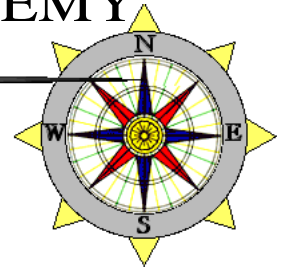
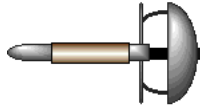


NORTHWEST FENCING ACADEMY



A School of Classical & Historical Swordsmanship

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Rules of Engagement in Foil Fencing

Foil fencing is conducted by rules of engagement descended from dueling practice, or more specifically, from the teaching methods employed by fencing masters over the past several centuries. These methods were designed to teach specific concepts of defense to swordsmen and thus maximize their chances of survival in an actual sword fight. As dueling gave way to the practice of foil fencing as a sport, these methods were codified and laid down as the "rules of the game". These are rules covering **right of way** (also known as **priority**) and the **limitation of the target**.

Right of Way: The basic convention is "right of way": determining who has the right to attack and who has the obligation to defend. When dueling, a swordsman maximized his chances of success in an attack by adopting a strongly offensive posture: he extended his arm and brought the attack as close to his opponent and as far from himself as possible, thus forcing his opponent into a defensive posture. Since it is very risky to attack while being attacked, intelligent swordsmen would defend against the attack before responding to it.

To teach the importance of these concepts, fencing masters taught certain principles that later evolved in the official rules for foil:

Every attack, that is every initial offensive action, which is correctly executed must be parried or completely avoided and the phrase must be followed through [...]. - FENCING RULES 1999 Edition, United States Fencing Association, Inc., Section t.56 (a)

Simply put, the person who is attacked must defend himself. The question then arises, "what is a correctly executed attack?" The following definitions and rules were established:

The **attack** is the initial offensive action made by extending the arm and continuously threatening the opponent's target, preceding the launching of the lunge or flèche. - FENCING RULES 1999 Edition, United States Fencing Association, Inc., Section t.7

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 of the opponent. - FENCING RULES 1999 Edition, United States Fencing Association, Inc., Section t.56 (a) 4.

In other words, the arm has to be extended before the lunge or flèche (a running attack) is executed. With the attack defined, the definition of the parry follows quite naturally:

The **parry** is the defensive action made with the weapon to prevent an offensive action arriving. - FENCING RULES 1999 Edition, United States Fencing Association, Inc., Section t.7

Note that parries can be simple (the hand moving laterally across the body) or circular (the hand moving the blade in a circle). Once the attack is successfully parried, the swordsman can then respond:

The **riposte** is the offensive action made by the fencer who has parried the attack.

The **counter-riposte** is the offensive action made by the fencer who has parried the riposte. - FENCING RULES 1999 Edition, United States Fencing Association, Inc., Section t.7.

If the parrying swordsman fails to riposte immediately, his opponent has an opportunity to execute **replacement** (also known as a **remise**). The remise is:

A simple and immediate offensive action which follows the original attack, [and is made] without withdrawing the arm, after the opponent has parried or retreated, when the latter has either quitted contact with the blade without riposting or has made a riposte which is delayed, indirect or compound. - FENCING RULES 1999 Edition, United States Fencing Association, Inc., Section t.8 (d) 1.

It should be noted that the swordsman's repertoire is not limited to the attack, the parry and riposte, or the remise. Attacks and ripostes may be simple (one blade motion) or compound (two or more blade motions), parries may be simple or circular, and a variety of counterattacks (an attack against an attack) are also employed.

Counter-attacks are offensive or offensive-defensive actions made during the offensive action of the opponent. - FENCING RULES 1999 Edition, United States Fencing Association, Inc., Section t.8 (c).

In all cases, however, the principle " every attack [...] which is correctly executed must be parried or completely avoided " is in full force. You must hit without being hit.

The Valid Target: In foil the valid target is limited to the front and back of the torso, excluding the arms, legs, and head. The logic in terms of dueling practice is that an adversary wounded in a vital organ is less likely to be able to continue fighting than one who has received a thrust to the musculature of the arm or leg.

At foil, only touches which arrive on the target are counted as valid. The target at foil excludes the limbs and the head. It is confined to the trunk, the upper limit being the collar up to 6 cm above the prominences of the collar bones; at the sides to the seams of the sleeves, which should cross the head of the humerus; and the lower limit following a horizontal line across the back joining the tops of the hip bones, thence by straight lines to the junction of the lines of the groin. - FENCING RULES 1999 Edition, United States Fencing Association, Inc., Section t.47

Fencing Technique and Fencing Rules: The rules quoted in this handout are all excerpted from the current edition of the Fencing Rules as written by the Federation Internationale d'Escrime (FIE) and as translated by the United States Fencing Association. While knowledge of the official rules - and there are a lot of more of them than the few excerpted here - is very useful to the fencer, the rule book is not a text on fencing methods or fencing technique. It is simply a reference intended to enable fencers to clarify their actions and resolve any disputes.