



Artist-Blacksmith's Association of North America, Inc.  
15754 Widewater Drive, Dumfries, VA 22025-1212  
Phone: 703-680-1632 Fax: 703-680-6222  
abana@abana.org • www.abana.org

## DEMONSTRATOR GUIDELINES (for public demonstrations)

**Foreword:** *The following guidelines are meant to serve as a set of helpful hints to those who have not demonstrated before. As you perform more demonstrations, you will find that adjustments may be necessary. Remember, when you are in front of the public, you are representing not only yourself, but other blacksmiths as well. Act accordingly. Integrity and safety should be at the forefront of your thoughts. These guidelines should be helpful, but are not to guarantee that all will work smoothly. A good safe demonstration requires a conscientious blacksmith. That, we can guarantee. Have fun. Demonstrate often.*

### BASIC TOOLING

When doing a public demonstration, you should have the proper tooling to explain the different processes and complete your forging. The more tooling you have to display, the better, but the more work involved in setting up and tearing down. The ideal setup would be a self contained trailer with a complete shop separate from your home shop. For the person just starting to demonstrate, it is suggested that you only take the basics.

Forge - with hood and good hand crank blower

Anvil - 125# and 175# are sizes that can be handled by one person easily.

Hammers - cross, straight, ball peen

Tongs - take only what is needed to hold stock sizes you will be using.

Cutters - hot cut, cold cut, chisels

Saw - hack saw with spare blades

Hold Fast

Coal - good quality (take only what you will use)

Water Bucket - a 5 gallon plastic bucket works well and can be used to haul tools

Punches - center and hole

Files - hot rasp and touch up (with handles on them)

Vice - make adapter plate to mount vice in anvil or use separate stand

Wire Brush

Flux

Blackboard

Display Table

Steel - pre-cut as much as possible and limit to smaller sizes

Tool Stand - neatness goes a long way when demonstrating

Safety Glasses - you need to make this a top priority

Drill - hand crank or brace

First Aid Kit - accidents are bound to happen, so be prepared

Twisting Wrench

Metal Finish

Fire Extinguisher

Rope and Stakes

Sprinkle Can

## SITE LOCATION

There are several things to consider when selecting a site. Remember, no one will show up to help until after you are done.

- 1) You should always try to set up in the shade, under a tree, beside a building, or under a shelter. It gets extremely hot while working and you will need this.
- 2) Check to see what will be set up around you. Stay away from quilt makers and others that the smoke and/or fly ash might do damage to their products.
- 3) If at all possible, try and set up to the right of the entrance. People have a natural tendency to go that way.
- 4) Set up in a depression with the public standing at a level about two feet higher. They get a better view and it reduces the chances of them being hit by slag, etc.
- 5) Avoid concrete and asphalt. These surfaces are very tiring for your feet and hot metal can melt asphalt.
- 6) Have a clean area without trash. Leave the area as clean as or even cleaner than you found it.

## SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Safety should be #1 in every demonstrator's mind--not only for the audience, but for you as well.

- 1) Work slow and always be aware of your audience. In your home shop, you naturally work faster and take certain things for granted. Never assume or take anything for granted while demonstrating.
- 2) Separate the audience from your forging area as much as possible. Use a rope barrier, display table, or something to make a boundary. People tend to move closer and closer as they get involved in watching. Most demonstrators try to keep at least ten feet distance between the forging area and the audience.
- 3) Always wear your safety glasses, and if possible have your viewers wear them also.
- 4) Preferably, keep your audience in front of you instead of on the sides. Always control your audience--never let them control you.
- 5) Wear an apron. Not only is it nostalgic, but it could prevent injury and embarrassment!
- 6) Talk about safety and warn of sparks, sharp edges and hot items. No matter how sincere they may be, don't let the viewers pick up tools or pieces you are working on.
- 7) Keep all hot pieces (cut-offs, etc.) under the forge and away from people. It may be best to quench all pieces to be on the safe side.
- 8) Have a first aid kit handy. You never know when you might burn or cut yourself.
- 9) Forge welding is always fascinating to watch, but can be very dangerous. It is best not to forge weld if possible.
- 10) Small children are naturally curious and will get right next to the forge or anvil. Be especially careful if they are present. Their little faces are right in line with the anvil and can be hit with slag or a chip of metal. It is not a bad idea to request parents to hold small children while you demonstrate.
- 11) When using a hardy, never cut completely through stock. Use your tongs to break the end off. A cut piece of steel can be a misguided missile if you aren't careful.

## SET UP

Normally, the layout of your equipment is what feels good to you. However, when demonstrating in public you should consider the audience and remember the safety aspects involved. Keep it simple, but have everything you need. A small work table is good when assembling items. For large audiences, bleachers work well and you can control the demonstration better. Make sure access is available to get equipment to the demonstration site. The last thing you need to do is lug an anvil across a parking lot to your site. Arrive early and set up so as not to interfere with other demonstrators.

## WHAT TO DEMONSTRATE

Everyone has a different level of proficiency, but when demonstrating in public you need to keep projects short and fairly simple. The attention span of your audience is relatively short since there may be other sites to see. Small quick-to-make items will also sell better if they see you make them. Rehearse your demo and have it down pat so that it will go smoothly.

Now is not the time to try a new technique. It is a good idea to have a speech prepared so you can explain the steps as you go. Always bring extra items you plan to demonstrate, so if someone is interested in purchasing one, you will have enough.

Some of the more popular items to demonstrate are:

Nails - this covers several processes and can be done in two heats or less

"S" Hooks

Skewers

Leaves - you can use them to make small souvenirs

Chain Links - caution should be used because of forge welding

Fire Poker

Screwdriver - perhaps the twisted handle type

Wizard Head - these are unique in the public's eyes

Letter Openers - these are utilitarian and gives you freedom for unusual design

Dinner Gong

You might also consider demonstrating with another person. For example, a two-person sledge demo to demonstrate drawing out of a bar could be done.

## THINGS TO TALK ABOUT

During a demonstration (between heats), it is good to have ideas of topics to talk about. There is no need to get technical or go into a long explanation of a tool or process because these people are there to be entertained.

- 1) If the audience won't ask questions, stimulate them by asking some of your own.
- 2) Pass around a chunk of coal and a piece of coke explaining how coal is converted into coke. Most people have no idea what you use to fuel your forge.
- 3) Tell them about the Industrial Revolution and the role the blacksmith had in it. Include some of the history of blacksmithing and how it evolved from the Stone Age.
- 4) There is a lot of interesting information to be passed on about the differences in wrought, mild and tool steels. Explain the plasticity of metal when it is heated.
- 5) The general public has always heard the term "wrought iron" to describe any forged work. You might explain what wrought iron really is.
- 6) People like to hear clean jokes, folk tales, and superstitions associated with the craft.
- 7) Talk about the tools of the trade, the many parts of an anvil and its function.
- 8) Be sure and note the presence of local or state affiliates and the national organization of ABANA. You never know when there might be someone in the crowd who has been looking for such a connection.
- 9) Distinguish the difference between blacksmithing as an art form and farrier work.
- 10) No matter where you go there will be people that will intentionally try and trip you up with a question. If you don't know the answer, say so. It is better to learn something new than to be made a fool.

## SELLING TECHNIQUES

It is easier to sell what you make during a demonstration, so choose your projects accordingly. A display board or table with some samples of your work is good and can lead to jobs down the road. Photo albums of past work are also a good selling tool. Keep a supply of business cards handy if anyone asks to have one. Keep extra stock of demo items in case an item you are demonstrating gets a lot of interest. Be able to make change with smaller bills. Price sale items fairly and don't cut the price. Remember, you are a craftsman.