Fencing Study Guide

**History**

* Fencing originates in Europe as early as at least the 12th century.
* Fencing was also in the original Olympic games in ancient Greece.
* Fencing was one of four sports to be included in every modern Olympic games, since the first in 1896.
* The father was the modern Olympic Games (Baron Pierre de Coubertin) was a fencer.
* The foil originated in the 17th century as a training weapon for the small sword. The foil is a light flexible weapon designed almost exclusively for thrusting.

**Equipment**

* White form fitting jacket with a strap between your legs. Instructors/Coaches wear Black
* One glove for sword arm.
* Breeches or pants
* Mask with a bib to protects the neck

**Weapons**

Foil, epee and saber are the three weapons used in the sport of fencing. In Physical Education class we will use the foil. Competitive fencers may compete with all three, however usually one tries to specialize and master one weapon.

**Foil**
The foil is a descendant of the light court sword formerly used by nobility to train for duels. It is 35 inches long and weighs less than a pound. Points are scored with the tip of the blade and must land on valid target area (torso from shoulders to groin in the front and to the waist in the back). The head, legs, arms, and neck are off-target.

**Foil Parts**

- **Blade**
- **Pommel**
- **Bell Guard**
- **Handle**
- **Forte (Strong)**
- **Medium**
- **Foible (Weak)**
- **Tip**

**The Grip**

The thumb and forefinger rest above and below each other. These are the “manipulators”, and control the movements of the foil blade. The remaining three fingers wrap around. Only the finger pads come in contact with the handle; the grip is firm but light, allowing a space between palm and handle.

**Field of Play**
A fencing bout takes place on a **strip** or **piste**. The strip is 1.5 to 2 meters wide and 14 meters long. Fencers are to remain on the strip while competing. In class if one foot or both feet step off the strip, a warning then point will be awarded.

### Scoring and Rules of Play

The unit of competition between two fencers is called a **bout**. Each bout is fenced for five of touches. A touch is a hit made with the point of the opponent’s foil. The director is the primary official of the bout. His duty is to observe the action, interpret it according to the rules, determine materiality of the hit, and award the touch if one has been scored. He controls the fencing strip or (Piste). Four judges assist him in reaching a correct judgment of the action. The judges are placed two behind each of the competitors. Each set of judges watches the target of the fencer whom they face. The judges are responsible for determining validity of touches. In class the director and four judges (jury) make the call. In competitive fencing bouts are judged electronically with one director (referee).

To score a touch in foil, the fencer must hit his opponent somewhere on valid target area. Off-target hits are foul. All hits will cause the director to stop action with the command, “Halt”. If the touch is awarded, fencers will be put back to the guard line and resume fencing. If there is no touch, the fencers are put back “en guard” at the site and action is resumed. When either fencer has scored 3 touches, the opponents change sides. Under the same circumstance when one of the fencers is left-handed, the judges change side. This way the director can continue to view the open side of the fencing.
Each judge has one vote. Upon seeing a touch scored, the judge raises his hand. The director will then stop the action and poll the judges. Judges can respond in the following ways:

**Yes**
- Valid
- Touch scored but off target

**No**
- clearly missed valid or non valid targets

**Abstain**
- doubtful about what has occurred

The director has 1½ votes, so he can overrule one judge, but can’t out vote both judges. If the director cannot reconstruct the phrase which enables right of way to be determined, even if all judges vote yes, the action is thrown out.

**Etiquette and Courtesy**

- Neat and proper attire
- The salute begins all bouts
- The salute and handshake ends all bouts
- Fencers may not talk through the mask
- Never turn your back to the opponent
- All touches are to be acknowledged
- A Fencer may raise his hand when bout is halted and the director may address an issu as he or she sees fit upon requesting the fencer to remove his mask

**Protocol (class)**

The director and four judges stand in place at the sides of the piste. Fencers are in attire stand and at the end of the piste with masks off. Prior to starting the bout the fencers must salute each other, then the director. The fencers start and stop the bout at the referee’s command. He will say “Fence” or “Allez” to start action and “Halt” to stop action. Once the bout is stopped, the director must explain his reasons for stopping it, analyze what just happened, and award points or penalties. If a point has been awarded, then the competitors return to their on-guard lines; if not, they remain approximately where they were when the bout was interrupted. The director will then restart the bout. This procedure is repeated until either one of the
fencers has reached to required number of points or time runs out. In class we will play 3 points or 4-8 minutes whatever comes first at the teachers discretion.

**Right of Way (Priority) rules**

The priority system is used for the director to determine which fencer had the right of way. If both fencers touch at the same time, the referee (director) must decide who should be awarded the point by using the priority system.

**Warning Lines**

If one foot touches the warning line, the director calls “halt”. This is a warning that the rear limit line is one meter away. Should this same fencer be pushed back over the rear limit with both feet, he will be penalized with a touch against him.

**The Parry**

The parry is a defensive move with the foil, which successfully deflects an attacking blade from the target area, preventing a valid touch. This can be accomplished through use of the guard parry (use of the guard to move the foil aside), or the beat parry (use of a spanking action delivered to the medium part of the blade). The guard parry is effective in most instances, and well suited in defending at short distances. The beat parry is designed and used as an early defense before close fencing distance is established.

**Defensive Parries**

Although there are eight different parries for the four target areas, parries of 6, 4, 8, 7 have the most practical use for the beginner, and are adequate for most levels of fencing. A good parry system gives maximum protection to all target areas with minimal wrist and hand movement. Just as the body target is divided into four quarters, so are the parries. However, a parry is differentiated by the quarter in which in finishes, and not where it is
Parries can be done in a lateral, diagonal, semi-circular, vertical, or circular direction. Remember that the parry serves to deflect the attack, not push it away.

Parry of 6 from guard position
- Palm up
- Right side
- Point up

Parry of 4
- Thumb up
- Left Side
- Point Up

Parry of 8
- Palm Up
- Right side
- Point down, but above knees

Parry of 7
- Thumb Up
- Left Side
- Point Down, but Above Knees

**Four target areas! (Sixte-six, Quarte-four, Octave-eight, Septime-seven)**
Helpful Hints for Bouting

1. Vary tempo and distance of footwork and foil play to make your movement unpredictable.
2. Capitalize on your opponent’s weak area when you identify it.
3. During the first minutes of boutting, observe your opponent’s fencing distance, parries, and basic fencing style.
4. Take care of your foil. Slightly bend down the blade with a bit of an arc.
5. Control your opponent’s foil and you will control the bout.
6. Control the fencing distance which will help you control the bout.
7. Try to use the Ballestra and the Pattinando (cross-over) when facing a short fencer with limited reach.
8. When directing pay attention and use fencing terms, not interpretations.
9. For every valid, threatening attack there exists a parry. You just need to figure out which one to use.
10. With good defense you can create offensive attacks.

11. Move with small motions of the forearm, not shoulder. The shoulder telegraphs intentions, it’s too big and slow of a movement which doesn’t fool anyone.

12. Keep moving! A moving target is harder to hit.

13. Maintain effective guard position; your weapon arm should act as a shield.

14. Make sure you are in a balanced guard position, ready to attack or defend.

15. Understand right of way. Riposte immediately after parrying. If your opponent fails to immediately riposte: Your options could be…
   - Remise-make a second attempt to score by replacing the point on target while still in your lunge
   - Reprise-retake the attack with a new action as opposed to just replacing the point.
   - Redoublement- retake the attack by regaining the guard position by recovering either forward or backward. Don’t attack into an attack.

16. Try to parry to the side since the target area is longer than wide. The shortest quickest parry is lateral.

17. Be aggressive!

18. Plan how you will attack and try and carry out that plan.

19. Raise your rear hand to acknowledge hits when practicing.

20. Use the side of the strip to your advantage.

Terms

**Advance**- A forward step toward one’s opponent.

**Allez**- Fence or start.

**Attack**- Any offensive movement which gains right-of-way.

**Ballestra**- The combined techniques of the jump and lunge as a means to attack.

**Beat**- A sharp spanking action on the blade used as preparation to the attack.

**Bind**- A preparation for the attack which transfers the opponent’s blade from one line to an opposite line.

**Bout**- Formalized combat between two fencers.

**Closing the line**- A defensive movement with the foil which protects a line from possible attack.

**Counterattack**- A stop thrust or attack into the tempo of the opponent’s offensive preparation.
Counter parry - A parry which defends against a riposte.
Coupe (cutover) - A preparation for attack which withdraws the foil blade up and over the tip of the defender’s blade, scoring to an opposite line.
Covered - A parry position which closes the line.
Derobement - A deceiving blade movement with an extended arm which avoids the opponent’s attempt to beat, bind, or take the blade.
Development - An extension of the sword arm as it precedes the lunge as one continuous movement.
Direct - An attack or riposte which does not break tempo or change lines on the way to the target.
Disengage - A movement made with the foil blade during the preparation for attack which transfers the blade under the opponent’s defense to an opposite line.
Distance - The space between two fencers at any time during the fencing bout.
Engagement - When two blades are in contract.
En Garde - Position taken before starting to fence.
Feint - A fake attack used to get the opponent to react.
Fleche - A means for delivering an attack with a forward-springing action which employs a run for its recovery.
Froisse - A powerful action against the opponent’s blade designed to disarm.
Halt - Stop.
High Lines - The lines of attack and defense above the fencer’s foil blade, including the inside and outside high lines.
Hit - Any scoring touch to either the off or on target areas of the fencer.
Indicator Points - the difference between the scored points of two fencers. (A score of 3-1 in class would result in 2 positive points and 2 negative points for fencers). In class we record the positive points only.
Indirect - Any offensive action which attempts to scores in the opposite line from that of the preparation.
Inside Lines - The lines of attack and defense to the left of the foil blade, including the high and low lines. (Reverse for the left-handed fencer.)
Invalid Touch - A scoring action which lands off target to the head, arms, or legs of the opponent.
Lines - Theoretical lines of defense which divide the target area into four scoring areas, including the outside, inside, high, and low lines.
Lunge - The Primary means by which the fencer delivers the attack.
Outside Line - The line of attack and defense to the right of the foil blade, including high and low lines. (Reverse for left-handed fencer)
Passe - An attack which slides by the target, failing to score.
**Pattinando**- Advance and lunge performed one movement, with lunge coming from rear foot. Useful against an opponent who habitually retreats because it gains distance and contains a tremendous element of surprise.

**Piste**- French term for the fencing strip.

**Point-in-Line**- Action in which the fencer, who is generally out of attacking range, points their weapons at their opponent with their arm fully extended. A fencer who establishes a point in line has right of way, and their opponent cannot attack until they remove the blade from line by executing a beat.

**Preparation of attack**- Any movement of the blade, body, or feet which creates the scoring opportunity.

**Recovery**- The movement which returns one to the en guard position after lunging.

**Right-of-way**- A scoring advantage related to timing which is gained by the fencer who first initiates an attack or who ripostes direct and without hesitation after a parry.

**Riposte**- A counterattack immediately following a parry.

**Salute**- A gesture of readiness which acknowledges one’s opponent before the fencing bout begins.

**Stop thrust**- A counterattack performed by extending the arm as a means of scoring into the opponent’s offensive preparation.

**Target**- The torso of the body, including the front, sides, and back, which defines the valid surface for scoring.

**Thrust**- Any action which conveys danger to the opponent’s target.