

A Quick and Dirty Guide to Conflict Checking

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The most important thing to remember about conflict checking is that most devices are going to be free from conflict, and those that aren't are mostly easy to change so that they will be. Before we actually get to conflict checking, though, there are a few ideas we need to address:

Clearing Conflict

There are three ways to clear a conflict between two devices:

1. (X.1) If you add or remove a primary charge, there's no conflict: "Gules, a lion and a chief ermine" does not conflict with "Gules, a chief ermine." Similarly, "Vert, a chevron between three water bougets Or" does not conflict with "Vert, three water bougets Or."
2. (X.2) If the device is simple (see below), then no device with a different primary charge, even if everything else is the same, can conflict with it. For this to apply, the two charges must be "substantially different." Thus, a pine tree is not substantially different from an oak tree (because they are both trees), but is substantially different from an arrow or a lion. This rule keeps you from having to look through the whole Ordinary for conflict.
3. (X.4) If there are two CD's (clear differences) between two devices, they do not conflict. When you're actually looking for conflict, this is where you'll spend your energy.

What are you looking at?

The first step to conflict checking is analyzing the device. Ask yourself the following questions (if you don't understand them, read the glossary, which explains these terms):

- What's the primary charge?
- Is there a secondary charge?
- Is there a peripheral ordinary?
- Is there an overall charge?
- Are there tertiary charges on any of the charges?
- What's the field?
- Is it simple armory?

What is simple Armory?

Armory is simple if:

- there is only one type of primary charge (and nothing else) with or without tertiaries
- there are two types of primary charges with no tertiaries
- there is only one type of primary charge and one type of secondary charge

So, the following are simple:

1. Argent, a tree eradicated sable.
2. Azure, in fess a plate between an increscent and a decrescent.
3. Sable bezanty, three millrinds argent.
4. Gules, on a bend argent three goutes azure and on a chief argent a sunburst gules.

The following are not simple:

5. Or, a tower between three roses, a bordure gules.
6. Per saltire gules and sable, a saltire between in pale 2 mullets and in fess 2 lozenges argent.
7. Argent, a sword overall a bend gules.

Conflict checking Simple Armory:

You only need to conflict check against devices with the same primary charge and devices with a primary charge which is not substantially different from your own. The organization of the Ordinary should give you ideas about what conflicts.

For example:

- mullets are not substantially different from estoiles; if you go to Mullet in the Ordinary, it will say “See also: Caltrap and Estoile and Sun”
- categories with the same overall heading (like trees) are not substantially different

So, “Gules, on a chevron between three billets argent each charged with a pheon sable three clarions azure” does not conflict with “Gules, on a fess between three billets argent each charged with a pheon sable three clarions azure.”

Now, this makes your life much easier, because all you’ve got to do is identify the primary charge, and then check the categories that are not substantially different. For most charges, there aren’t too many items to check.

You’re looking to make sure that there’s nothing that’s less than 2 CD’s away from the proposed armory. To do that, first you’ve got to know what changes give you a CD. The basic rule of thumb is this:

- You can get only one CD from changes to the field, no matter how significant.
- For charges on the field (primary, secondary, peripheral, overall), you can get a CD for each change to at least half of the charge group.
- Addition or removal of a group of charges is only worth one CD.
- You can only get one CD from changes to one group of tertiary charges.

Now, we’re finally ready to actually look at armory. The O&A is found in several locations online:

<http://oanda.sca.org/>

<http://www.farreaches.org/heraldry/OandA/>

<http://newmarch.org/heraldry/OandA>

<http://www.wgz.org/heraldry/OandA/ordinary>

Each of them is linked from www.sca.org/heraldry/laurel, so you can follow the links from there. Which site is best varies over time, but at least one of them is always up and running.

So, where do you look for possible conflicts?

1. The Exact Match: Find the category in the Ordinary and look under the field tincture. Read every blazon that has the same field tincture!

2. One CD Away: Look in that category under other field tinctures and under other charge tinctures. Remember, you’re now a CD away (because you’ve changed the tincture of either the field or the charge, and only need one more difference. Don’t forget to look at fieldless and tinctureless badges. Also don’t forget that once upon a time we were not consistent about rules of contrast, so sometimes there’s stuff with really poor contrast. Searches work well here, if a device has more than one charge.

3. Other subcategories: Look in that category under other numbers and positions - you’re now a CD away and need to match everything else exactly (tinctures, arrangement, etc.), so don’t bother looking anywhere except under that field color and that charge color. Also try charged or uncharged versions of the same charge, or changes in line type for central ordinaries. Searches work well here too!

4. Other Categories: Try other categories that are only a CD away (even if your armory is X.2 simple): mullets are a CD away from estoiles, various kinds of trees are a CD apart, as are quatrefoils and cinquefoils. Remember that you’re now a CD away and need an exact match, so don’t bother looking anywhere except under that field color and that charge color. Usually, I find it easier to read through the items with the same field color than use searches.

5. What if you’ve got two types of primary charges? Then you need to check both of them, because “Vert, a sun and a sword argent” conflicts with either “Vert, two suns argent” or “Vert, two swords argent.” However, you only need to check one of them completely. For the other one, remember you already have one CD for the change of type of half the primary charges, so just check the exact match.

The Gory Details of Conflict Checking:

Getting CD's from Primary (and central ordinary) charges

You can get a CD for change in number of primary charges or type, number, tincture, position (on the field), or posture of at least half of them. You can get both CDs from the primary charge. Exceptions:

- large numbers are hard to tell apart, so 4 is the same as 5, 5 is the same as anything from 4 to 7, and all numbers six and higher (including semys) are the same.
- many animals of the same sort are not a CD apart (cats and lions, dogs and wolves)
- Star-like things with more than 6 arms are not a CD apart (mulletts/estoiles/suns)
- All architecture (towers, bridges, etc.) can conflict.
- Maintained charges (things held in a hand or around the neck, for example) cannot give a CD, no matter how many there are (unless one of them is equivalent in size to the charge holding it, in which case it is blazoned "sustained")

When an ordinary is the primary charge, you can get a CD for changes to type, tincture, number, or changes to the type of line of the ordinary (plain to something else, or between line types). Not all changes to the line are sufficient for a CD: basically, if it gives a similar feel, it conflicts (so embattled is a CD from wavy, but nebuly and wavy conflict).

Getting CD's from Secondary (and peripheral ordinary) charges

You can get a CD for change in number of secondary charges or type, tincture, position, or posture of at least half of them. You get a CD for removal or addition of a secondary charge. You can get both CD's from changes to secondary charge(s).

You get a CD for changing the type of peripheral ordinary, or for replacing a secondary charge with a peripheral ordinary (and vice versa). You can also get a CD for change in tincture or number (for example, a change from a bordure to a chief and a base gives two CDs, one for type and one for number). You can get a CD for changes to the type of line of a peripheral ordinary, only if it is the same kind of ordinary. You do not get a CD for changes to the line if you change the type of peripheral ordinary. You can get both CD's from changes to a peripheral ordinary.

Getting CD's from Overall Charges

For overall charges, you can get a CD for change in number of overall charges or to type, number, tincture, position, or posture. In addition, you can get a CD for adding or removing overall charges. You can get both CD's from changes involving overall charges.

Getting CD's from Tertiary charges

You can only get one CD for changes to a set of tertiaries, though you could get 2 CD's from two different sets of tertiary charges on two different charges. Normally, you need changes to two of the following - type, tincture, number, or posture - to get a single CD. On an ordinary or a simple geometric shape (but not mullets), you can get a CD for substantial difference of the tertiaries. To get a CD for this, all the tertiaries (in that group) must be the same, and the difference must be substantial (see glossary). People often call this class of difference X.4.j.ii (after the rule number).

Maintained charges (things held or worn, for example) are not tertiary charges and do not contribute to difference.

Getting CD's from the field

If there is a primary charge (or central ordinary) you can get one CD for changes to the field (and only one, no matter how different). While a semy is a secondary charge, ermine is a field. Ermine is a CD from argent; other furs are a CD from their base color (and each other). Thus, "Gyronny wavy argent and sable, a lion azure" is only one CD from "Bendy gules and Or, a lion azure."

And two more spoilers...

- Fieldless badges (arms cannot be fieldless) have one CD from any other armory, even another fieldless badge. However, you cannot get a CD for difference in position on the field. Thus, "(Fieldless) A pear vert" conflicts with "Per chevron Azure and Or, in base a pear vert."
- Tinctureless badges have one CD from any other armory (because they're fieldless). However, the second CD must come from the outline of the charges. Internal lines of division don't count for difference, nor do changes for the field. Thus, "Per pale azure and Or, a mullet of four points counterchanged" conflicts with "(Tinctureless) A mullet of four points distilling a goutte" with only one CD for tincturelessness. There are only a few tinctureless badges, as we have not registered them for many years.

Glossary

Primary charge: The charge(s) in the visual center of the shield. If there is one or more central ordinary(-ies) this is usually the primary charge(s). For example, in "Argent, a bend sable" and "Argent, two bendlets sable" the bend(lets) are the primary charges. In "Argent, a lion sable", "Argent, three lions sable", and "Argent, semy of lions sable" the lions are the primary charges. If there is no other central charge, a semy is a primary charge. If there are charges only in chief or base, they're still the primary charge. Not every device has a primary charge, but most do.

Secondary charge: A charge or group of charges around the primary charge(s). Therefore you cannot have a secondary charge without a primary charge to surround. For example, in "Argent, a fess between three lions sable" and "Argent, semy of lions, a fess sable" the lions are the secondary charges, surrounding the primary fess. Similarly, with the case "Argent, a fess and in chief a lion sable", the lion is the secondary charge. In each case if you removed the fess the lions would become primary.

Peripheral charge: A charge or group of charges that follows the edge of the shield, such as a bordure, a chief, an orle of charges, etc. It is not necessary for there to be a primary charge present. For example, in both "Argent, a bordure sable" and "Argent, a lion within a bordure sable" the bordure is the peripheral charge. Peripheral charges act like a kind of secondary charge.

Overall charge: A charge that overlies a primary charge. The underlying charge is the primary. In period heraldry the overall charge is almost always an ordinary, and usually a bend. For example, in "Argent, a lion sable surmounted by a bend gules" the bend is the overall charge, and the lion the primary.

Tertiary charge: A charge or group of charges which lies entirely on another charge. For example, in "Argent, on a bend sable three mullets argent" the mullets are the tertiary charges. You may have different tertiary charges on different charges (though you may not put tertiaries on tertiary charges).

Substantial difference: Two charges are said to be substantially different if the difference between them is sufficiently great that they would not be used to indicate that two people are closely related. Thus, a pine tree and an oak tree are not substantially different, but an oak tree and a lion are substantially different. If the primary charges for simple armory are substantially different, the arms are clear under X.2 (#2 in the handout).

CD (clear difference): A difference that would normally be found between a father and son to indicate cadency. Two differences of this sort are required in the Society between armory. Multiple changes that are each less than the sort used for cadency cannot "accumulate" to make a CD. Sometimes called significant difference.

Field primary armory: Armory without a primary charge (either no charges or only peripheral charges). In this kind of armory, both CDs come from changes to the field (see RfS X.4.a.ii).

If you have questions, feel free to contact me or try the Æthelmearc Herald's Mailing List at aethel-heralds@lists.andrew.cmu.edu or SCAHR LDS@scahrlds@listserv.aol.com.