make, check your size estimates, event/feast limits. It's better to have too many than too few. Often people will ask for additional copies.

***** Don't leave your handouts at home! *****

- Practice teaching your class on friends at home. *(Invite them over for food!)*
- If you are teaching a hands-on class and you are providing materials, make up a kit for each person. This will save time getting things passed out at the beginning of class.
- Check your supplies/materials to make sure you have everything. Put them where you won't be able to forget them. (Like in your vehicle!)

Tote boxes are GREAT! Rolling crates are even better!

- If you will be charging a fee, bring money to make change and something to keep it in.

That day....

Wear something you'll be comfortable in. Wear or bring a watch.

Get to the site early.

Check the time and location of your class. *Double-check it!*

Find your room. Locate the nearest bathroom. *You will need it!*

Bring something to drink with you to the classroom.

Carry your supplies/materials to your room. If possible, set things up ahead of time.

(If you need help ferrying stuff, check with the class-o-crat or the autocrat.)

Look over your notes/handouts. Add any last-minute comments or ideas.

4. Presentation

Zero hour, or Some things to remember....

It's ok to feel nervous. Just try not to let it show. (*Too much!*)

Very few people will be there early or on time. Don't start talking about important points for 5 minutes, or maybe 10. In that time:

- Display the class "Agenda" / "Topics to Cover." (This sends an important signal to the students: "*I own this class. I have a lot to cover. You will learn a lot! Let's get started!*")
- Pass out index cards and ask students to jot down a "burning question" they are hoping you will answer during the class.
- Pass out your handouts. (Put extras by the door so latecomers can pick up copies as they enter. Ask someone sitting near the door to make sure everyone gets one.)
- Collect money (if there is a fee) and take roll (if students signed up in advance).
HINT: To save class time, arrive early and start before class begins. Or, ask a friend or a student in the class to distribute handouts and collect money for you. Or simply pass a hat.
- Welcome students and thank them for coming to your class.
- Introduce the class; tell what you intend to cover.
- Tell a little about yourself.
- Get to know your audience; ask questions. Find out about their skill level and expectations. Ask each person to tell their name and where they are from. Use this information to personalize the class. This also helps to create a "community" where people share similar interests/fears/questions and feel they have something to contribute.
- Find out about their expectations for this class and questions they would like to have answered during the class. (If desired, jot these down for all to see – some call this the "Question Garage" – and return to them later.)
- Let students know up front whether you welcome questions during your presentation or if you prefer that they hold them for the end.

People will trickle in and drift out. **DON'T LET THAT THROW YOU!!**

Ask students to give you feedback. **HINT:** At the beginning of class, have students write on an index card: *The most helpful/important/cool thing I learned from this class is ...* or *One thing I can use from the class is ...* On the other side, have them write, *One thing that still puzzles me is ...* or *I wish you had spent more time* .)

If this is your first time teaching this (or any!) class, don't hesitate to mention this up front. Let your students know that you would appreciate their feedback at the end of the class.

At the beginning of class, ask someone (the "chatty" person?) to signal you 10 or 15 minutes before the class ends so you will have enough time to wrap things up.

Convey enthusiasm for your topic, through your voice, eye contact, gestures, etc. To keep your listeners' attention, change your voice's volume, intensity, speed, etc.

Make eye contact; look around the room.

When demonstrating something, make sure everyone in the class can see.

Follow your outline/handout, but don't simply read it word-for-word! Cover more in class than is included in your handout.

Make sure everyone in the class can hear you.

HINT: If you have a tendency to speak too softly, ask someone in the back to signal if your volume is too quiet.

Don't speak too quickly; it takes time for sound to travel from your lips and be decoded by a listener's brain. Give your students time to absorb what you've said.

HINT: If you know you have this problem, ask someone in the back to signal you.

HINT: Spend time listening to reporters/announcers on NPR; compare how they sound to commercial radio announcers.

Keep in mind that your audience will be HEARING your words, not READING them. Most adults today aren't used to following the thread of an argument from start to finish; that makes the speaker's job much more challenging. So, ...

- At the beginning, state where you are heading and how you will get there.
- Allow time for your listeners to "process" information before going on to the next point; pause before moving on to new key ideas.
- Use signal words like "First," "Second," and "Finally" to help listeners keep track of where you are.
- Give a "summing-up" sentence to allow them to take in what they have just heard and to get ready for the next point.
- Make sure it's clear how the new point relates to the previous one.
- Spell unfamiliar words for the compulsive note-takers in the audience.

Try to build in opportunities for people to comment, share ideas, discuss, etc.

When possible, have students work in pairs. This works well in classes where you want students to discuss as well as in hands-on classes.

HINT: At the beginning of class, pass out color-coded index cards. Use one color for students with some experience and a different color for students with little/no experience. Ask students to sit next to someone with the opposite color.

*** Some students feel intimidated or self-conscious in hands-on classes. Be LAVISH with your praise! Give them a "praise sandwich": compliment something that's working/right, offer a suggestion for improvement, then compliment something else.

Instead of pointing out flaws in what students are doing, ask, "*What's working for you?*" "*How's it going?*" "*How can I help you?*" Often, students will point out their own flaws – and then you won't have to!

Never apologize for what you don't know. We are all here to learn.

Always say so when you don't know the answer. You **will** regret it if you offer incorrect information. At the very least, everything you say in the class will then be suspect.

Thank everyone for coming! *Smile! You're done!*

5. Problems

Pitfalls to avoid ...

Lack of focus

Make sure there is a point to your class. Keep it in mind all the time!
Your point should NEVER be “See how wonderful I am!”

Lack of sufficient material to fill the time allotted

Don't count on your audience to “fill in the gaps” you create.

Don't waste class time

Arrive on time (or *early!*).
Set up in advance, if possible; if not, plan your set-up so it takes as little time as needed.
Bring everything you need with you.

Tough Stuff ...

Teaching to your audience

Sometimes, in spite of what you wrote in your class description, you do not get the audience you intended. You may find that you need to quickly change your approach or method once class has started. Be flexible! Try to be prepared for last-minute changes!

Fielding Questions

Listen to the question. Make sure you understand what the person is asking.

If you're not sure what the person is asking, get them to clarify:

- “Could you give me an example?”
- “Do you mean?”

Repeat the question so **all** can hear it.

Answer questions succinctly. Consider: *What does the class need to know, not just the questioner?*

If you have a long, involved answer to a question, answer it after class. Wait until after class to answer specific questions that are not very relevant to most of the audience.

Correcting Errors and Inaccuracies

Sometimes students will cite “facts” that you know or suspect are wrong. You don't want to embarrass the person, but you also don't want people to walk away thinking that what the person said is correct. Saying something like, “*Hmmm, I have not encountered that in my research*” sounds much better than “*You're WRONG!!*”

Dealing with “chatty” students or “hecklers”

When students are talking while you are trying to teach, it can be very disconcerting. Assume it’s because they have a question but don’t want to bother you. Stop what you’re saying, glance at the area where the talking is coming from, and ask something like, “*Can everyone hear me okay? Do you need me to repeat or clarify that last point? Do you need me to spell that? Have I lost anyone?*” Generally, this will do the trick. However, if the disruption continues, you can either choose to ignore it or use one of these super-secret-Jedi-teacher-mind-tricks:

- Don’t try to talk over them. Instead, speak more softly. (It works! Really!)
- Pause and wait for the talking to stop. When it does (it will ... eventually!), continue with the class.
- Stroll over to the area where the talking is coming from. Stand there until the conversation ends. Teach from there or return to your original spot.
- Pause. Look directly at the talkers. When the talking has stopped, continue with the class.

Sometimes, students in the class seem to be there not to hear what you have to say but rather to take advantage of a “captive audience.” This can be an awkward situation, because you do not want to come off looking either incompetent or like a jerk. Here are some ways to handle this.

First, acknowledge the person. Say something like, “*Oh, I am so glad to meet another fan of _____!*”

Next, validate his/her interest and knowledge. “*It sounds like you have a lot of experience! Would you have time after class to tell me more?*”

Encourage participation, but don’t allow anyone to monopolize or take charge of **your** class! If it becomes apparent that someone is trying to usurp your class, deal with the person politely but firmly. Here are some possible things to say: ***Practice saying these at home while looking in a mirror!***

- “That’s a great question! I’d like to save that for the question-and-answer portion at the end of the class.”
- “That’s very interesting. I’d really like to hear more about that after class.”
- “Goodness! Look at the time! I’m afraid we won’t be able to finish if we don’t return to my agenda.”
- “I’m sorry, but that’s beyond the scope of this class.”
- “This is a class for beginners. Since you are obviously much more advanced than the rest of the students here, you may not want to waste any more time sitting in on this class. Perhaps you could find a class more suited to your skill level.”
- “Thank you for sharing that with us. Let’s hear from someone else.”

If you think it would help, give the person **A Very Important Job**: signaling you every ten minutes, or making sure that latecomers get handouts, or holding something, or collecting show-n-tell items after they’ve been passed around,

The important thing is: **Keep things moving in your class!** Remember: You’re the one who did all the work to make the class happen. Don’t let someone else derail or sidetrack your plans!

HINT: If you want to be *really sneaky*, ask a friend to sit in on the class; devise signals to use if problems arise. When you signal, your friend says something like, “I’d like to hear more from our instructor about _____.”

6. *Post-mortem*

Afterwards....

Keep a copy of your handout, notes, list of materials, class-o-crat information, etc., in a file. Date the file. You may want to jot down how many people attended.

Evaluate how you did. Make notes on things you would do differently next time: what worked, what didn't. Don't be afraid to try something new or change you approach. Would having more (or less) time help?

Ask someone who attended the class for a critique.

If you asked your students for feedback, read through their comments. Use their suggestions to make improvements.

Talk to other teachers in your field; find out how they teach classes on your topic. Attend others' classes in your field, to see how they do it.

If you teach the class again, all you'll have to do is pull out the file and update it.

Information to give to the Class-o-crat

About you

Your SCA name _____

Your modern name _____

Street address _____

Phone number _____

E-mail address _____

Brief bio about you/your persona _____

About your class

Title of Class _____

Description of the class (1-2 sentences) _____

Audience level _____

Class limit, if any _____

Fee, if any _____

Amount of time needed _____

Special needs/facilities, if any _____

Scheduling requests, if any _____

Class Title _____

Taught at _____

Date _____

Content

Audience

Purpose

Type of class

Scope

Class size

Time limit

Facilities/Special Needs

Set-up Time

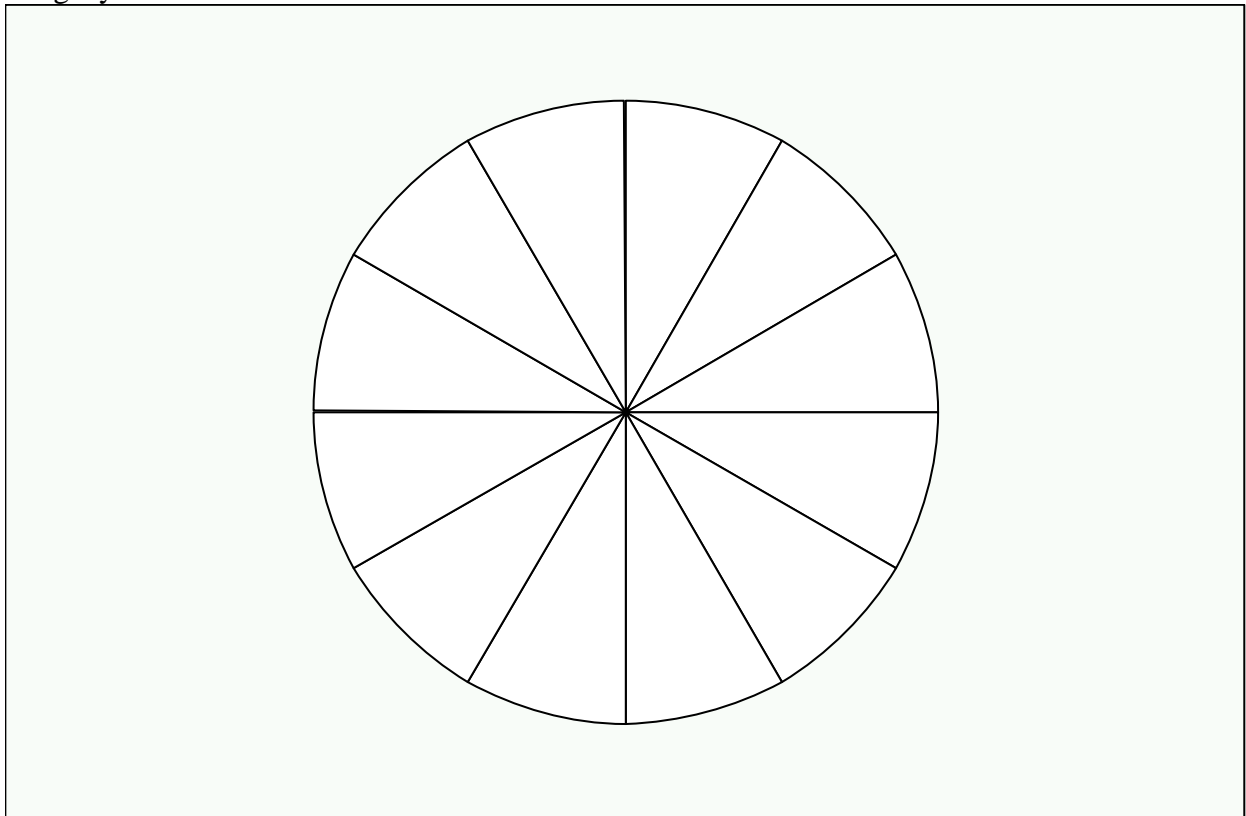
Description of the class (1-2 sentences) _____

Plan your class

List materials, supplies, to bring

Outline your class

Budget your time



Class Title _____

Taught at _____

Date _____

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