

Beginning Fencing HPR 1200

Fencing ~ Study Guide

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What is fencing?

Fencing is defined as the art, practice, or sport in which an épée, foil, or saber is used for defense and attack.

The sport of fencing is fast and athletic. The movements are so fast that the touches are scored electrically. It requires the person to think on their feet and to use strategy to win. Competitors win a fencing bout (what an individual “game” is called) by being the first to score 5 points against their opponent, or by having a higher score than their opponent when the time limit expires (3 minutes). Each time a fencer lands a valid hit - a touch - on their opponent, they receive one point. Foil, épée and sabré are the three weapons used in the sport of fencing.

Fencers come in all ages, sizes and sexes. It is a sport for all ages! A good fencer will take their physical attributes and work them to their advantage.

The main object of a fencing bout (what an individual “game” is called) is to effectively score 15 points (in direct elimination play) or five points (in preliminary pool play) on your opponent before he scores that number on you. Each time a fencer scores a touch, she receives a point. Direct elimination matches consist of three three-minute periods.

Modern Olympic fencing has 3 forms. Each form uses different swords and different rules. The swords are foil, sabre, and épée.

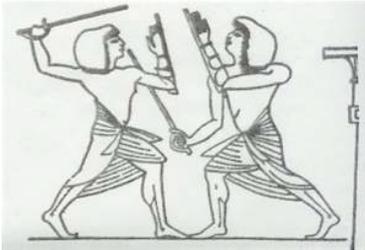
History of Fencing

When most Americans think of swordplay, the images that come to mind are either of the lumbering power of armor-clad knights battling with broadswords, or of the swashbuckling flair of Errol Flynn and other screen duelers of the '30s and '40s.

The modern Olympic fencer trains for years, honing agility, quickness, and subtlety of movement. The sport has been described as “chess with muscles,” suggesting that

complicated strategy lies behind the thrusts and parries that punctuate a duel. Fencers of today employ a strange combination of archaic and modern customs; combatants still salute before a match and wear the traditional white uniforms and masks, but scoring is now determined by electronic padding worn by the combatants that registers when a hit takes place with flashing, color-coded lights.

As suggested by the continuing power of the myths of sword fighting knights and adventurers, the fencing tradition is rich and storied. Like fellow Olympic sports archery



and javelin, fencing has its roots in ancient combat. Around 1200 BC, the Egyptians began the custom of fencing for sport, as seen by images in decorative reliefs from that period depicting knobs on the end of weapons, earflaps and other protective garb. Sword craftsmanship evolved through the ages, from the short, wide swords favored by the Greeks and Romans

to the heavy two-handed broadswords in vogue during the age of chivalry. After the advent of gunpowder and firearms, armor became obsolete and lighter swords gained popularity as the sidearm of choice for European officers and gentlemen.

The Italians, Spanish, and French all claim parentage for modern fencing, but throughout Europe during the Renaissance the discipline took on the aura of high art, with masters refining and passing on to a select few their secret techniques. In the 18th century, treatises appeared in print setting forth the current system of rules and scoring, and prescribing the foil, a metal mask with eye slit, and protective jacket or vest as equipment for use. The rules were intended to simulate real combat while protecting the safety of the combatants. “Conventions” were subsequently adopted to limit the target area of the body and providing for a “right of way” for attacks.

Fencing was a clear choice for inclusion in the Olympic program from 1896 onwards. At the time, the sword was still considered an important military weapon, and sword fighting remained a well-established European custom backed by centuries of tradition. In addition to the foil, contested weapons were the epee, descendent of the dueling sword, and the sabre, which evolved from the weapon of choice for cavalry troops. Fencing remains one of just six sports to have appeared in every modern Olympic Games.



In the first decades of competition, Europeans dominated, with France, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, and the Netherlands all boasting champions. Following World War II, the communist nations of Eastern Europe rose to pre-eminence, with the Soviet Union, Poland, and Hungary sharing the medal stand. Aladar Gerevich of Hungary is considered fencing’s greatest champion, with seven gold medals in sabre competition to his credit.

Until recently, women were permitted to compete only in foil, but now the USFA offers national competitions for women in epee and sabre. Women’s epee was added to the

World Championships in 1989 and will be held for the first time at the Olympic Games in 1996.

Posted on Fencing.net by [Craig Harkins](#) on November 14, 2003

Type of Fencing Weapons

Foil

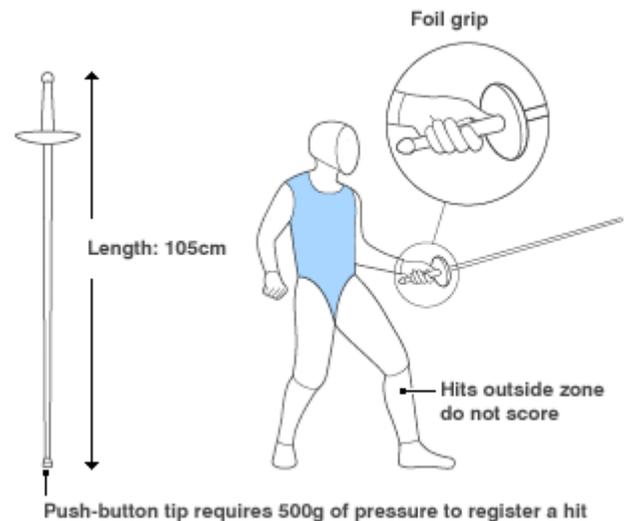
The foil is a descendant of the light court sword formerly used by nobility to train for duels. It has a flexible, rectangular blade approximately 35 inches in length and weighing less than one pound. Points are scored with the tip of the blade and must land on valid target (see diagram). The arms, neck, head and legs are considered off-target. This concept of on-target and off-target evolved from the theory of 18th-century

fencing masters, who instructed their pupils to only attack the vital areas of the body - i.e. the torso. Of course, the head is also a vital area of the body, but attacks to face were considered unsporting and therefore discouraged.

FENCING: FOIL

Scoring zones

■ Scoring zones



Sabré

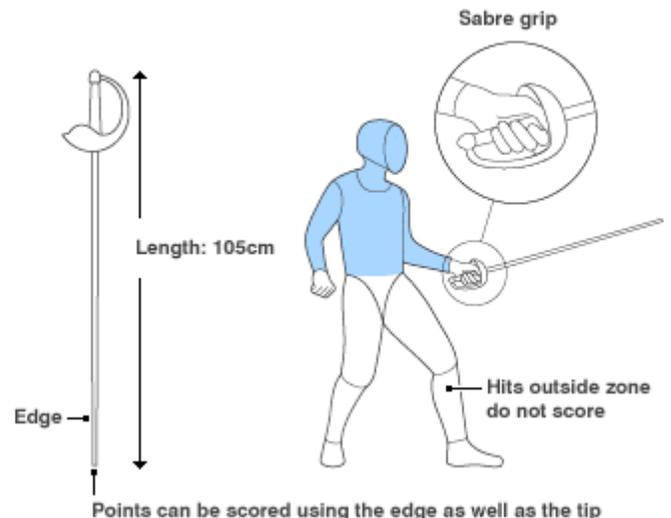
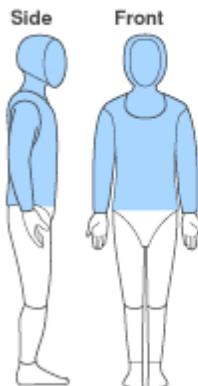
The sabré is the modern version of the slashing cavalry sword. As such, the major difference between sabré and the other two weapons is that sabréists can score with the edge of their blade as well as their point. In sabré, the target area is the entire body above the hips, excluding the hands.

The lower half is not valid target, which is meant to simulate a cavalry rider on a horse.

FENCING: SABRE

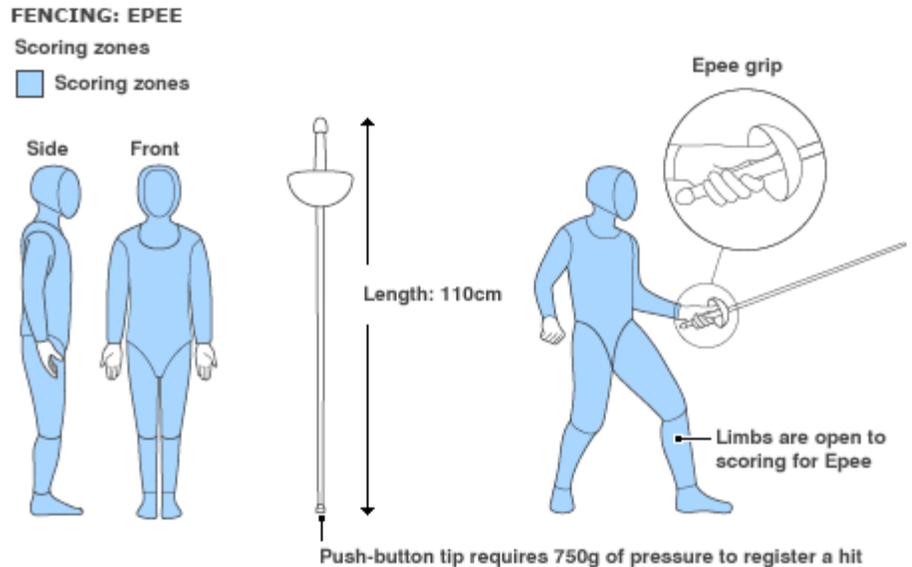
Scoring zones

■ Scoring zones



Épée

The épée (pronounced "EPP-pay" - literally meaning "sword" in French) is the descendant of the dueling sword, but is heavier, weighing approximately 27 ounces, with a stiffer, thicker blade and a larger guard. As in foil, touches are scored only with the point of the blade, however in épée the entire body, head-to-toe, is valid target - much like in an actual duel. Because the entire body is a valid target area there is no concept of "off-target" in épée - anything goes.



Right of Way

Right of Way is a theory of armed combat that determines who receives a point when the fencers have both landed hits during the same action. It sets up an orderly sequence of attack and counter-attack. The first attack must be defended against before a counter-attack may begin. Naturally, fencer who is being attacked must defend themselves with a parry, or somehow cause their opponent to miss in order to take over right of way and score a point. Right of Way only pertains to foil and sabre. Épée has no right of way rules.

The most basic, and important, precept of right of way is that the fencer who started to attack first will receive the point if they hit valid target.

Footwork Terminology

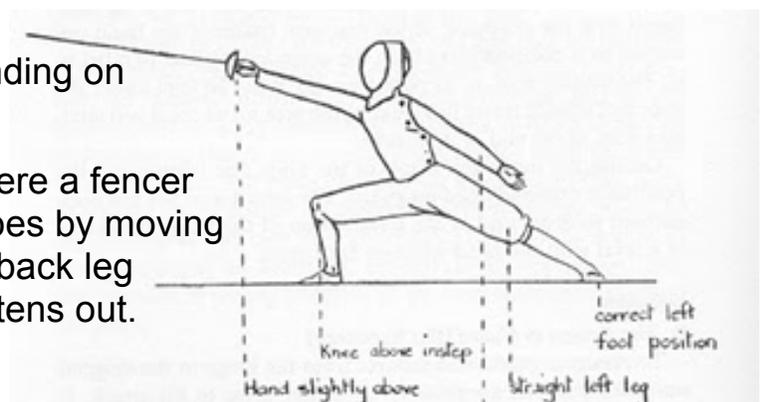
En garde French for "on guard", the position that fencers take before a bout begins or after a break in the action.

Advance To step forward.

Retreat To step backwards

Jump jump forward or backwards landing on both feet at the same time

Lunge The basic attack in fencing where a fencer closes the distance between foes by moving the front leg forward while the back leg remains stationary and straightens out.



The correct progression for a lunge:

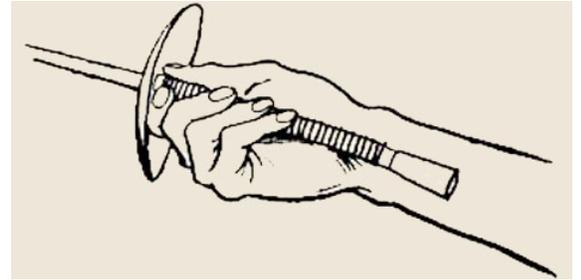
1. sword arm extends toward the target
2. forward movement of the right foot followed by the body
3. The back arm drops down

The movement of the hand must in all cases precede that of the foot or body.

Holding a Foil

Step 1

Hold your dominant hand in front of you with your palm facing upward. Rest the grip in your palm so it forms a straight line between the first knuckle of your forefinger and the center of your wrist. The curve in the handle rests naturally in the curve of your palm.



Step 2

Pinch the handle of the grip between your thumb and forefinger. The fingers pinch the handle just behind the guard, but not touching it.

Step 3

Bring your middle finger around the handle so the fingertip rests on its center. Wrap your remaining two fingers around the handle in a similar manner to help balance the blade in your hand.

Step 4

Assume your on-guard position and rotate your hand so your thumb is facing 1 o'clock if you are using your right hand or 11 o'clock if you are using your left hand.

Distance and fencing

Fencing distance is the optimal distance a fencer attempts to maintain from his/her opponent, where they are close enough to launch a successful attack, and yet far enough away to defend or outdistance an opposing attack.

Each fencer attempts to maintain distance to his or her advantage while maintaining sync with their strategy's timing. A properly timed advance will add speed and surprise to an attack, whereas an appropriately timed retreat will devastate the best executed counter attack by simply causing it to fall short of the target.

- ... Short - the separation at which the opponent could be hit by a simple extension from the guard position. This was sometimes referred to as extension distance.
- ... Medium - the separation at which a lunge was needed to hit the opponent with an attack. This was sometimes referred to as lunging distance.

... Long – the separation at which an advance was needed to bring the fencer into lunging distance. This was sometimes referred to as advance lunge distance.

Attacks ~ Simple and Compound

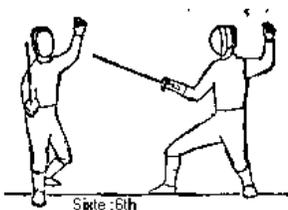
Simple attack	An offensive action that is executed in one movement.
Compound attack	An offensive action that is executed in several movements
Feint	A false thrust designed to make the opponent parry or otherwise react.
Disengage	Changing blade line by dropping the point <i>under</i> opponent's blade and then raising it on the other side.
Beat	An attack on the opponent's blade made by tapping it sharply.
Point-In-Line	A position by the defending fencer. The fencer holds the arm straight from the shoulder and (on-the-line) presenting the point directly at the attacker, offering to impale him. The point in line is a "defensive" threat and has the right of way until deflected.
Remise	immediate replacement of an attack that missed or was parried, without withdrawing the arm.

Defense ~ Parries

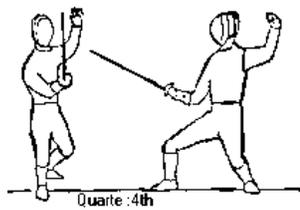
Parry	A defensive action made with the weapon to prevent an offensive action arriving.
<u>Lateral Parry</u>	moves in lines with a defined starting and stopping point (like a line segment)

Defensive Lines with Parry Positions

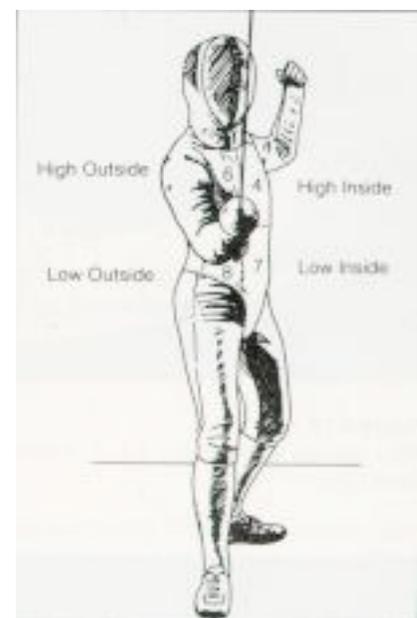
Here are the four most used parried

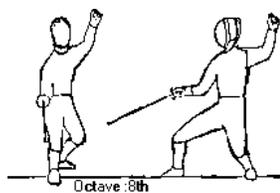


Parry 6



Parry 4

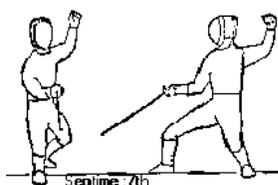




Parry 8

Semi-circular Parry

moves in a semi-circular motion



Parry 7

Circular Parry

moves in a circular motion beginning and ending at the same location

Fun and interesting fencing facts:

- The tip of the fencing weapon is the second fastest moving object in sport; the first is the marksman's bullet.
- Fencing is the only combat sport with no weight classes.
- Fencing is conducted on a 14m x 2m "strip" or "piste" to replicate combat in confined quarters such as a castle hallway. The end of the fencing strip represents the line drawn in the earth by duelists' seconds: to retreat behind this line during the duel indicated cowardice and loss of honor. Foil is the only weapon that has always had "strip" rules. For many years, epee and saber fencers could move about with no restrictions.
- The 750 gram weight test used to ensure a touch is scored with sufficient force is based on the amount of tension required to break the skin. In a duel, honor was done when blood was first drawn -- even if from a minor wound such as a blister.
- The target area in sabre, originally a cavalry weapon, is from the waist up because it is contrary to the rules of chivalry to injure an opponent's horse. The rules in sabre changed for one season in 1903 to forbid hits with the point. And from 1908 - 1915 sabre fencers were awarded 2 points for a riposte.
- Fencers wear white uniforms because before the advent of electronic scoring, touches were recorded on the usually white surface with a wad of ink-soaked cotton on the tips of the weapons. But since our first Nationals in 1888 rules on the colors required of uniforms (then called "suits" or "costumes") varied from "dark colors" to "white with black stitching" to "any color" from 1897 to the early 1900's. Our rules even required foil fencers to have buckskin or chamois covering the front of the jacket (1900).
- Women's Foil was added to the events at the Olympic Games in 1924. Women's Epee was added in 1996. The 2004 Olympic Game in Athens, Greece was the first time that Women's Sabre was an official part of the Olympic program. United States Fencers Mariel Zagunis and Sada Jacobson won Gold and Bronze in the women's sabre event at Athens.

Famous Fencers:

President Theodore Roosevelt

Winston Churchill ~ Prime Minister of England during WWII (high school champion of England)

Prince Albert of Monaco - sabre.

President Andrew Jackson fought a duel of honor with swords

General George Patton (WWII) was a member of U.S. Olympic Fencing and Pentathlon teams in the 1912

Movie stars

Vigo Mortensen

Jerry O'Connell - saber,

Madonna

Catherine Zeta-Jones

Tom Cruise

Will Smith

and surprisingly, soccer star David Beckham!

Links and other information:

General Fencing Information

www.usfencing.org

www.fencing.net

<http://www.olympic.org/fencing>

<http://www.london2012.com/fencing>

USA fencing website

Great information and forums

Olympic Fencing

2012 London Olympic Fencing

Rulebooks and guides

<http://usfencing.org/resources/documents/usfa-rulebook>

<http://usfencing.org/resources/documents/parent-spectator-guide>

<http://usfencing.org/resources/documents/athlete-handbook>