

Intermediate Course

Week 1

Please note: whilst not mandatory, in order to fully participate in Week 5 of the course – Introduction to Club Fencing – you will need to have your own breeches. The course coaches will give you information on purchasing equipment at an early stage.

Flicks

A *flick* is where you use the weight of the point, throwing it around an obstacle in order to hit. Flicks look cool, BUT only if you can do them properly.

Unless you're a trained killer, going for flicks will often lead to one or more of the following: taking too long to wind up for the flick, exposing yourself (your hand in particular) and allowing your opponent to hit you; missing disastrously, allowing your opponent to hit you; standing there admiring your feeble attempt for too long, allowing your opponent to hit you; hitting your opponent with the flat of the blade instead of the point, causing pain. So: flicking, don't do it. Not for at least another 5 years!

Repetitive hitting

This, in part, was covered in the Beginner Course under *Second Intention*. Second Intention is a little more planned (as the word 'intention' implies), whereas repetitive hitting is something that should be more instinctive. The idea revolves around *automatically* renewing a hit on your opponent – again, see Beginner Course notes - whilst you have the opportunity. Repetitive hitting has two main advantages: it will keep your opponent on the back foot and, more importantly, it'll make you score more points! Remember to say "sorry" if you do hit more than once...

Foot hits

If you go for a foot or leg shot on your opponent, try not to actually *look* at the target. Try to extrapolate where the target is – guess where the target is by knowing what else is known – for example, if you can see their hand, drop your point a little and your aim changes to leg; drop it further, and you go to foot. The danger of looking at the target is that your

whole body will drop when trying to score the hit, making it easier for your opponent to counter-attack, and making it harder for you to recover to a safe distance out of trouble.

Weeks 2 & 3

This week is going to focus on distance. By this stage in your brief but glittering fencing career, you'll no doubt have had coaches yell at you numerous times for being too close to your opponent. Good footwork and good distance is essential to good fencing!

Keeping Distance

There's a saying that "distance is the best defence"; if you're fencing anyone that knows what they're doing, and you fall asleep on the spot, then they'll hit you (with a 'one tempo' attack – explained below). Also, remember that even if you have scored a hit, your opponent has 0.25s to score a hit themselves for a 'double'. Don't give them the chance, get out of the way!

Always stay sharp and at a good distance – if they can't reach you, they can't hit you!

Controlling Distance

Keeping distance is the most basic element of footwork. 'Controlling' distance is the next step; doing so will allow you to manoeuvre your opponent on the piste, to the distance and in the direction that you want them to be in. Controlling where your opponent is on the piste will make it easier for you to score a hit. Remember, it's easier to reach the target if your opponent is moving toward you, or in the middle of changing direction.

Tempo Distance

Fencing is so important that it has its own time, called *fencing time* (or 'tempo'). Consider that time and distance are linked: the further away your opponent is, the longer it'll take to hit them; with this in mind, in a fight there is what's called *one tempo* and *two tempo distance*. ("Tempo" just means "time").

One tempo distance is where you can hit your opponent in one move, for example with a direct lunge or flèche, and two tempo distance is where the opponent is slightly further away, and you need two (or more) movements to get to the target.

If you or your opponent is caught napping during a fight, this is often a good opportunity to

score a quick point using a one tempo attack. If, however, they are too far away then you'll need to do what's called a two-tempo attack: drawing out your opponent with the first action, before hitting them with a second. So when you're fencing, before anything happens be aware of the distance between you and them: can you hit them in one move; can they hit you in one move; do you need to draw them out before attacking?

Distance Tricks

Distance and footwork is one of the most obvious aspects of the sport that separates a beginner fencer from a good fencer, and a good fencer from a great fencer. As such, there are a number of tricks that can be used to usurp (what a great word) control over your opponent – a few of these are outlined below...

Breaking distance

Breaking distance uses the old adage that "attack is the best form of defence". Invite your opponent to lunge at you and, once they've started, step in toward your opponent (with your front foot first) and, at the same time, push your opponent's blade out of the way... all this should be done before your opponent's front foot lands and completes their lunge. Once you're in close, and your opponent is dazed and confused, angulate your point to score a hit.

Sneak Up on 'Em

And we don't mean on your tippy toes; instead, this trick plays on your opponent's field of vision. Most people normally focus their vision on and around their opponent's guard; furthermore, anyone sane will ordinarily fence at two tempo distance (explained above). Based on these two assumptions, from two tempo distance you can extend your arm – your opponent won't feel too threatened – and then move your feet closer (i.e. to one tempo distance)... allowing you to execute a one tempo attack, such as an explosive lunge or flèche.

L'Aspirateur

(French for the word 'hoover'). In fencing, as in normal life, if someone tries to hit you then your automatic reaction is to want to hit them back. This basic instinct can be turned to

your advantage: on the recovering from an attack, if you go back to a safe distance whilst leaving your blade in absence, the bulk of your target will be exposed and more often than not the temptation will be too much for your opponent and they'll likely try and attack you... providing that you're ready for it, and at a safe distance, you can use your absence of blade to angulate a stop-hit to their wrist and then step out of the way again (you may need to come up with a parry afterwards just to make sure you're safe).

Week 4

“Most games are lost, not won” (Casey Stengel)... it doesn't matter who you are, what your ability is, or how long you've been fencing – psychology is massively important in fencing. In fact, if you just Google “sport psychology” you'll come up with over 19 million results; do a search for the same on Amazon and there're well over 6,000 books dedicated to the subject.

Below are just a few practical bits of advice that should help you in both training and competition...

No Mistakes

We said in the first week of the Beginner Course that épée is “the art of making the fewest mistakes” – this was said by Éric Srecki, a French fencer who medalled at 4 successive Olympic Games (so fairly well qualified to comment). As he says, fencing is about making less mistakes than your opponent, and the *only* thing that defines a mistake is your letting them scoring a point. It sounds simple, but all you have to do to win is not let them hit you... if you have that in your mind on the piste – that you're not going to give away any silly points – then it will serve you well; you're distance will be better, and your mind clearer. Keep your distance, and don't commit to anything unless you *know* that you will score yourself.

'One Hit' Mentality

Following on from the above, it doesn't matter if the final score is 1-0 or 15-14, it only takes one hit to win a fight. Enough said.

Street Epée

Of course, your coaches will want you to fence elegantly, with balance, poise, control and finesse... however, we don't care that much. The sayings “it's not pretty, but it counts”, and “winning ugly” both come to mind; it doesn't matter how you get the hit, or if what you meant to do didn't quite work out how you wanted it to: the most important thing is that you don't get hit yourself. Far too often, fencers make what they perceive to be a mistake – or even a hit – when in fact nothing has happened, they've stopped (quite often looking at

'the box'), their opponent hasn't, and the referee definitely hasn't yet called "halt".

Don't stop and get hit by your opponent – you'll look like an imbecile.

Keep Calm and Carry On

"Keep the fire in your heart, and the ice in your head" (Al B.)... no matter where you are, who you're fencing, what the score is or how much you want to win, you should never, ever, lose your temper. A very common mistake when things aren't going your way is to just "do it faster" – don't. All you'll achieve is losing quicker.

Instead, keep a clear mind and just focus on winning the next point (i.e. making no mistakes) and you'll fair a lot better. Plus, people who hit hard tend to have fewer friends.

What's in a Name?

Nothing is – it's just a name. It doesn't matter if you're fencing a beginner or the reigning Olympic champion, you still need to beat 'em. Too often, inexperienced fencers will lose before they even step on the piste: if you think you're going to lose, you will; if you try your best and keep in mind all the information above, you'll stand a chance.

If they have 'GBR' on their back, it doesn't matter – it may stand for Great Brighton or Gets Beaten Regularly.

Week 5

Introduction to Club Fencing

Please note: whilst not mandatory, in order to fully participate in this lesson, you will need to have your own breeches. The course coaches will give you information on purchasing equipment at an early stage.

Electric fencing is the norm nowadays. It involves a **scoring box** (usually referred to simply as “box”), situated by the centre line of the piste, which is connected to two **spooles** at either end by what are called **ground wires/leads**. Each spool will have a socket, into which the fencer will plug their **bodywire** and then attach it to a clip on their jacket – the other end of the bodywire, which is worn underneath the fencing jacket, will plug into the socket of an electric weapon.

Fencers “test guards” before each fight – hitting your opponent’s guard once – to make sure that no scoring lights come up on the box.

Electric fencing is simple for the most part, with just two fencers and a referee. Fights progress as detailed earlier in this Beginner Course hand-out. During play, any hits registered by either fencer will cause the box to beep and show some pretty lights, signalling the referee to call “halt”; the side on which the light appears is the same side by which it was scored.

In épée competitions, it is not uncommon for there to be **floor judges**, because if the weapon hits the floor it will register a coloured light which may not be valid. To eliminate this, and usually at competitions, fencers will sometimes play on what is called an **electric/metallic piste**, which is hard-wired to the box and will eliminate most floor hits by earthing them out.