

How To Make A Coat Of Arms

Introduction: Why Create Your Own Coat of Arms?

A coat of arms is more than just a flashy medieval badge; it is a visual representation of identity, values, and heritage. Originally used by knights to identify themselves on the battlefield, heraldic emblems soon became symbols of family lineage, civic pride, and personal achievement. Today, you do not need to be royalty or a knight to design one. Learning **how to make a coat of arms** allows you to tell your own story through ancient symbols, colors, and patterns. Whether you are creating a family heirloom, a logo for a club, or a personal emblem for a creative project, this guide will walk you through every step of the heraldic design process.

In this article, we will cover the essential rules of traditional heraldry, explore the meaning behind colors and symbols, and provide practical tips for crafting a unique, meaningful design. By the end, you will have the knowledge to create a coat of arms that is both historically informed and personally significant.

Understanding Heraldry: The Basics

Before diving into design, it helps to understand the language and structure of heraldry. A coat of arms consists of several parts, but the central element is the **shield** (or escutcheon). Everything else – helm, crest, mantling, motto, supporters – is optional, though they add grandeur. For a simple yet authentic design, focus on the shield. The rules that govern heraldry, known as the **laws of heraldry**, are meant to ensure clarity and contrast. One key rule: never place a color on a color, or a metal on a metal. Colors are called **tinctures**, and they fall into three categories: metals, colors, and furs.

The Three Tincture Groups

- Metals:** Gold (Or) and Silver (Argent). Represented by yellow and white.
- Colors:** Red (Gules), Blue (Azure), Green (Vert), Purple (Purpure), Black (Sable). Each has traditional meanings.
- Furs:** Ermine (white with black tails) and Vair (alternating blue and white shapes). Add texture and prestige.

Using these correctly ensures your design is legible and adheres to heraldic tradition. For example, a red lion on a gold field is permissible (color on metal), but a blue lion on a green field is not (color on color). When learning **how to make a coat of arms**, always check contrast.

The Shield: Your Foundation

The shape of the shield matters less than what is on it, but it can set the tone. Traditional shapes include the **heater shield** (classic medieval), the **French shield** (square with a pointed base), or a simpler **oval** for a more modern look. Choose a shape that feels right for your purpose.

The shield's background is called the **field**. It can be a single tincture, or it can be divided into sections using **lines of partition**. Partitions add complexity and allow you to combine multiple symbols. Common partitions include *per pale* (vertical line), *per fess* (horizontal line), *per bend* (diagonal), and *quarterly* (four quarters). You can also use **ordinaries** – geometric shapes that run across the shield, such as a **fess** (horizontal band), **pale** (vertical band), **bend** (diagonal band), or **chevron** (inverted V). These serve as a framework for placing charges.

Charges: The Symbols on Your Shield

Charges are the animals, objects, or geometric figures placed on the shield. They are the heart of your coat of arms, carrying the meaning. When exploring **how to make a coat of arms**, the choice of charges is where personal storytelling begins.

Common Heraldic Charges and Their Meanings

- Lion:** Courage, royalty, strength.
- Eagle:** Power, vision, freedom.
- Fleur-de-lis:** Purity, French heritage, light.
- Rose:** Love, beauty, England.
- Sword:** Justice, military honor.
- Oak tree:** Strength, endurance, wisdom.
- Star (mullet):** Nobility, guidance.
- Castle:** Fortitude, security, civic pride.

You can also use everyday objects – books, tools, musical instruments – as long as they are stylized and recognizable. The key is to select symbols that resonate with your identity, values, or family history. Avoid crowding the shield; one to three major charges is enough. For balance, you can add smaller charges around a central figure or on a chief (a horizontal band at the top of the shield).

Writing the Blazon: The Formal Description

Every coat of arms comes with a **blazon** – a precise, jargon-rich description that allows anyone to recreate it. Learning to write a blazon is part of mastering **how to make a coat of arms**. The blazon follows a specific order: field tincture, partition (if any), ordinary (if any), then charges with their positions and tinctures.

For example: “*Azure, a lion rampant Or, armed and langued Gules*” means a blue shield with a gold lion standing on one hind leg, with red claws and tongue. The blazon uses the language of heraldry: “rampant” describes the lion’s posture. Other common postures include *passant* (walking), *sejant* (sitting), and *couchant* (lying down). Learning a few heraldic terms adds authenticity and helps you describe your design clearly.

Choosing Tinctures and Patterns with Intention

Colors in heraldry are not arbitrary. While modern interpretations may vary, traditional associations can guide your choices. For **how to make a coat of arms** that feels purposeful, consider these meanings:

- Gold (Or):** Generosity, elevation of mind.
- Silver/White (Argent):** Peace, sincerity.
- Red (Gules):** Warrior spirit, magnanimity.
- Blue (Azure):** Truth, loyalty.
- Green (Vert):** Hope, joy, loyalty in love.
- Purple (Purpure):** Royal majesty, sovereignty.
- Black (Sable):** Constancy, sometimes grief.

You can also add **patterns** like *paly* (vertical stripes), *barry* (horizontal stripes), or *checky* (checkerboard). These add visual interest without needing extra charges. Remember to maintain contrast: if your field is a color, use a metal for charges, and vice versa.

Optional Accessories: Helm, Crest, and Motto

Once your shield is complete, you may add external elements. The **helm** (helmet) sits above the shield and its style indicates rank – a closed helm for gentlemen, an open visor for knights, a barred helm for royalty. The **crest** sits atop the helm and is often a smaller version of the main charge or a separate symbol. The **mantling** is a cloth cape that flows from the helm, usually in the main colors of the shield. A **motto** appears on a ribbon below the shield; it can be in any language and should express a guiding principle.

When including these, ensure they complement rather than overwhelm the shield. The shield remains the core of any coat of arms.

Step-by-Step: How to Make a Coat of Arms

Now that you know the components, here is a practical workflow for creating your own. Follow these steps to design a coat of arms that is personal, heraldically sound, and visually striking.

Step 1: Define Your Purpose and Symbols

Ask yourself: What values, achievements, or heritage do I want to represent? List three to five key words (e.g., courage, family, craftsmanship, faith, nature). Then, brainstorm visual symbols that match each word. For example, “courage” could be a lion or a mountain, “craftsmanship” could be a hammer or a quill. Narrow down to one or two primary charges.

Step 2: Choose Your Field and Tinctures

Select one or two tinctures for the background. If you use a partition, decide on the line (straight, indented, wavy, etc.). Apply the rule of tincture: if the field uses a color, your main charge should be a metal, and vice versa. For example, a green field (Vert) with a gold lion (Or) works beautifully.

Step 3: Position Your Charges

Sketch the shield shape lightly. Place your primary charge in the center (the *fess point*). If you have two charges, consider placing them side by side or one above the other. Use heraldic postures: a lion can be *rampant* (rearing up), *passant* (walking), or *statant* (standing still). Birds are often *displayed* (with wings spread). Inanimate objects are simply centered.

Step 4: Add an Ordinary or Division (Optional)

If the shield feels too plain, add an ordinary like a **chevron** or **bend**. This can also separate two different charges or add structural interest. For example, a *per fess* division with a different symbol in each half can show two aspects of your identity.

Step 5: Refine the Blazon

Write a short blazon using heraldic terms. This ensures your design is reproducible. Example: “*Per pale Azure and Gules, a lion passant Or armed Argent.*” If you are unsure of the terms, a simple description like “blue and red divided vertically, with a gold walking lion” is fine for personal use.

Step 6: Create the Visual

Now, bring your design to life. You can hand-draw it using pencils and colored markers, or use digital tools. Free online heraldic generators (such as Heraldicart or DrawShield) allow you to input a blazon and see an instant design. Vector software like Inkscape or Adobe Illustrator gives you full control. For a traditional look, use clean, flat colors and stylized silhouettes for charges.

Modern Uses for Your Coat of Arms

Once you have completed **how to make a coat of arms**, you can apply it in many ways: print it on stationery, use it as a family crest for reunions, embroider it on a banner, or feature it on a website. Some people register their design with heraldic authorities (like the College of Arms in England or the Chief Herald of Ireland) for official recognition, though this is not necessary for personal use. Your coat of arms is your creative expression, rooted in a centuries-old tradition.

Common Mistakes to Avoid