

The British Academy of Fencing



FOIL

Key Teaching Points

Second Edition

With Foreword
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The object of this document is to provide a summary, in note form, of the important aspects of fencing strokes or movements that should be stressed when teaching – either in class or individual lessons.

Candidates for BAF Examinations should find the notes useful in all parts of the examination, but they are primarily intended as an aid to developing an adequate ‘explanation’ of strokes/movements in class lessons.

Compiled by the
Standing Sub-Committee for Technique and Terminology

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FOREWORD

The exercising of weapons putteth away aches, griefs and diseases, it expelleth melancholic, cholericks and evil conceit; it keepeth a man in breath, perfect health and long lyfe.

George Silver "Paradoxes of Defence", 1599

Only he who sacrifices himself relentlessly to his coaching profession, who possesses talent and the ability to work on himself through constant enrichment of knowledge and just a little bit of inspiration from God, may become a good coach and educator.

Antoni Piechniczek, 2002

Doctor Czajkowski showed us that fencing is not so easy to comprehend as some people may superficially think.

Pat Pearson, 1970

I am very pleased and feel greatly honoured to be asked to write a foreword to the "General Information" and "Key Teaching Points – Foil, Epee, Sabre" published by the British Academy of Fencing.

The work of a fencing master is very complicated, versatile, difficult and... interesting. It is much more complicated and difficult than in many other branches of sport (see below).

In my home – which is a kind of private "fencing museum and library" – I have hundreds of fencing manuals, old and new ones, from many different countries.

I have studied them all with keen interest and have learned a lot. What however strikes me, is the fact that great majority of even most modern fencing books are, in a way, very one-sided. They contain plenty of figures depicting the on guard position, lunge, various parries etc., and detailed explanations of how to execute various positions and strokes. Of course, such descriptions and drawing are very necessary and useful, but what surprises me is that very few authors describe in detail how to apply these actions in a bout and how to teach them, what methods of teaching-learning ought to be used and what are the most important qualities of an efficient fencing coach. They very often omit the most important and salient principles of training a fencer, how to teach sensory-motor skills (fencing actions), how to develop various qualities of attention, skillful perception, sense of surprise (sense of timing) and many other important elements. They do not discuss most important principles of training, training methods, social and psychological aspects of training and competing, dimensions of pupil's personality, tactical types of fencers, influence of motivation – including achievement motivation – and arousal on our education and performance, programming and planning of training process and training stages, phases of teaching-learning motor skills (motor habit patterns). Very often there is lack of clear definitions and descriptions of fencer's functional-motor fitness (comprising energy abilities and co-ordination abilities), and its importance in fencing. Many authors don't discuss various sensory-motor responses (motor reactions) that form the base of fencer's technical-tactical capabilities (assessment of distance, sensing of surprise, lightning speed assessment of situation, predicting opponent's intentions, differentiating between false and real attacks, between simple and feint attacks, ability to change one's intention during an action etc.).

The “General Remarks” and the “Key Teaching Points” edited by B.A.F. are not text-books and cannot explain everything, yet they fulfill two important demands:

1. Indirectly they stress the necessity of coach's knowledge and practical abilities, they point out the unity of theory and practice, unity of knowledge and performance.
2. They give many concise definitions of fencing actions and plenty of methodological advice.
3. They give much useful practical advice.

I would like to stress once more the importance of correct and detailed terminology. Knowledge of terminology not only facilitates the communication between the coach and his/her pupil, but – what is often not appreciated – it also helps our perception. As I keep telling my pupils and students: “To look is not the same as to see, to see is not the same as to perceive. We really perceive – on a higher, motor-functional level – what we know well, can describe and discuss and give name to”. The great Chinese sage, Confucius, centuries ago, very cleverly remarked: “Ability to give proper name to thing is the first step towards wisdom”. All coaches and their pupils should attain the first – and further steps – of wisdom.

Fully appreciating the immense value and importance of terminology and theoretical knowledge – and the coach's necessity to constantly read, learn and discuss various aspects of fencing, methodology of training, sport psychology etc. – one should not forget the importance and necessity of fencing master's practical capabilities and practical experience, pedagogical intuition and... common sense. As the famous XVI century French surgeon Ambroise Paré in his “Principles and Rules of Surgery” aptly remarked, “Mere knowledge, without experience, does not give the surgeon self-confidence”.

I have mentioned already that fencing is a very special, specific branch of sport. I'll try to explain what I mean. Fencing has a very long history and tradition (wars, combats, knights tournaments, judicial duels, knight's duels, honorary duels, principle of fair play, chivalry) and fencing as a modern sport is very complicated and develops many qualities necessary in life, productive work, artistic activity.

All branches of sport may be broadly divided into:

1. The most typical sports in which most prominent and visible factors are movement and physical effort (although they need not to be the most important factors). Here belong fencing, wrestling, boxing, tennis, badminton, track and field events, rowing, cycling, swimming, skating, soccer, basketball, volleyball, baseball etc. These sports are very different but typical for them are motor activity and effort.
2. Sports in which the most prominent factor is aiming at a target (shooting, archery etc.).
3. Vehicle driving (car and motorcycle racing).
4. Logical, abstract games (chess, checkers, cards etc.).
5. Modeling (constructing and competing with model cars, model planes etc.).

Fencing belongs to the first group – most typical sports. This group of sports may be divided into three sub-groups. In all of them – as already mentioned - physical effort and movement are very prominent features, but there are also marked differences between them. The three sub-groups are:

- a) Sports of artistic expression in which technique is the main object. The essence of these sports is to demonstrate a difficult, complicated set of

- movements and the judges assess their accuracy, beauty, level of difficulty, rhythm (gymnastics, acrobatics, figure skating etc.).
- b) Sports in which the most important feature is physical fitness – energy abilities. Technique serves the purpose of achieving the highest measurable results – faster, longer, higher, etc. (track and field events, swimming, rowing, weight lifting, cycling etc.).
 - c) Sport in which the most important aspects are tactics and connected with it psycho-motor abilities. Here energy fitness is necessary to master technique and technique is a “servant” of tactics.

In group a) there are many sensory-motor skills, closed (intrinsic) of motor type; important are motor educability and motor control. Cognitive, mental processes are not so important.

In group b) here is usually only one motor skill, closed (intrinsic) of motor type. Technique serves the purpose of demonstrating chosen energy abilities.

In group c) there are many open (extrinsic) motor skills, cognitive-motor variety. The most important is ability to apply correctly chosen actions in changing situation of a bout, with counter-acting opponent. Most important are motor adaptability, tactics, cognitive processes, perception, speed and accuracy of reaction, choice of action, fast and correct assessment of tactical situation. Here belong combat sports and games.

Fencing has many characteristics of sports from group c) and yet differs markedly from other combat sports (and, of course, from games). The main differences are: In fencing there is no need for sheer, “brutal” strength (the explosive speed is necessary). The time of a bout is not so important because if the time of a bout is over, the fencer with a better score of hits wins. One, single, even most beautiful action does not bring the victory. Fencers fight with weapons. There are no weight categories. A very specific – only in fencing – form of teaching, learning and training form is being used – individual lesson with direct and close co-operation between the coach and athlete. The results of a fencing bout depends to a large extent more on cognitive and psychological factors than physical fitness (although its value cannot be underestimated). One, even very big mistake, in a bout does not lead to a defeat of a better fencer. So many factors influence fencer’s results in competition, that some weak points may be and are compensated by high level of other factors. Highly characteristic for fencing is extremely strong connections and interdependence of physical, cognitive and emotional skills and processes.

In planning and conducting fencing exercises and the entire process of training the fencing master must take into account these various characteristic points of fencing. For example developing fencer’s specific endurance he must realize that it depends on resistance to perceptual fatigue (high level of attention and its other qualities, speed and accuracy of reaction, decision taking etc.), resistance to mental fatigue (cognitive processes, assessing the situation, planning of actions), resistance to emotional fatigue (state of arousal, various kinds and levels of motivation, motif of success, motif of avoiding failure, resistance to stress) and – less important – resistance to “physical” fatigue. So the choice of exercises and the ways of conducting them must be highly specific, ensuring the positive transfer of skills. Spending a lot of time and energy on running will not develop fencer’s endurance but long distance runner’s endurance (rhythmic movements, no change of situation, no direct opponent, aerobic processes, slow twitching muscle fibres). As I keep telling my pupils: “Running round the pitch does not improve soccer player’s ability to play soccer just the same as walking round the table will not improve billiard player’s skills.”

Very important in coach's work and fencer's activity is motivation – its direction, level, essence and level of arousal. The best combination of various motifs is intrinsic motivation (I fence because I like it, it gives me pleasure, it improves my health etc. etc.) and information function of extrinsic motivation (the grants, awards, cups, words of approval etc. inform and accentuate my effort, my devotion. abilities and results). The control aspect of extrinsic motivation (you must train and compete because we pay you for it) is not very positive and has socially negative aspect.

There is also achievement motivation, very important – it is a set of various motifs occurring in situation of rivalry, competing. Most coaches and athletes think that the best combination of achievement motivation is very high level of motif of success (victory is everything, I must win at any cost) and an extraordinary, “murderous” effort. My nearly 70 years lasting involvement in fencing (fencer, coach, professor, author, researcher) tells me that the most effective and socially most valuable achievement motivation is set of following motifs: optimal level of motif of success (desire to win, willingness to compete, but not maniacal “victory at any cost”); task involvement, striving to learn as much as possible, desire to increase one's own skills and abilities; independence and self confidence, and self-efficacy.

Connected with motivation and all our activities is arousal – state of activation (excitatory processes) of the nervous system and all the system and organs of human organism. Every human being and every activity need a different optimal level of arousal that the fencing coach must take into consideration both in training and during competition. It is well known that learning-teaching actions and capabilities require a relatively low level of arousal. Learning then is slow, but more efficacious, more exact and results are long lasting. It is also logical that when our pupils fences with a strong opponent and every hit is very important, and the fencer is rather nervous, anxious – level of arousal is high – it is logical to calm him down instead of shouting at him and throwing a cascade of tactical advice. It is logical and common sense and yet during an important bout how often do we see a coach who, instead of calming his pupil down, makes him even more nervous and anxious by nervous gestures and advice.

Speed in modern fencing is very important. The majority of great champions are very fast but in teaching one must remember that first we have to develop accuracy of movement. It is much easier to speed up a slow but correct movement than to correct a fast but incorrect movement.

Talking of speed in fencing we must remember that it is not only the speed of certain movement and the speed of moving on the strip. One must realize that speed and accuracy of assessment of tactical situation and speed of motor responses (to be more exact, time of duration of the latent period of reaction) combined with the sense of timing (sense of surprise) is by far more important, although less visible, than mere speed of execution of movements – various fencing actions.

I would like to mention still the importance of knowledge approach to training, certain important principles of training – principle of unity of component parts of training process, principle of practical application, principle of individualization of training, the importance of team cohesiveness and many other aspects of fencer's training, but – I am afraid – the foreword would be too long. So, finishing it I am going to enumerate the most salient features of fencing, its specific charm and high value, which make fencing specially attractive and valuable sport. These factors are:

1. The sheer joy of a fast, mobile and versatile fight with a light weapon, with kaleidoscopic changes of situation on the fencing strip.
2. Exceptional and decisive significance of cognitive processes and psychological traits in the fencing bout, including psychomotor abilities (psychological processes, like perception, attention, decision making etc. – strictly connected with fencer's motor activity).
3. Rich, romantic and historical tradition and very long, colourful history of it, which stirs the imagination of not only youths.
4. The possibility of cultivating fencing from youth to well above middle age.
5. The exceptionally high health, social and educational value of fencing as an attractive form of preparation for life and work in the contemporary world; it develops gross and fine co-ordination abilities, energy abilities, a high level and accuracy of perception, fast decision making, many aspects of attention (range, selectivity, shifting, divisibility etc.) – all of which is very useful and practical in modern life, professional work, artistic activity, driving a car, using various apparatuses etc. (weight lifting, running etc. develop mostly muscles, cardiovascular system etc. and physical abilities which are not so useful in contemporary life and work).

Taking this into consideration we may say that fencing, one of the oldest sports in the world, is – paradoxically enough – the most versatile and best adapted to the life and work in the 21st century.

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ERRATA

Regarding **Beat Attacks** relative to Foil (cf. pp 21-22)

Candidates should be aware of the following rule change that was enacted by the FIE on August 2014:

t.56.

4. Attacks by beats on the blade:

1. a) In an attack by beating on the blade, the attack is correctly carried out and retains its priority when the beat is made on the foible of the opponent's blade i.e. the two-thirds of the blade furthest from the guard.
2. b) In an attack by beating on the blade, when the beat is made on the forte of the opponent's blade i.e. the one-third of the blade nearest the guard, the attack is badly executed and the beat gives the opponent the right to an immediate riposte.

THE GRIP

The *Grip* is the manner in which the sword is held. It should be conducive to ease in the wielding of the weapon and to all movements of the fingers, wrist and sword-arm.

Manipulators:

- the handle should be held between the ball of the thumb and the second phalanx of the index finger
- the end of the thumb and the side of the index finger should touch the pad inside the guard
- the ball of the thumb should be flat on the handle and the fleshy part of the thumb in the palm of the hand should rest in the curved part of the handle.

The Aids:

- the three remaining fingers, should rest lightly but firmly on the outer face of the handle
- there should be no spaces between the fingers.

THE STANCE AND THE ON GUARD POSITION

The Stance

The *stance* is the position in which the feet are placed when the fencer is standing in the *on-guard* position. Their correct placing ensures balance and mobility:

- feet, approximately 18" (50cm) apart (the exact distance will vary from fencer to fencer)
- feet, at right angles to each other with heels in line
- leading foot pointing towards the opponent.

The On Guard Position

The *On Guard Position* is that position of the whole body (and sword) that is adopted by the fencer at the commencement of a bout.

To be *on guard* is to be prepared to execute defensive actions when attacked, or to be in a position to launch an offensive action whenever an opportunity presents itself:

- assume the stance
- bend the knees outwards over the insteps
- distribute the body weight equally on both feet
- hips and shoulders - half turned (45 degrees) to a line drawn between the heels
- the elbow of the sword arm – approximately 6" (15 cm) away from the body
- there should be a continuous line from the elbow to the point, which is held approximately level with own eyes
- sword hand - in either sixte or an offensive/defensive position
- rear arm - upper arm in line with the shoulders, forearm – nearly vertical, at right angles to this, hand - relaxed
- head - upright and steady, following the line of the spine.

THE SALUTE

The *salute* is a courteous gesture to one's opponent, the officials and the audience before and after a bout. A fencer should also salute his/her master before and after a lesson.

Before a bout or lesson.

- Stand with feet at right angles, heels touching, legs straight, facing opponent (or master), mask under rear arm, sword arm and weapon in a straight line from the shoulder – pointing to the ground in front of and to the outside of the front foot.
- Pivoting from the shoulder, keeping the sword arm straight, raise the sword arm and weapon to point diagonally upwards.
- Bending the sword arm at the elbow, bring the hilt down level with the mouth, blade vertical.
- By extending the sword arm, return to the first position.
- Use the rear arm and hand to put on the mask.
- Step forward with the front foot and assume the on-guard position.

After a bout or lesson.

- From the “on-guard” position stand up by moving the front foot back towards the rear so that the heels touch at right angles, the legs straight and the body erect. The sword-arm and weapon in a straight line from the shoulder to point in front of and to the outside of the front foot, the hand in supination. The rear arm should be held in a straight line, slightly away from the body. The head should be erect and facing the opponent.
- Pivoting from the shoulder, keeping the sword arm straight, raise the sword arm and weapon to point diagonally upwards.
- Bending the sword arm at the elbow, bring the hilt down level with the mouth, blade vertical.
- By extending the sword arm, return to the first position.
- Remove mask with rear hand and place it under the sword arm, leaving the rear arm and hand free to shake hands with the opponent (or master).

GAINING AND BREAKING GROUND

Stepping Forwards

Front foot - lifted and placed down, heel first, about 6" (15cm) in advance of its original position.

Rear foot - lifted and placed down, toe first, at an equal distance to that moved by the front foot.

Stepping Backwards

- reversal of stepping forward.

Rear foot - lifted and placed down, toe first, about 6" (15cm) behind its original position.

Front foot - lifted and placed down, at an equal distance to that moved by the rear foot.

Notes:

- The feet should not be lifted excessively, but should stay close to the ground.
- After stepping forwards or backwards, the distance between the feet should not have changed and the on-guard position should be balanced.
- Steps may vary in both length and speed (i.e. long, short, quick and slow)

- All footwork should be executed smoothly and not appear mechanical.

THE LUNGE

The *lunge* is an offensive movement. Executed from the on-guard position, the front foot is raised from the heel (toe first) and advanced forwards, whilst at the same time the rear leg is straightened, the rear foot is kept flat on the ground, so that the whole body is thrust forward.

Teach initially as a simple attack to the inside high line:

- extend the sword arm at shoulder height
- lift the front foot and push into the lunge position by straightening the rear leg
- front foot - lands heel first.

On the Lunge:

- front knee - over the instep of the front foot
- body - upright
- back leg - straight
- back foot - flat on the floor
- back arm, parallel to the back leg with the palm upper-most
- sword-arm - may need to be lifted or lowered, relative to the shoulder, in order to facilitate the hit.

THE RECOVERY

To return to the on-guard position from a lunge.

Backwards:

- lift the front toe and push back from the heel, bending the rear leg
- time the lifting of the front foot to coincide with the acquisition of momentum
- place the foot down, heel first, in the correct stance position
- maintain a bent knee position of "on guard".

Forwards:

- lift the back foot and position it in the correct stance - placing the toes down first
- maintain a bent knee position of "on guard".

Notes:

- The sword-arm may remain straight or bent depending upon the action which follows the recovery.
- The rear arm may remain in the position it occupied when the lunge was completed or return to the position it occupies in the on guard position.

THE FLÈCHE

The *flèche* is an alternative, to the *lunge*, for delivering an offensive action:

- like the development it is initiated by the extension of the sword-arm
- initial thrust comes from the straightening of the back leg
- keep the front knee bent as the body passes over it

- keep the head and body upright throughout the flèche
- the shoulders should be carried through horizontally
- the drive (extension) of the front leg should be timed to occur as the centre of gravity of the body passes in advance of the front knee
- the acceleration and drive should be directed forwards and not upwards.

THE HIT

To *hit* is to strike the adversary with the point of the sword on any part of his body, so that it fixes clearly and distinctly and has the character of penetration:

- sword hand – may be in pronation, supination or any intermediate position
- the height of hand and the degree of angulation is dictated by the part of the target to be hit
- extension of the sword arm should be just sufficient to make the hit
- point - in line with the target and placed using the wrist and/or fingers.

Note: during a lunge, the hand may need to be lifted or lowered, relative to the shoulder, in order to facilitate the hit.

SIMPLE ATTACKS

Direct Attack or Straight Thrust

A *straight thrust* is a simple attack made without changing the line:

- made into an open or opening line
- no movement around, under or over the opponent's blade
- adjust the length of the foot movement (step/lunge/flèche) according to distance
- the sword arm - should be extending before any movement of the feet
- the hit – see above.

Disengage Attack

The *disengage* is a simple offensive action made in one motion by passing the point into a different line - under the opponent's blade in the high line or over the opponent's blade in the low line.

It is most effectively employed as the opponent is attempting to close a line:

- made into an open or opening line
- usually made on the opponent's attempt to engage or close a line
- involves passing under the opponent's blade (or over if in the low line) in order to attack the open or opening line
- finger/wrist movement - drop and lift the point into the open or opening line
- the sword arm should be extending before any movement of the feet
- adjust the length of the foot movement (step/lunge/flèche) according to distance
- the hit – see above.

Counter-disengage Attack

The *counter-disengage* is a simple offensive action, which deceives the opponent's attempt to change the engagement.

Made on the opponent's attempt to change the line of engagement:

- involves following the circular movement of the opponent's blade in order to attack the opening line
- finger/wrist movement (circular action)
- the sword arm should be extending before any movement of the feet
- adjust the length of the foot movement (step/lunge/flèche) according to distance
- timing, may be executed at any time during the opponent's change of engagement
- the hit – see above.

Cut-Over (coupé) Attack

The *cut-over* is a simple offensive action made in one motion by passing the point into a different line - over the opponent's point in the high line or under the opponent's point in the low line.

Teach initially as an attack in the high line:

- made into an open or opening line
- usually made on the opponent's attempt to engage or close a line
- involves moving the blade over the point of the opponent's blade in order to attack the open or opening line
- keep your own point as low as possible
- when executed from sixte - slightly supinate the hand
- when executed from quarte - slightly pronate the hand;
- adjust the length of the foot movement (step/lunge/flèche) according to distance
- extend the sword arm before the foot movement - this is most important at foil to gain the 'right of way'
- the hit – see above.

Simple Attacks - RULE

At foil the fencer whose arm is the first to extend his/her arm with the point in line (threatening the opponent's target) has the priority to attack.

COMPOUND ATTACKS

A *compound attack* is an attack that includes one or more *feints*.

The objective of the *feint* is to draw the defender's blade towards it in an attempt to parry, this parry is then deceived (*trompement*) and the final movement of the attack delivered into an opening line.

Used to gain time and distance – when too far away for a successful simple attack:

- feints are used to provoke parries which are subsequently deceived
- observe the probable type of parry
- execute the feint with an extending arm, into an open or better an opening line
- make the feint convincing enough to provoke the opponent's parry.

Choice of compound attack (*one-two, doublé, etc*) - relative to the defence employed by the opponent.

Two-time:*Early Parry*

- feint with the extension of the sword arm
- deception of the parry with the final action of the attack (step, lunge or flèche)
- two periods of fencing time
- used against a fencer who readily reacts to feints.

Progressive:*middle parry*

- feint and deception executed on the same step, lunge or flèche
- one period of fencing time
- used against a fencer who does not readily react to feints.

Broken-time: refer to the section "broken-time"*Late Parry***Teaching Named Compound Attacks****The One-Two (disengage, disengage)***Blade engaged in 4**Reflex in 4 Attack**Engage outside disengage to 6*

Consists of a feint of disengage to draw a simple (lateral) parry, which is then deceived by a further disengage.

Teach it first as a two-time attack:

- start just outside riposting distance with the defender covered in quarte)
- attacker executes a disengage feint into the open outside-high-line
- defender moves across to sixte to intercept and the attacker executes his second disengage and steps forward to hit
- extend the distance first to half-lunge then full-lunge distance
- progress toward executing the movement progressively (i.e. in one period of fencing time)
- repeat the whole process to defeat a quarte parry – pointing out the additional problem of avoiding the defending sword-arm
- finally execute from full lunging distance in absence of blade - the defender starts the movement by attempting to engage the attacker's blade.

Note: Always emphasise the need to make a convincing feint.**The Doublé (disengage, counter-disengage)**

Consists of a feint of disengage to draw a circular parry, which is then deceived by a counter-disengage.

Teach it first as a two-time attack:

- start just outside riposting distance with the defender covered in sixte
- attacker executes a disengage feint into the open inside-high-line
- defender attempts to take a circular parry of sixte and the attacker executes his counter-disengage and steps forward to hit
- extend the distance first to half-lunge then full-lunge distance
- progress towards executing the movement progressively (i.e. in one period of fencing time)
- repeat the whole process to defeat a quarte parry – pointing out the additional problem of avoiding the defending sword-arm

- finally execute from full lunging distance in absence of blade - the defender starts the movement by attempting to engage the attacker's blade.

Note: Always emphasise the need to make a convincing feint.

The Feint-direct, disengage

Consists of a feint of a direct thrust to draw a simple (lateral) parry, which is then deceived by a disengage.

Teach it first as a two-time attack:

- start just outside riposting distance with the defender in a quarte position but the blades not engaged
- attacker (also in a quarte position) executes a direct feint into the open outside-high-line
- defender moves across to sixte to intercept and the attacker executes a disengage and steps forward to hit
- extend the distance first to half-lunge then full-lunge distance
- progress toward executing the movement progressively (i.e. in one period of fencing time)
- repeat the whole process to defeat a quarte parry:
 - fencers both adopt a sixte position in absence of blade
 - point out the additional problem of avoiding the defending sword-arm
- finally execute from full lunging distance in absence of blade.

Note: Always emphasise the need to make a convincing feint.

Suggested Exercise:

- attacker, arm extended, walks towards the opponent, who is walking backwards taking simple parries, the attacker executes one deception before hitting
- repeat the above exercise, extending the arm whilst executing the first deception
- progress to observing and deceiving differing parries whilst moving forwards.

Compound Attacks (RULE)

At foil the fencer whose arm is the first to extend with the point in line (threatening the opponent's target) has the priority to attack.

Compound attacks are correctly executed when the arm is straightened in the presentation of the first feint. This feint must precede the initiation of a step, lunge or flèche, the point must be continually threatening the valid target, and the arm is not bent during the successive actions of the attack.

DEFENCE

The *principle of defence* is the opposition of the forte of the defending blade to the foible of the attacking blade.

Supinated Parries - quarte, sixte, septime and octave.

Quarte – is normally used to deflect an attacking blade wide of the inside-high-line, in which case:

- elbow - close to, but not touching the body

- hand - at breast height
- hand - in three-quarter supination
- blade - is held so that the point is higher than the hand and inclined outwards relative to the vertical and wide enough to prevent the attacking blade reaching the extremes of the target
- back of the hand - is at an obtuse angle to the line the forearm
- pommel – slightly away from the wrist.

Sixte – is normally used to deflect an attacking blade wide of the outside-high-line, in which case:

- elbow - close to, but not touching the body
- hand - at breast height
- hand - in three-quarter supination
- blade - is held so that the point is higher than the hand and inclined outwards relative to the vertical and wide enough to prevent the attacking blade reaching the extremes of the target
- pommel - on the wrist.

Septime – is normally used to deflect an attacking blade wide of the inside-low-line, in which case:

- elbow - close to, but not touching the body
- forearm - horizontal
- hand - in three-quarter supination
- blade - is held with the point lower than the hand, inclined outwards relative to the vertical and wide enough to prevent the attacking blade reaching the extremes of the target
- back of the hand - is at an obtuse angle to the line of the forearm
- pommel - is slightly away from the wrist.

Octave – is normally used to deflect an attacking blade wide of the outside-low-line, in which case:

- elbow - close to, but not touching the body
- forearm - horizontal
- hand - in supination
- blade – is held with the point lower than the hand, inclined outwards relative to the vertical and wide enough to prevent the attacking blade reaching the extremes of the target
- back of the hand - is in line with the forearm
- pommel - is slightly away from the wrist.

Pronated Parries – prime, seconde, tierce and quinte.

Prime – is normally used to deflect an attacking blade wide of the inside-high-line, in which case:

- sword arm – at shoulder height
- guard - level with your own rear shoulder
- handle - is held well forward in the hand
- forearm and hand - slightly in advance of the elbow

- blade - points almost vertically downwards, but slightly forward and held high enough and wide enough to prevent the opponent's blade reaching the extremes of the target
- back of the hand - is line with the forearm.

Seconde – *is normally used to deflect an attacking blade wide of the outside-low line, in which case:*

- elbow - close to, but not touching the body
- forearm - horizontal, hand, in pronation
- point - should be lower than the hand
- blade - held wide enough to prevent the attacking blade reaching the extremes of the target
- back of the hand - is in line with the forearm.

Tierce – *is normally used to deflect an attacking blade wide of the outside high-line, in which case:*

- elbow - close to, but not touching the body
- forearm - horizontal, hand in three-quarter pronation
- blade - is held so that the point is higher and inclined outwards relative to the vertical and wide enough to prevent the attacking blade reaching the extremes of the target
- back of the hand in line with the forearm.

Quinte – *is normally used to deflect an attacking blade wide of the inside-low-line, in which case:*

- forearm - adjusted to the height of the attacking blade
- hand - in pronation
- point - is normally held slightly higher than the hand
- back of the hand - is in line with the forearm.

Note: The above descriptions of the fencing positions are for guidance only. Coaches will understand that they are not fixed, but may need to be adjusted to cope with the height of the attacking blade.

Covering

To be *covered* is to engage in such a way that the line in which the swords are crossed is closed to a direct thrust.

- When swords are engaged only one of the fencers can be covered.
- Being covered is an advantage, because it limits the opponent's choice of attack.
- To achieve a covered position one may '*close the line*' or '*change the engagement*'.

Closing the Line/Guard

The action of moving the hand and blade to achieve a *covered* position.

For two same-handed fencers:

- from a quarte engagement where neither fencer is covered
- the forearm and wrist are used to move the blade across to quarte, pushing the opponent's blade across at the same time
- stop in an accurate quarte position.

This movement is easily deceived - it can, therefore, be used to draw an attack.

Changing the Engagement (changing the line)

The *change of engagement* is to engage the opponent's blade in the line opposite to the one of engagement.

For two same-handed fencers:

- from a sixte engagement – opponent being covered in quarte
- the wrist and/or fingers are used to draw an anti-clockwise circle with the point (for a right-handed fencer) to engage the opponent's blade in quarte and, at the same time, the hand adopts a quarte position
- stop in an accurate, covered quarte position.

This movement is easily deceived - it can, therefore, be used to draw an attack.

Simple (lateral) Parry

Teach initially from sixte to quarte (or vice-versa) on an attack to the high-line:

- start from a covered position
- at any point during the execution of the parry, the blade should be parallel to its starting position
- maintain the hand at breast height
- maintain the forward position of the hand
- pivot at the elbow and wrist
- stop in an accurate covered position, (sixte or quarte.)
- in sixte the pommel is on the wrist, in quarte the pommel is slightly away from the wrist.

Circular (counter) Parry

Teach initially the circular parries of sixte and quarte on an attack to the high-line:

- start from a covered position
- point describes a complete circle (ellipse) to collect the opponent's blade with the forte and returns to the original covered line (i.e. the start position)
- although most fencing manuals describe this as "a finger movement", in fact the fingers, wrist and forearm may all be involved
- maintain the forward position of the hand
- stop in an accurate covered position.

For a right-handed fencer:

- circular-sixte rotates clockwise
- circular-quarte rotates anti-clockwise.

Semi-Circular Parry

Teach initially from sixte to octave, or from septime to quarte:

- start from a covered position
- although most fencing manuals describe this as "a finger and/or wrist movement", in fact the fingers, wrist and forearm may all be involved
- the point describes a semi-circle (parabola) to collect the opponent's blade with the forte and carries it to the final covered position
- maintain the forward position of the hand
- stop in an accurate covered position.

For a right-handed fencer:

- sixte-octave rotates anti-clockwise
- quarte-septime rotates clockwise.

Diagonal Parries

This type of parry moves diagonally across the target, e.g. from *sixte* to *septime* or from *prime* to *seconde*.

Teaching Diagonal Parries

Suggested Example: octave to quarte

Teach it first from absence of blade:

- start just outside riposting distance with the defender in octave
- attacker extends his arm to threaten the opponent's high-line and pauses momentarily before stepping forward slowly to complete a straight thrust
- defender moves his hand diagonally across to quarte, and at the same time swinging the point in an anticlockwise arc (for a right-handed fencer) in order to collect the attacking foible with his forte and deflect it wide of the inside-high-line.

Stress:

- the importance of collecting the blade with the forte and the rim of the guard
- stopping in an accurate quarte position.

Repeat, gradually increasing the distance, until it can be executed successfully against a full-lunge.

Contraction Parries

Contraction parries are similar to counter parries, but taken in the in opposite direction and, at the same time travelling across to the opposite line. A contraction parry starting in *sixte* would, whilst travelling across to quarte, describe the circular action of a counter-quarte parry.

Teaching Contraction Parries

Suggested example: from *sixte* to quarte.

Teach it first from an engagement with the defender covered in *sixte*:

- Start just outside riposting distance
- Attacker disengages and extends his arm to threaten the high-line
- Defender, whilst moving across to quarte, executes a complete anticlockwise circle (for a right-handed fencer) and deflects the blade wide of the inside-high-line.

Stress:

- the transport of the attacking blade by the defender, using the forte and the rim of the guard
- stopping in an accurate quarte position

Repeat from a slightly greater distance allowing the attacker to step forward to complete his attack after his extension.

Continue to increase the distance until the contraction parry can be successfully executed against an attack with a full lunge.

Progress to attacks from absence of blade.

Further progress to the use of this type of parry against a compound attack by one-two. Here it is sometimes called a "disruptive" or "spoiling" parry.

Successive Parries

Successive parries are two or more parries taken one after another as a defence against compound offensive or counter-offensive actions:

- start by teaching just two parries
- start from a covered position
- move smoothly to the first parry and accelerate in the second parry
- maintain the forward position of the hand
- stop in an accurate covered position
- select the final parry to facilitate the riposte.

Examples parry sixte - quarte
parry quarte - sixte
parry counter-sixte - octave

parry quarte - septime
parry counter-sixte - counter-sixte
parry counter-sixte - quarte

Ceding Parries

Ceding parries use the force of the opponent's *prise-de-fer*, to divert both the defending and attacking blades into another line and, at the same time, closing that line defensively:

- skill - essentially involves the timing of when to give way in order to form the parry
- allow the opponent to execute approximately a half to two-thirds of the *prise-de-fer* before giving way and forming the parry (i.e. begin to parry during the last third of the opponent's *prise-de-fer*)
- beware of giving way too soon – thus allowing opponent to redirect the attack.

Examples – for two fencers of the same hand:

- on a bind from quarte to octave, **Cede** to quarte
- on an envelopment in sixte, **Cede** to prime

Opposition Parries

Opposition parries oppose the direction of the last part of a *prise-de-fer* (or *offensive action in opposition*) deflecting the attacking blade away from the target:

- skill - essentially involves accurate timing in dropping (or lifting) the point in order to transfer control of the attacking foible into the forte of the defending blade
- allow the opponent to execute approximately a half to two thirds of the *prise-de-fer*, before dropping (or lifting) the point whilst forming the parry (i.e. begin to parry during the last third of the opponent's *prise-de-fer*)
- beware of opposing too soon - thus allowing opponent to redirect the attack.

Examples – for two fencers of the same hand:

- on a bind from quarte to octave, **Oppose** to octave
- on an envelopment in sixte, **Oppose** to sixte.

Defence General

Opposition in a Parry

The defender holds the attacking blade momentarily after completing a parry for one or more of the following reasons:

- to ensure the clearance of a forceful attack
- to prevent a remise
- to feel the opponent's reaction upon being parried, so the appropriate riposte can be used.

Detachment in a Parry

The defender premeditates the type of riposte to be used and leaves the opponent's blade immediately after parrying it.

Advantage - speed – much faster riposte than after an opposition parry.

Disadvantage - the riposte may not always be correctly premeditated and there is always the danger of a remise.

RIPOSTES

At any time during the teaching of ripostes, revise 'the hit' if necessary.

Direct Riposte

A *direct riposte* is the offensive action made after successfully parrying an attack and directed into the same line as the parry was taken

Normally taught as a conventional "right of way" following a successful parry.

For two fencers of the same hand it is convenient to teach the movement following a parry of quarte because the target is more open.

Initially, to avoid unnecessary strain, teach the riposte following an attack with a step rather than a lunge.

Stress:

- maintain three quarter supination
- bring the point down into line with the target using the wrist and/or fingers
- accurate placement of the point on the valid target with the wrist and/or fingers
- only use sufficient extension of the sword arm to give the character of penetration.

Progress to executing the riposte following an attack with a half lunge, and finally with a full lunge. In both cases the attacker should remain on the lunge after his attack is parried.

Indirect Ripostes

An *indirect riposte* is the offensive action, following the successful parry of an attack and is directed into a different line to that in which the parry was taken.

Disengage Riposte

A *disengage riposte* is the offensive action made (after successfully parrying an attack) in one motion by passing the point into a different line. In the high-line the point will pass under the opponent's blade, but in the low-line it would pass over the opponent's blade.

Normally taught as a conventional "right of way", following a successful parry, against an opponent who, anticipating a direct riposte, automatically closes his open line after being parried.

For two fencers of the same hand it is convenient to teach the movement following a parry of quarte where the opponent automatically closes his own line of quarte after being parried.

Initially, too avoid unnecessary strain, teach the riposte following an attack with a step rather than a lunge.

Stress:

- maintain three quarter supination
- the accurate use of the wrist and/or fingers to manipulate the point around the opponent's blade and arm, during his covering action
- for two right-handed fencers, this movement will be a clockwise arc
- stop the movement when the blade is in line with the target
- do not extend to hit until this movement is completed – to avoid hitting the opponent's arm
- accurate placement of the point on the valid target with the wrist and/or fingers
- only use sufficient extension of the sword arm to give the character of penetration

Progress to executing the riposte following an attack with a half lunge, and then with a full lunge. In both cases the attacker should remain on the lunge after his attack is parried.

Finally require the attacker to return to guard with his defensive action so that the riposte is delivered with a lunge. Because of this increased distance, the arm may now be extended with the disengage action.

- Examples* - parry sixte, riposte by:
- disengage to high line
 - disengage supinated into the low-line
- parry quarte, riposte by
- disengage into the high line
 - disengage pronated into the low-line.

Counter-disengage Riposte

A *counter-disengage riposte* is the offensive action made (after successfully parrying an attack) in one motion and which deceives the opponent's change of line.

Normally taught as the conventional "right of way", following a successful parry, against an opponent who, anticipating a direct riposte, automatically changes his engagement (takes a circular parry) after his attack has been parried.

For two fencers of the same hand it is convenient to teach the movement following a parry of quarte where the opponent automatically executes the action of a counter-sixte parry after his attack has been parried.

To avoid unnecessary strain teach the riposte initially following an attack with a step rather than a lunge.

Stress:

- maintain three quarter supination
- the accurate use of the wrist and/or fingers to manipulate the point around the opponent's blade and arm, during his defensive action
- for two right-handed fencers, this movement will be an anti-clockwise circle
- stop the movement when the blade is in line with the target
- do not extend to hit until this movement is completed – to avoid hitting the opponent off target
- accurate placement of the point on the valid target with the wrist and/or fingers.
- only use sufficient extension of the sword arm to give the character of penetration.

Progress to executing the riposte following an attack with a half lunge, and then with a full lunge. In both cases the attacker should remain on the lunge after his attack is parried.

Finally, require the attacker to return to guard with his defensive action so that the riposte is delivered with a lunge. Because of this increased distance, the arm may now be extended with the counter-disengage action.

Cut-over Riposte

A *cut-over riposte* is the offensive action made (after successfully parrying an attack) in one motion into a different line by passing the blade over the opponent's point. In the low-line the blade will pass under the opponent's point.

Normally taught as the conventional "right of way", following a successful parry, against an opponent who normally keeps his point low and who, anticipating a direct riposte, automatically closes his open line after being parried.

For two fencers of the same hand it is convenient to teach the movement following a parry of quarte where the opponent automatically closes his own line of quarte after being parried.

To avoid unnecessary strain teach the riposte initially following an attack with a step rather than a lunge.

Stress:

- the accurate use of the wrist and forearm to lift the blade over the opponent's point, during his covering action
- slightly pronate the hand during the action of lifting the blade
- return the hand to three-quarter supination as the blade is brought down into the opening line
- accurate placement of the point on the valid target with the wrist and/or fingers
- only use sufficient extension of the sword arm to give the character of penetration.

Progress to executing the riposte following an attack with a half lunge, and then with a full lunge. In both cases the attacker should remain on the lunge after his attack is parried.

Finally require the attacker to return to guard with his defensive action so that the riposte is delivered with a lunge. Because of this increased distance, the arm may now be extended with the cut-over action.

First Counter-riposte

A *first counter-riposte* is an offensive action made after successfully parrying a *riposte*.

Teach initially, as a premeditated action, following a simple attack and a direct riposte, in which case:

- attack with a straightening arm, point threatening the target
- lunge fully with the front foot, but hold the body back slightly on the lunge
- maintain good balance on the lunge
- parry the riposte well forward from the extended arm position, keeping the elbow down
- accurately place the point with the first counter-riposte.

Second Counter-riposte

A *second counter-riposte* is an offensive action made after successfully parrying a *first counter-riposte*.

Teach initially, as a premeditated action, following the above example of a first counter-riposte, in which case:

- the riposte should have sufficient depth to provoke the first counter-riposte
- parry the counter-riposte well forward from the extended arm position, keeping the elbow down
- accurately place the point with the second counter-riposte.

Counter-ripostes are numbered - such that the attacker makes all the odd numbered counter-ripostes and the defender makes all the even numbered counter-ripostes.

Compound Riposte

A *compound riposte* is an offensive action following a successful parry and which includes one or more *feints*:

- used when indirect ripostes are unsuccessful
- feints are used to provoke parries which are then deceived
- beware of extending the sword-arm too soon
- observe the probable type of parry
- execute a convincing feint into an open or, better, into an opening line.

Choice of riposte, depends upon:

- the opening for the feint
- the probable type of parry.

Examples – where the attacker returns to the on-guard position either closing or changing the line:

Two-Time

- feint with the extension of the sword arm
- deception of the parry with the final action of the riposte (i.e. step, lunge or flèche) to hit
- two periods of fencing time
- used against a fencer who readily reacts to feints.

Progressive

- feint and deception executed on the same step, lunge or flèche
- one period of fencing time
- used against a fencer who does not readily reacts to feints.

Broken-time

- refer to the section "broken-time"
- more than one period of fencing time.

Ripostes General

In the early stages, the pupil(s) should be encouraged to hold the parry slightly before riposting. This will allow the coach to check that the parry has been formed correctly. In addition to this it is important to check the timing of the pupil's parry relative to the presentation of the attacking blade. However, as soon as possible, the pupil(s) should be encouraged to use more immediate ripostes.

Because of the relative closeness of the opponent, ripostes may require a bigger arm and/or blade movement in order to get around the opponent's blade.

PREPARATIONS

In the French School of Fencing there are three categories:

- making and breaking ground (stepping forwards / backwards)
- attacks on the blade (attaques-au-fer)
- takings of the blade (prises-de-fer).

FOOTWORK

It is essential to relate all footwork to the offensive or defensive action being prepared.

Stepping Forwards and Backwards

- may be executed at various speeds in any sequence
- use variety in the size of the steps taken
- remember that small steps make it easier to adjust and control distance.

The Appel

An *appel* is the striking of the ground with the ball of the foot:

- most commonly, the front foot is moved forward as in the action of a step forward, but before the step is completed, the ball of the foot is struck on the ground
- the front foot strikes the ground during, or immediately before the execution of a further foot action or offensive/defensive action
- the appel may also be executed with the back foot.

The Balestra

A *balestra* is a short jump forward, with both feet landing simultaneously:

- the action is that of a short staccato jump forward
- most commonly, during the action of jumping forward the ball of the front foot is raised, the heel is cleared of the ground and then at some short distance forward of the original position, the ball of the foot is struck on the ground
- simultaneously, the rear foot just clears the ground, and is brought forward (a corresponding distance to that of the front foot) and is also struck on the ground.

ATTACKS ON THE BLADE (attaques-au-fer)

These are the *beat*, *pressure* and *froissement*.

Any attack on the blade should be related to the offensive or defensive action being prepared.

Beat

A preparation of attack made by suddenly striking the opponent's blade. The objective being one or more of the following:

- to gain right of way
- to provoke a reaction
- to knock the opposing blade aside and/or expose the target
- to unsettle the opponent

Emphasise:

- crispness of the beat, executed by flexing the wrist (or opening and closing the hand)
- spring-board action (or beating-board action, as in a gymnastic vault)
- sword moves diagonally forward to beat and then forward to hit

Beat direct:

- emphasise speed from beat to hit.

Beat disengage:

- teach as a progression, when the class observes the instinctive reaction (usually a simple parry) to the beat
- emphasise the swing of the blade following the beat
- accurate placement of the point.

Change-Beat

A sudden crisp beat on the opponent's blade in the opposite line to that of the engagement.

Like the beat, the *change beat* may be used to:

- to gain right of way
- to provoke a reaction
- to knock the opposing blade aside
- to unsettle the opponent

Emphasise:

- a circular action, similar to that of the change of engagement is executed before beating the opponent's blade in the opposite line.
- crispness of the change-beat, executed by flexing the wrist (or opening and closing the hand)
- spring-board (or beating-board action, as in a gymnastic vault)
- sword moves forward to execute the change-beat and then forward to hit.

Change-beat direct:

- emphasise speed from beat to hit

Change-beat disengage:

- teach as a progression, when the class observes the instinctive reaction (usually a simple parry) to the change-beat
- emphasise the swing of the blade following the change-beat
- accurate placement of the point.

General tactical approach for beats and change-beats

Often used to take the right of way from an opponent who maintains a straight arm, in this case the beat must deflect the opponent's blade out of line.

When used as a preparation of attack, the attack is usually delivered on the opponent's reaction to the beat.

Pressure

As its name implies, this *attack on the blade* is the exertion of a sudden force on the opponent's blade. The subtlety and variance of the strength of the pressure can stimulate a variety of responses from the opponent, which may be used to the advantage of the fencer making the preparation.

The objective of the pressure being one or more of the following:

- to push the blade aside
- to expose target
- to get a reaction
- more subtle than a beat
- executed from an engagement (foible to foible)
- best employed as a preparation for a disengage

- emphasise the opponent's reaction to the sudden force on their blade.

Froissement

An attack on the blade that displaces the opponent's blade by means of a sharp, strong, grazing action diagonally forwards and downwards from foible to forte. Used to upset the opponent's grip and or control of the sword.

Teach initially from an engagement and progress towards executing the action from absence of blade:

- if executed in quarte - slightly pronate the hand whilst severely grazing down the opponent's blade
- if executed in sixte - slightly supinate the hand whilst severely grazing down the opponent's blade
- emphasise the sharpness and power of the action.

Compound Preparations

Compound preparations are two or more preparations made simultaneously, e.g. a step forward with a beat.

For teaching points see *Footwork*, *Attacks on the blade* and *Prises-de-fer*.

Timing is the essential thing and this depends upon the intention following the compound preparation. Examples of this intention could be:

- to create an opportunity to attack
- to draw an attack.

Double Preparations

Double preparations are two preparations executed successively not simultaneously, e.g. a step forward followed by a beat.

For teaching points see *Footwork*, *Attacks on the blade* and *Prises-de-fer*.

Timing is essential, i.e. the variation of timing between the two preparations depends upon the intention following the double preparation.

TAKINGS OF THE BLADE (Prises-de-fer)

A *prise-de-fer* transports the opponent's blade away from its existing line into a preferred position, opening the way for an offensive action.

The named *prises-de-fer* are the *bind*, the *croisé* and the *envelopment*.

The *engagement*, the *change of engagement* and *coulé* may also, depending upon the manner in which they are executed, be regarded as *prises-de-fer*.

Any taking of the blade should be related to the offensive or defensive action being prepared.

The Engagement

When a fencer crosses swords with an adversary the blades are *engaged*. The *engagement* corresponds to the line in which the swords are crossed.

Revise:

- naming the engagement
- closing the line
- covering.

Engagements are achieved from absence of blade.

The action of engaging the blade could be used to:

- draw an attack
- draw a reaction from which to attack
- achieve an engagement to facilitate an attack from that line.

The Change of Engagement

The *change of engagement* engages the opponent's blade in the line opposite to the one of engagement. It can be executed by passing under, or over the opposing blade.

Changes of engagement are made from an engagement.

The action of changing the engagement could be used to:

- draw an attack
- draw a reaction from which to attack
- changing the engagement to a particular line to facilitate an attack from that line.

Coulé

This movement is a *graze* down the opponent's blade, executed by straightening the arm and maintaining contact with the opponent's blade throughout. This action may be regarded as a *simple attack*; an *attack on the blade*; or even as a *prise-de-fer*.

For two same-handed fencers:

- initially taught in sixte, against an opponent who has a low hand with the point slightly higher than the hand
- start just outside riposting distance with the hand in sixte
- take a counter-sixte action whilst extending the arm, such that the middle of the blade engages the opponent's foible
- the engagement should occur at approximately two thirds of the full arm extension
- the attacking point should be kept low, relative to the hand, when the hit occurs
- the opponent's point should be deflected away from the target as the attacking arm is extended
- maintain contact with the opponent's blade throughout the execution of the action
- when the coach is satisfied with the extended arm position, add the angulation and hit
- point moves straight to the target, whilst the hand and guard move diagonally forward.

Concentrate on: the forward movement of the point, straight to the target.

Bind

The *bind* transports the opponent's blade diagonally across the target from a high-line to a low-line or *vice versa*.

Most effectively used as an attack:

- initially taught from quarte to octave, against a fencer extending the sword arm into the high-line with a high hand and a slightly lower point;
- engage the opponent's blade in quarte with slight domination,
- pivot over and carry it across to the opposite low-line
- extend the arm, maintaining contact with the blade, and hit
- keep contact with the opponent's foible, across the rim of the guard and the forte, throughout the action
- hand - maintained at breast height
- do not attempt to use the fingers - this is a wrist and forearm action
- on extending to hit, use the opponent's blade as a path to the target.

Croisé

The *croisé* transports the blade downward (or upwards) while keeping it on the same side of the target:

Most effectively used as a riposte or counter-riposte because the opponent's point is kept well clear of the target (important in close-quarter fencing).

Teach initially from quarte to low quinte, against a fencer extending the sword arm into the high line with a high hand and a slightly lower point:

- engage the opponent's blade in quarte
- pronate - with slight domination (crossing of blades)
- bear vertically down - to low quinte
- angulate and hit
- maintain contact with the opponent's foible, across the rim of the guard and the forte, throughout the action.

Envelopment

The *envelopment* dominates the opponent's blade as it carries it around in a circle returning to the original line.

Teach initially from sixte, against a fencer who extends the arm with a low hand and a slightly higher point:

- start just outside riposting distance with the hand in half quarte
- opponent threatens the slightly open line of sixte (extending the arm)
- engage sixte with slight domination
- completely encircle the blade in a circular action (clockwise - for a right-handed fencer)
- extend the arm, during the last third of the circular action, to hit
- maintain contact with the opponent's foible, across the rim of the guard and the forte, throughout the action

- hand - maintain at breast height
- do not attempt to use the fingers - this is a wrist and forearm action
- on extending to hit, use the opponent's blade as a path to the target.

Compound Prises-de-fer

Two or more *prises-de-fer* taken continuously without losing contact with the opponent's blade.

Normally used against a fencer whose reaction is to lift or lower his arm, during the prise-de-fer, whilst maintaining a straight arm.

- Examples** - from quarte, bind to octave, then bind to quarte
- from sixte, envelop in sixte, then croisé in low sixte
- from sixte, envelop in sixte, then bind to septime.

Teach initially stepping with the first prise-de-fer and lunging with the second prise-de-fer.

For teaching points refer to “*Prises-de-fer*” above.

Double Prises-de-fer

Two or more *prises-de-fer* during which there is a momentary loss of the blade.

Normally used against a fencer who deliberately (or accidentally) slips off the first prise-de-fer to re-direct the point into a open line whilst maintaining a straight arm. Where the blade is presented on the loss of blade, therefore determines the choice of the second prise-de-fer.

For teaching points refer to “*Prises-de-fer*” above.

Examples

- engage quarte, bind to octave (blade lost), retake in sixte and either coul   through sixte or bind to septime
- from sixte, coul   or envelop (blade lost), retake in quarte and either bind to octave or cro     from quarte to low quinte.

Takings of the Blade General

- Best employed against the type of fencer who maintains a stiff, straight arm with the point threatening the target.
- Most important is the use of the guard and forte against the foible of the opponent's blade to take the blade and point out of line.

COUNTER-OFFENSIVE ACTIONS

Stop-Hit

A *stop-hit* is a counter-offensive action made, for example, into an opponent's attack. At foil, to be valid over an attack, the *stop-hit* must arrive *one period of fencing time* before the final movement of the attack arrives.

Teach initially on a badly executed compound attack:

- control of distance and timing
- accuracy of the point, hand and arm
- make use of a visual and/or tactile stimulus to initiate the counter attack
- hit without being hit (or at least one period of fencing time ahead of the attack).

Stop-Hit with Opposition

The *stop-hitter* anticipates the final line of the opponent's attack and *stop-hits*, in opposition, into that line - thus deflecting the attacking blade at the same time as the *stop-hit* is made. At foil, because this action is made into the final action of the attack, it cannot be valid if the attack lands on or off target.

Note: Stop-hits in opposition were formerly known as 'time-hits'.

Teach initially, starting from quarte, as a stop-hit in opposition through sixte on a disengage attack into the sixte line:

- the opponent's hit should not land
- generally, this is a premeditated action based upon observation of the opponent's attack
 - correct anticipation of the final line of the attack
 - stress the need for this observation of the opponent's final line of attack
- a stop-hit in opposition in the high-line works best on an opponent who attacks with a low hand and a fairly high point
- a stop-hit in opposition in the low-line works best on an opponent who attacks with a high hand and a fairly low point
- use both the guard and the forte to deflect the attacking blade
- timing is critical - much practice needed
- point - moves straight to the target, whilst the hand moves diagonally forward using the forte and guard to deflect the attacking blade.

Concentrate on: the forward movement of the point, straight to the target.

COUNTER-TIME

Every action made against an opponent's counter-offensive action.

Teach initially as premeditated action.

One of the simplest examples is to draw a stop-hit, parry it and riposte:

- for there to be a stop-hit, there must be an attack
- stop-hit must be drawn (i.e. the attack must look as though a stop-hit would be effective)
- parry taken well forward
- after the successful parry, add the riposte.

Distance:

- too close and the stop-hit is likely to be successful
- too far away and the stop-hit may not be provoked.

Riposte with opposition could prevent a renewal of the stop-hit.

BROKEN-TIME (*Temps perdu*)

A pause deliberately made between two movements, which normally follow each other immediately.

Note: '*Temps perdu*' means '*lost time*'.

Normally used against a well-controlled opponent, who delays parrying until the last possible moment:

- very long deep feint, so deep that the blade needs to be withdrawn to avoid the parry, thus breaking normal fencing time (i.e. lost time - *temps perdu*)
- accurate placement of the point in the open (or opening) line
- stress the danger of developing automatic broken-time actions - they should be used sparingly
- pupil(s) should be warned that badly planned and executed broken-time actions are easily interrupted by a counter-attack.

Note: the final part of a broken-time action may be executed simple or compound, with or without: angulation, opposition or by prise-de-fer.

THE DÉROBEMENT

The evasion of the opponent's attempt to find the blade.

The fencer executing the *dérobement* must initiate the movement by straightening the arm and maintain the right of way throughout the movement (the opponent is, therefore, attacking onto a straight arm).

Teach initially against an attack by bind:

- extend the arm, hand and point in line with the shoulder, point threatening your opponent's target
- as the opponent attempts to execute an attack by bind, evade the blade by a wrist /finger movement
- the arm must not bend during the execution of the movement
- the point must, at all times, remain in line with the valid target
- there should be no contact of blades

- a *dérobement* may be executed from a stationary position or whilst moving away but not whilst moving forward (because this would be an attack).

Note - this action can be executed simple or compound.

RENEWED OFFENSIVE ACTIONS

Remise

The *remise* is a renewed offensive action in which the blade remains in the line in which it was parried (or missed) and is then replaced on the target; or it is left in line for the opponent to advance onto.

Normally used against a fencer who parries and opens the line, but fails to riposte or a fencer whose riposte is either indirect or compound.

Generally considered to be a premeditated action.

Ideally the hit should be placed with the wrist/fingers.

Under certain circumstances it may be necessary to bend the arm.

Teach it initially on an opening line, then on an indirect riposte and finally on a compound riposte.

Executed as a renewed attack as follows:

- full lunge with the legs, but deliberately short with the body and the arm
- place the point immediately after it is released from the opponent's parry
- may be executed with or without opposition.

Notes:

Any movement of the sword arm, before the hit, makes the renewal a redoublement.
Any movement of the legs makes the renewal a reprise.

Redoublement

The *redoublement* is a renewed offensive action, into the same or a different line from that in which the blade was parried, by an additional movement (or movements) of the blade, arm or body. The feet do not move.

Normally used against a fencer who parries and fails to riposte or delays the riposte.

Generally considered to be a premeditated action.

Ideally the point should be manipulated with the hand/wrist.

Under certain circumstances it may be necessary to bend the arm.

Teach it first as a disengage following an attack which has been parried

Executed as a renewed attack as follows:

- full lunge with the legs, but deliberately short with the body and the arm

- make the redouble immediately after the attack has been parried
- stress the rapid and accurate manipulation of the blade and the placing of the point.

Notes:

- any movement of the feet turns the redoublement into a reprise
- may be executed as a direct, indirect or compound action
- may be executed with or without opposition, angulation and/or by prise-de-fer.

Reprise

The *reprise* is any renewed offensive action that involves additional foot movement(s). This usually involves a return to guard either forwards or backwards.

Used against a fencer who:

- parries with a step back and fails to riposte or delays the riposte
- parries without footwork and fails to riposte or delays the riposte.

Generally considered to be a premeditated action.

Ideally the point should be manipulated with the hand/wrist (under certain circumstances it may be necessary to bend the arm).

Teach initially with a disengage action following an attack which fails because the opponent takes a parry whilst stepping back.

Executed as a renewed attack as follows:

- full lunge with the legs, but deliberately short with the body and the arm
- keep the arm straight and maintain contact and tension on the opponent's blade as the rear foot is brought forward (to conceal your intention)
- only release the blade when in position to deliver the final part of the reprise.

Notes:

- may be executed as a direct, indirect or compound action
- may be executed with or without opposition, angulation and/or prise-de-fer.

Renewals - General

All offensive actions may be renewed.

To be valid renewals must land one period of fencing time before the final offensive action of the opponent.

EVASION or AVOIDANCE (Esquive)

Any action made to avoid being hit by displacing one's target from the line of the attack, such as ducking, sidestepping, etc. The named esquives are : *In Quartata*, *Passata sotto* and *Rassemblement*.

In Quartata

An evasive manoeuvre executed by pivoting on the front foot and moving the rear foot sideways to make a half turn to the outside line in order to avoid being hit. It is often accompanied with a stop-thrust.

Teach initially merely as an evasion of a straight thrust (without the stop hit):

- keep head as still as possible keeping the eyes fixed on the opponent's target
- front foot remains still, but some fencers who do not have full flexibility of ankle, knee and hip may prefer to pivot on the ball of the foot
- movement is initiated by back foot stepping sideways behind the sword arm
- trunk of the body is also turned sideways evading the line of the opponent's thrust
- leave the evasion as late as possible
- movement is only effectively used sparingly and as a surprise action
- add the stop-hit when the movement is satisfactory.

Passata sotto

An evasive manoeuvre executed by placing the unarmed hand on the floor and, at the same time, ducking below the attacking blade into a rear-lunge position. The movement is usually accompanied by a stop-thrust.

Teach initially merely as an evasion of a straight thrust (without the stop hit):

- keep the eyes fixed on the opponent's target
- front foot remains still
- movement is initiated by back foot being moved backwards into the lunge position
- pivoting from the waist, the trunk of the body is then moved diagonally downwards, below the attacking blade
- to help maintain balance, the rear hand is placed on the piste a short distance to the inside of the front knee
- leave the evasion as late as possible
- movement is only effective when used sparingly and as a surprise action
- add a stop-hit into the low-line when the movement is satisfactory.

Rassablement

A method of withdrawing by pulling the forward foot back to the rear foot (requiring standing up).

The movement is rarely, if ever, used at foil, but it is very effective in Epée fencing against attacks to foot where the movement is usually accompanied by a stop-hit to arm.

Crossover Step

A *crossover step* is an alternative to the normal method of making (or breaking ground) by crossing the legs during the movement. It has the advantage of covering more ground but the fencer is easily "wrong footed" if he/she does not choose the correct time to use the movement.

Crossover forward

Rear foot is brought forward and placed down in front of and at right angles to the forward foot, which is then moved forward to assume the normal on guard position.

Crossover backward

Front foot is moved backwards and placed down, toe first, behind the back foot, which is then moved backwards to assume the normal on guard position.

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES***Fencing Time (temps d'Escrime)***

One period of fencing time is the time taken by a fencer to execute one movement of blade, arm, body or legs - or any of these simultaneously.

Reaction Time

In simplistic terms, a fencer's reaction time may be regarded as the time it takes for a fencer to perceive the commencement of a simple attack and to execute a single parry. Some fencers have faster reactions than others but, on average, the time for such a *reaction time* is about one-tenth of a second.

Again, in simplistic terms, this *reaction time* may be related to *distance* as follows.

If an attacker has the initiative, and is very close to his opponent, he should be able to hit before his opponent can parry. We could say the attacker is *inside the defender's reaction time*.

Experimentation could find a distance where the defender parries as often as he is hit. We could now say that the attacker is *at the defender's reaction time*.

If the distance is increased beyond this point, the defender will always parry the attack. Here we could say the attacker is *outside the defender's reaction time*.

Most fencing movements, beyond the fundamental positions and movements, therefore have the objective of *gaining time and distance* on an opponent or, more simply, "*getting inside an opponent's reaction time*".

Offensive actions

May be executed from all supinated or pronated lines and from either an engagement or absence of blade.

Opposition

- All offensive actions may be delivered in opposition.

- During an offensive action, the guard and the forte of the attacking blade are used to deflect the opponent's blade – thus deflecting the opponent's point away from your own target.
- The easiest oppositions are effected in sixte and octave.

Angulated Offensive Actions

There is a very large variety of possible angulated movements, each needing its own specific information:

- all offensive actions may be delivered with angulation
- the angulation should be left to the last possible moment
- by hitting at an angle near to 90°, the point is less likely to slip off
- accuracy in directing and placing the point is essential.

General Points:

- surprise value, opponent thinks that the line is covered
- a relaxed, flexible wrist and shoulder are essential
- if the shoulder is tight, it is almost impossible to get a good wrist angulation.

Examples: (fencers of the same hand)

supinated angulation around a quarte parry

pronated angulation around a sixte parry.

Attacks on Preparation

Simple and Compound Attacks into an opponent's preparation are best taught initially on a foot and blade preparation (e.g. step forward with an engagement).

Teach initially using a lunge on the attack.

For teaching points see “Attacks”.

Prises de Fer

May themselves be used as offensive and/or counter-offensive actions in addition to their use as preparations.

Attacks

A step or a feint with a bent arm, is not considered an attack, but as a preparation.

From BFA "Rules for Competitions" (t.56):

"A simple attack, direct or indirect, is correctly executed when the straightening of the arm, the point threatening the valid target, precedes the initiation of the lunge or the flèche.

"The compound attack is correctly executed when the arm is straightening in the presentation of the first feint, with the point threatening the valid target, and the arm is not bent during the successive actions of the attack and the initiation of the lunge or the flèche.

"The attack with a step-forward-lunge or a step-forward-flèche is correctly executed when the straightening of the arm precedes the end of the step forward and the initiation of the lunge or the flèche.

"Actions, simple or compound, steps or feints, which are executed with a bent arm, are not considered as attacks but as preparations, laying themselves open to the initiation of the offensive or defensive/offensive action from the opponent."

Second Intention

An action made on an induced response (i.e. the act of drawing a movement from your opponent and counteracting it).

- Examples*
- counter-time (draw a stop-hit, parry it and riposte)
 - first counter-riposte (draw a riposte, parry it and riposte).

Compound attack lessons

Feint direct

Blades disengaged

Step forward - Feint direct: ①

effectively lining up target to draw a parry.

hit with a lunge by - ② disengage - ③ counter disengage and cut over. ④

① no more

coach actions - ② Lateral parry Quarte
③ Circular parry Sixte
④ Lateral parry Quarte

Step forwards - Feint by disengage - Blades engaged

as before - hit with lunge by D, CD, CO

Coach applies pressure to student's blade towards Quarte

Student disengages + steps forward.

① - Lateral parry Quarte

② - Circular parry Sixte

③ - Lateral parry Quarte

For Counter disengage as Coach applies pressure towards Quarte
Student sword is