



MASTER SMITH APPLICANT

Eligibility:

Before standing for the performance portion of the test for Master Smith, the applicant must have been an ABS Journeyman Smith for one (1) full year. The Master Smith applicant must have held the rating of ABS Journeyman Smith for two (2) full years, before presenting his work for evaluation at the Annual Show and Meeting.

Conditions for Performance Test:

The test must be observed and administered by an ABS Master Smith.

The applicant must make prior arrangements with the Master Smith whom he/she selected to supervise the performance test.

The test may be conducted at the shop of the Master Smith or at any official ABS function where the facilities lend themselves to the safe and responsible conduct of the testing procedure (hammer-ins, etc.). Exceptional circumstances may occasionally exist wherein this is not possible. Exceptions to this rule may be granted by the Chairman of the American Bladesmith Society; however, this approval may only be granted after conferring with the testing Master Smith prior to the proposed test date.

Blades or any component of a completed knife made in any instructional class will not be eligible to be used for performance tests or presented to the ABS Judging Panel for fit and finish examination for the rating of Journeyman Smith or Mastersmith.

Either the supervising Master Smith or the applicant may request that one or more witnesses be present during any or all testing procedures. This condition must meet with the approval of the Master Smith supervising the performance test.

Reasonable and appropriate safety precautions must be followed. The applicant assumes responsibility for any injury incurred while performing the test.

The applicant is further responsible for providing all safety equipment such as, but not limited to; safety glasses, a heavy shop apron, leather gloves, etc.

The applicant must have personally forged and performed all work on the test blade, with no other person physically assisting in its construction or heat-treating.

Only forged blades may be tested. Applicants for Master Smith rating must test with a pattern welded Damascus blade per the test knife specifications.

Once the test begins, no work, not even light stropping, may be done to the test blade.

The applicant alone must conduct the test of the blade's performance under the supervision of the Master Smith. No other person is to conduct any portion of the test, including the supervising Master Smith, except for the rope-cutting test as specifically provided in the rope cutting procedure. A special exception may be obtained for an applicant who has a disability that requires accommodation in order to perform the test. Such exception must have prior written approval from the Chairman of the ABS.

Test Knife Specifications:

Overall Length of Knife: Maximum fifteen (15) inches.

Blade Width: Maximum two (2) inches.

Blade Length: Maximum ten (10) inches from point to the beginning of either the guard, bolster, or handle of the blade.

Handle Configuration: The test blade must be of a "stick tang" or hidden tang design. If the tang bends over during this test, the applicant fails. Any handle configuration is acceptable with or without guard, bolsters, ferrule, etc.

Handle Material is irrelevant and solely the choice of the applicant.

Blade Material: The Journeyman Smith must test with a forged blade that has a minimum of 300 layers of pattern-welded Damascus steel and was made by the applicant.

***NOTE:**

The Master Smith test knife must be forged with a "stick" or hidden tang handle. A full tang is not acceptable as a test knife. If a blade is loose in the handle, or in the judgment of the supervising Master Smith presents a risk, the knife may be refused for testing. This does not count as a failure to pass the test. The applicant may proceed with the test when any such handle looseness is corrected to the satisfaction of the supervising Master Smith.

Supplemental Test:

The applicant may be required at the Master Smith's discretion:

- A. To forge a non-Damascus blade of any style.
- B. To forge-weld a billet of pattern-welded Damascus.
- C. To pass a verbal quiz.

Testing:

The applicant must supply materials needed for the performance test:

- The ABS Performance Test Certification Form.
- All safety equipment including safety glasses, heavy shop apron, gloves, etc.
- A sufficient length of one (1) inch minimum diameter sisal or manila rope.

- A four (4) foot or longer length of 2x4 construction grade wood stud of the applicant's choice.
- The applicant's test knife. No special handle or finish is required, though it is recommended that the test blade be lightly etched so that the master may view the layer count. This is a test of performance, and the test knife will ultimately be destroyed during the testing process.
- While not a part of the formal test, the applicant is encouraged to bring several finished knives for the Master Smith to inspect for quality of workmanship, fit, finish, design, etc. The feedback from the Master Smith is intended to help the applicant better evaluate whether the quality of his/her work (design, detail, finish, etc.) is likely to meet the criteria of the ABS Judging Panel at the annual show.

The Performance Test must be conducted in the following sequence:

NOTE: ALL TESTS MUST BE PERFORMED BY THE APPLICANT, EXCEPT AS SPECIFICALLY PROVIDED FOR IN THE ROPE CUTTING. THE MASTER SMITH IS TO SUPERVISE AND SERVE AS THE OFFICIAL ABS WITNESS.

1. ROPE CUTTING: THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEST IS TO TEST THE EDGE GEOMETRY AND SHARPNESS. The applicant is responsible for supplying the test rope and ensuring that it is a minimum of one (1) inch in diameter. If the applicant brings a larger rope, the applicant will be judged using the same criteria as though the rope was one (1) inch in diameter. The rope is to be hung in a safe manner, so that the end of the rope to be cut hangs loose without touching the floor or any other object. As a safety precaution, the rope is not to be handheld by another person during the rope-cutting test. The hanging end of the rope is to be marked with tape or a marker to clearly indicate the area that is to be cut. The cut must be approximately six (6) inches from the end of the free hanging rope. A minimum of one (1) cut must be made. The applicant is to aim at the mark with a two (2) inch margin of high or low being acceptable. The applicant must sever the rope in two with one stroke. If the applicant fails on the first attempt, the Master Smith will allow two more attempts. However, if the Master Smith believes that the failure to sever the rope is due to the lack of skill or strength of the applicant, the Master Smith may attempt the rope cutting with the test knife. This is a test of the applicant's ability to make a knife, not his or her ability to cut with it. If neither the applicant nor the Master Smith successfully cuts the rope, the applicant fails.

2. WOOD CHOPPING: THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEST IS TO DEMONSTRATE EDGE TOUGHNESS. The chopping test is to be conducted with a 2x4 construction grade wood stud. The 2x4 may be either handheld or clamped into a vise or other safety device. A chopping motion (no whittling) is to be used. The 2x4 must be chopped completely through a minimum of two (2) times. The applicant may choose the area of the 2x4 through which to chop. Following the chopping test, the Master Smith will inspect the edge to determine if there is any noticeable damage to the blade. Any nicks, chips, flat spots, rolled edges, or other deformations of the blade, including bending, will result in failure of the test.

3. SHAVING HAIR: THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEST IS TO DEMONSTRATE EDGE RETENTION. After the Master Smith approves the quality of the edge, the blade will be returned to the applicant. The applicant must then shave hair from his or her arm, using the section of the blade that was most frequently used in the cutting and chopping portions of the test.

Enough hair must be shaved to demonstrate that the edge remains keen and shaving sharp.

4. BENDING: THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEST IS TO SHOW THAT THE APPLICANT IS ABLE TO HEAT TREAT A KNIFE WITH A SOFT BACK AND A HARD EDGE.

The bending of the blade is the final test. Safety gear should be worn. The edge and point will be dulled prior to bending. The Master Smith will mark a line across the width of the blade approximately three (3) inches from the tip of the blade. The blade will then be inserted into vise, tip first, such that the blade is placed into the vise up to the mark on the blade. If the vise jaws are very rough, smooth metal or hardwood inserts may be placed on each side of the clamped portion of the blade to protect it when bending the test knife. The blade shall be bent by force applied to the handle. A leverage device, such as a pipe may be used as long as it does not pose a safety risk. The use of such a device is at the sole risk of the applicant and at the discretion of the supervising Master Smith. The applicant will then bend the blade ninety (90) degrees.

The supervising Master Smith will signal the applicant when the ninety (90) degree angle has been reached. *Failure on the part of the applicant to **stop his bend immediately** when signaled to do so by the Master Smith administering the test exposes the tester to risk of test failure, as any blade damage occurring during a continued bend after that point will disqualify the blade.* The blade is allowed to crack at the edge on bending but not beyond approximately **one third (1/3rd) the width of the blade**, leaving two thirds (2/3rds) of the blade intact. However, if any part of the blade chips or any part of the blade or tang breaks off, the applicant fails. The Master Smith shall determine if the extent or location of the fracture line is acceptable. The decision of the Master Smith is final.

Following the Completion of the Performance Test:

After satisfactorily passing the Performance test, the supervising Master Smith will sign and date the applicant's ABS Performance Test Certification Form. The Master Smith is responsible for notifying the ABS of the Pass or Fail Status of the performance test. The Master Smith is encouraged to assist the applicant who has failed the performance test to gain the necessary skills or knowledge needed to satisfactorily meet the performance test criteria on his or her next testing. After (6) six months, the applicant may retest with the same Master Smith or any other Master Smith chosen by the applicant.

Show Requirements:

The applicant is responsible for presenting the *original* signed ABS Performance Test Certification Form and the test blade *in person* to the Judging Panel at the ABS Annual Show and Meeting. No modification of any sort is to be made to the bent test blade following the completion of the test. Any test blade which has been straightened or otherwise altered shall be disqualified.

The applicant must submit a minimum of five (5) completed forged knives of different styles for judging by the ABS Judging Panel. At least one of these knives must be an art knife meeting the ABS requirement of a traditional pattern welded Damascus European Quillon

type dagger with at least three hundred (300) or more forge welded layers. The rest of the knives are required to be of different designs and varieties and can be of different steel types to demonstrate the applicant's ability to make a wide range of classic blades.

Only knives made completely by the applicant are acceptable for submission, including all heat treating and/or enhancements, such as file work, engraving, and/or metal coloration. The applicant is also encouraged to submit only completed knives which show the applicant's best work, as all knives submitted will be judged and the failure of any one knife may cause the applicant to fail this portion of the test. Swords, axes, hatchets, war hammers, and tomahawks or any other pieces other than knives are not permitted during this test.

In the case of folders, the judges will check them for proper construction, blade alignment (open and closed) and operation. No drag marks should be present on the blade or liners, nor gaps, and certainly no "rough spots" in operation. Detents should be fully functional if used and lockups secure, if they exist on the knife. Applicants may include only two (2) folders in the group of five (5) test knives; however, these knives must utilize pattern-welded Damascus blades of the applicant's making. No plain carbon blades will be accepted, nor will any automatic or switchblade knives be accepted. Folders, incidentally, are optional and are not a requirement for this test.

Other than optional folding knives, the art dagger is the only knife required to utilize a blade of pattern-welded Damascus and must be in the form of a European Quillon dagger. The guard of the dagger must be a Quillon guard, similar to those found on European daggers in the middle to late middle ages. A Quillon guard extends outward from the center of the knife and must be even and symmetrical. Flat round guards or oval guards do not qualify. Quillons may be forged or turned but must be traditional to this style of knife.

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The **blade** of this dagger must be forged of pattern-welded Damascus steel of the applicant's making and must consist of at least **300 layers** in construction in any pattern **except** a random pattern. Twists, ladder patterns and mosaic patterns are all encouraged, but be sure that there is at least one section visible which the judges can ascertain that the blade meets the 300-layer minimum. The blade is the only portion of the dagger, which is required to be made of Damascus steel, though Damascus is certainly permitted in the hardware of the handle.

The blade must be a **minimum of 10 inches in length** from guard to tip. The blade must be ground in either a double flat grind (diamond cross-section) or double hollow-ground and must be straight, symmetrical, and contain no flaws or cold shuts.

The **handle** also has some requirements. Its length should be appropriate for the blade and should be made of the very best materials you can afford. The more salient requirements are as follows: The handle must be inlaid with a twisted wire wrap, set to a depth of one half its (the twisted wire's) diameter. The handle must also be fluted for most of its length between the strands of twisted wire. The strands of twisted wire must show the same degree of twist for all. Flutes should be crisp, distinct, and well-finished. The spacing and depth for wires and flutes must also be even and uniform. The wire is not to be glued to the handle and must stay firmly in place, though the hidden ends of the wire can certainly be anchored in any appropriate manner. The rules currently do not specify that the wire and flutes must be spiraled around the handle and we do see some with the wire/flutes running parallel with the handle. With either method, it is recommended that the handle have a minimum of four strands of twisted wire, with appropriate flutes between.

Time Limits:

If the applicant does not pass the performance test, he or she may not present knives for judging at the ABS Annual Show and Meeting. The applicant is not permitted to retake the performance test until six (6) months have elapsed from the date of the failed performance test. There is presently no limit to the number of attempts which may be made to pass the performance test.

An applicant has three (3) years from the date of the performance test to present his or her test blade, Performance Test Certification Form, and five (5) completed knives at the ABS Annual Show and Meeting for judging by the ABS Judging Panel. If the applicant does not complete both phases of the test within a three (3) year time period, the applicant must reapply and complete the performance testing process again.

The applicant is allowed a maximum of three (3) opportunities to present his or her work to the ABS Judging Panel in an effort to secure a rating of Master Smith. Though these attempts need not necessarily be made in consecutive years, no further applications are accepted after a third failure.

Annual Show Disclaimer:

The ABS does not have control over where or when the ABS Annual Show and Meeting will be held. Because dates may vary, some applicants may be inconvenienced and find on occasion that they must wait longer than the expected duration before being eligible to stand for judging as an ABS Master Smith.

Greg Neely, Chairman
Board of Directors
American Bladesmith Society, Inc.
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