



CLASSICAL ACADEMY OF ARMS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR ORAL COMPONENTS OF PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATIONS

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Satisfactory completion of an oral examination is required for the ranks of Classical Fencing Demonstrator, Classical Fencing Instructor, Classical Fencing Provost, and Classical Fencing Master. The examination panel may choose any of the following questions appropriate for the rank for discussion in the examination. In some cases the Classical Academy of Arms uses terminology that we feel best identifies concepts or names of techniques of instruction used during the classical period but either not specifically identified or known by a variety of names. There may be reasonable differences in answers depending upon the school in which the instructor has trained.

Candidates should note that the answers provided below to individual questions are the expected minimum response. You are encouraged to read more deeply on these topics, discuss them with your instructor, and physically walk through the answers where appropriate to make certain that you understand the material.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe the classical fencing piste and identify what impacts its design might have on fencing.

ANSWER – the classical piste used by the Classical Academy of Arms for foil and sabre is 20 feet long by 3 feet wide, a set of dimensions used by period pistes. Bouts in epee may be fenced on this piste or on longer ones. The short piste limits mobility and the rapid chases seen in modern fencing, makes the advance of the advance-lunge a preparation, increases the value of the counterattack, and encourages the delivery of the first feint from the guard with the attack from the lunge.

2. What are the three standard distances of classical fencing and how are they measured?

ANSWER –Although there are some differences in terminology, in general distance is described as short (able to hit the opponent with an extension), medium (a lunge required to hit), and long (an advance and a lunge is required to hit). Distance is individual to the fencer (a tall fencer's medium distance may be a short fencer's long distance). In addition, distance is specific to the target in sabre and epee which have advanced targets (medium distance to the arm may be long distance to the torso).

3. How are the fencing lines defined?

ANSWER – vertically as high and low lines and horizontally as inside and outside lines, forming four quadrants, not necessarily equal in size: (1) high outside, (2) low outside, (3) low inside, and (4) high inside. Lines are defined in relation to the weapon's guard, with high above, low below, inside toward the front of the torso, and outside toward the back. The physical extent of the lines depends upon the established target for the weapon.

4. Why would points be awarded in bouts for form or style?

ANSWER – the award of points for style disappeared before World War I. The intent was to reward fencers who showed superior form and technique in a bout with 0.5 to 1.5 points to encourage stylistically pure fencing.

5. What are the significant schools of the classical period?

ANSWER – the French, Italian, and Spanish were the three weapon schools. The Italian School was in turn divided into competing factions at various times, with separate Northern Italian and Neapolitan Schools. In addition, a distinct school of sabre fencing developed in Hungary, the Kreusslerian school of Thrust Fencing was widely taught in Germany, and the Hollandsche Methode was an attempt to create a distinctly Dutch approach to fencing. Finally, a distinctive German approach to dueling developed as academical fencing in the university environment.

6. How would you define the term school in relations to classical fencing?

ANSWER – a school is a regional or national approach to fencing that existed over a period of time with a coherent doctrine, texts that describe the method of fencing, a body of fencing masters and fencers, and a distinctive pattern of weapon.

7. Describe the basic classification of fencing actions.

ANSWER – fencing actions can be classified as actions not intended to hit (in reconnaissance, as preparations, or to cause the opponent to adopt a desired course of action), offensive (the attacking actions intended to score), defensive (actions to block or avoid the opponent's actions), and counteroffensive (actions to either hamper an opponent's ability to attack or to score against an attack in progress without a parry).

8. What are the basic types of attacking actions?

ANSWER – although there are differences in terminology and in how different masters categorize actions, we can generally classify attacks as: false attacks (attacks which do not intend to land in first intention, but serve as preparation or reconnaissance), simple attacks (one tempo direct and indirect actions), compound attacks (multiple tempo actions which combine one or more feints with a final simple attack), attacks on the blade (actions using percussion to displace the opponent's blade to open the line for the final action), and takings of the blade (actions using leverage to displace the opponent's blade to open the line for the final action).

9. What are the arguments for and against positioning the guard and blade centrally at the intersection of vertical and horizontal lines equally dividing the torso?

ANSWER – it positions the blade so as to be able to react equally in meeting the threat in any of the four quadrants. However, it forces the fencer to actively move the arm, hand, and blade to a new position for every threat, and does not provide a secure starting point for defense in and one line.

10. What is an attack and when does it begin?

ANSWER – an attack is the extension of the arm and blade threatening the opponent's target with the point or, in sabre, the cutting edges, at a distance at which a hit is possible. The attack begins with the start of the extension and may be carried to the target with footwork.

11. What is the difference between the materiality and the validity of a hit?

ANSWER – materiality is a judgement as to whether or not a hit lands on the body of the fencer, with the point arresting in all three weapons or the cutting edge in Sabre. Validity is an assessment of whether or not a material hit is awarded a touch under the rules for the weapon.

12. What is the theoretical basis of the stop thrust or stop cut?

ANSWER – in a duel the stop action with the sharp weapon is intended to arrive far enough in advance of the attack to arrest the attack and wound the attacker, thus denying the attacker's ability to hit the fencer.

13. You are presiding over a bout. Your judges behind the fencer on the left signal a hit on fencer on the right. (1) The votes are yes and yes, but not valid, and you abstain. The judges watching fencer on the left both vote yes that fencer on the right's action landed on fencer on the left. What is the outcome? (2) What would have happened if fencer on the right's action had missed, and fencer on the left remised on target?

ANSWER – (1) the first action by the fencer on the left is a doubtful hit. There is no doubt (vote 2-0) that a hit arrived. However, it is impossible to tell if it was on or off the valid target. The doubtful hit stops the fencing action, and fencer on the right's hit has no effect. (2) If fencer on the right had missed and fencer on the left successfully remised, that remise would score a hit against fencer on the right. A second action by the fencer making a doubtful hit scores if there no intervening hit by the other fencer.

14. How are touches recorded, and what is the theoretical basis for this method of scoring?

ANSWER – touches are scored against an opponent who is hit. Thus a bout scored A – 5 and B – 0 is a victory by B who has touched A 5 times and not been touched himself. This replicates the reality of the duel in which hits by a duelist resulted in wounds to the opponent. If our A and B case were a duel, the formal record of the affair would have recorded that A was wounded 5 times and B not at all.

15. What is the purpose of a feint, and how is it conducted?

ANSWER – the feint creates a false impression of the objective of an attack, causing the opponent to react to the feint by moving the blade in an attempt to parry it, thus opening a line into which the fencer can direct the actual attack.

16. What was the maximum number of distinct parts to the most complex compound actions commonly taught during the classical period? Was there a difference between this number and the number commonly referred to as being practical in a bout? If so, what was the difference?

ANSWER – period texts indicate the maximum number of tempos taught was four with the first and all subsequent tempos until the last being feints, and the final tempo being the attack. However, these sources also indicate that three tempo actions were the practical limit in bouting.

17. How many hand positions are found in the classical French, Spanish, and Italian Schools, and what are their names?

ANSWER – the French and Spanish Schools commonly use three positions: pronation, middle, and supination. The Italian School typically uses 6: First, Second, Second in Third, Third, Third in Fourth, and Fourth, although some texts describe a First in Second.

18. Define tempo and discuss the relationship between tempo and actual time.

ANSWER – tempo is defined as the period of time required to complete one simple fencing action. The actual time length of a tempo depends upon the speed with which the action is executed. Two one tempo actions executed at different speeds will require different actual times for their completion. Tempo is important in determining right of way in foil and sabre. Actual time for these weapons is primarily relevant to whether an opponent can insert a stop action prior to the start of the final action of an attack. In epee tempo is important in discussing and teaching technique, but actual time determines the priority of a hit.

19. How is the classical fleche executed?

ANSWER – the rear foot is brought forward and placed in front of the front foot. The front foot is then swung forward into a lunge, forming essentially a short forward pass swinging into the lunge. The tendency of some fencers to simply run at the opponent was considered deplorably bad fencing, although by the end of the period it had become commonplace.

20. What was the naturalist approach to fencing?

ANSWER – naturalists such as Burton and de Bazancourt advocated for simplified technique, the teaching of a quite limited number of fencing actions, emphasis on natural posture and movement, and the rapid exposure of students to bouting.

21. What is a contraction parry?

ANSWER – a parry that pulls the opponent's blade across the fencer's target. Change parries transporting an opponent's blade to the opposite lateral line are an example.

22. What is an invitation and how is it performed?

ANSWER – an invitation is a deliberate action of second intention using blade movement to open a line to induce the opponent to attack into the opening, so that attack can be parried with a riposte or counterattacked to score a touch. Typically, invitations involve lateral and/or vertical movement of the blade and arm to create the desired opening. The size of an invitation depends upon the susceptibility of the opponent to this ruse and to the ability of the fencer to rapidly react to the attack that it provokes.

23. What are the general types of parries, and how do they differ?

ANSWER – parries are generally named by the line which they close (1st through 8th in foil and epee and 1st through 7th in sabre). When the blade is moved from one line to another the direction of movement is also used to describe the parry. Movement horizontally across the target (for example, 6th or 3rd to 4th) is a lateral parry. Vertical movement of the blade with a sweep to gather an opponent's blade and move it away from the target (for example, foil 4th to 7th or sabre 3rd to 2nd) is a semicircular parry. Circular movement of the blade to relocate the attacking blade away from the target is either a circular (when returning the opponent's blade to the original line, for example a disengage from 4th back to 4th) or change (when moving an attack to a different line, for example a straight thrust in 4th to 3rd) parry. Parries which move to the opposite line vertically and horizontally are diagonal parries (for example, from 2nd to 4th). In addition, parries may be simple (a single parry) or compound (two or more parries linked together against a compound attack, sometimes termed composed), beat (tac-au-tac) or opposition, or ceding (yielding to the opponent's pressure so as to move to a new parrying position).

24. What is an engagement?

ANSWER – there are two versions of the definition of an engagement. Engagement may mean a situation in which the two fencers have their blades in contact in the same guard, effectively closing the line selected for both fencers, but without either fencer having a clearly established advantage. Alternately, it may refer to the two fencers having their blades in contact in the same guard, but with one fencer having established clear dominance over the other's blade. Many classical period fencers considered that all fencing actions had to start with engagement; to act without engagement first was not fencing to these individuals.

25. What is an appel?

ANSWER – a slap of the (usually) front foot on the piste so as to create a distinct, sharp noise. The appel theoretically would startle or frighten an opponent, giving the fencer an opportunity to attack while the opponent was momentarily disoriented. In practice, any fencer frightened by an appel was clearly engaged in the wrong sport. The appel was used to call attention to and emphasize an action, sometimes accompanied by a shout, although the value of this was questionable. In combination with the lunge as an appel-lunge it acted to break the inertia of the guard position, accelerating the lunge itself. The same effect occurs when combined with a remise from the lunge position.

26. What are the footwork actions commonly used in classical fencing?

ANSWER – during the classical period there was a rich body of footwork available to fencers, although the basic advance, retreat, and lunge was quite sufficient for most needs on the shorter strips. Forward movement could also be achieved with a jump forward (the balestra), an inverse step (with the back foot moving first), or a patinando (an advance, appel, lunge). Backward movement could be done with a jump back or the backwards lunge. Evasion could be done off line with the in quartata or vertically with the passata sotto.

27. What are actions of first, second, and third intention?

ANSWER – Actions of first intention are actions intended to result in a hit in their own right. Actions of second intention consist of a first action which is not intended to hit, but rather to draw a response from the opponent, so that the response (parry and riposte, counterattack, etc.) will enable the fencer's second action to hit. Actions of third intention are intended to draw and defeat the opponent's second intention.

28. What are the basic variations of scoring bouts in the classical period?

ANSWER – Bouts were evaluated by a Jury of four Judges and a President (or Director later in the period). There are four basic models for the judging of a bout: (1) the Jury observes the bout, meets at its conclusion, and determines by vote which fencer won based on touches and on the quality of the fencing, (2) the bout is fenced for a set period of time in which the fencers may score as many touches as possible, (3) the bout is fenced for a set number of touches, either with or without a time limit, and (4) the bout is fenced for a set number of touches with the addition of points for the excellence of form of the fencers.

29. What are countertime actions?

ANSWER – The term countertime evolves during the classical period. In some cases it was intended to mean an action to take the opponent's time – what we now call a stop or time hit. However, the more modern definition, which seems to reflect an evolution in doctrine, is that countertime actions are those conducted to draw an opponent's counterattack, defeat it with blade action to score a hit.

30. What is the meaning of materiality and validity, and how are these determined?

ANSWER - A material hit is one that lands on the opponent with the point (or cutting edge in sabre) in such a way as to have caused an injury should the weapon have been sharp. Materiality is determined by the vote of two Judges facing that fencer and the President. Validity is whether or not a material hit arrived as a scoring touch on the target (or not) in keeping with the rules of right of way or priority for the weapon. Validity is determined by the President.

31. How is distance defined?

ANSWER – There are two common definitions of distance. The broader, and less useful, definition is a measurement of the physical distance between the two fencers on the piste. A more narrow definition is that it is the measurement of the physical distance that the scoring portion of the weapon must travel to land a touch on the opponent's target area. Distance and measure are the same.

32. What is the key characteristic of actions that take the opponent's blade, and what types of techniques are commonly considered takings of the blade?

ANSWER – Takings of the blade are distinguished by using leverage to displace an opponent's blade while maintaining contact with it. These are also known as transports and involve moving the blade diagonally across the target (the bind), vertically from high to low line (the croise and flanconade) or the reverse, and in a circle returning to the original line (the envelopment). The lateral transport (the glide, graze, coule, glissade, etc.) is classified, depending on the author, as either a taking of the blade or an attack on the blade.

33. What is the key characteristic of actions that attack the opponent's blade, and what types of techniques are commonly considered attacks on the blade?

ANSWER - Takings of the blade are distinguished by using percussion or force to displace an opponent's blade from the line. These include actions which displace the opponent's blade by a sharp impact (the beat), by constant pressure (the press), or by expulsion from the line (the froissement).

34. What is sentiment de fer, and what is its importance?

ANSWER – Sentiment de fer is the ability to sense the strength of the opponent's grip, the start, end, and direction of blade movement, and even his level of focus, resolve, and intentions from contact between the fencer's and the opponent's blades. It is developed by practice, concentration, and relaxation of the arm and grip, and increases the fencer's ability to use the weapon

35. What is a point in line, and how is it used?

ANSWER – A point in line is a counteroffensive action made by establishing an extended arm and blade at shoulder height to deny the opponent the ability to execute a simple direct attack without first removing the point from the line. A point in line is effective when it is established at a distance where it provides an actual threat to the opponent and before the opponent has initiated an attack. At various times the fencer establishing a point in line has been required to remain unmoving in place, or alternately allowed to advance, retreat, or lunge.

36. What is the relationship between simple and compound attacks?

ANSWER – There are relationships in tempo and in construction. Compound attacks are constructed as a series of the movements characteristic of the five simple attacks linked together by transitions from one feint to either another or to the final attack. In doing so, each simple technique adds a tempo to the final compound attack.

37. What is preparation?

ANSWER – preparation is any action that precedes an attack and creates the conditions for its success. Preparation may be by footwork, engagement or change of engagement, or other bladework.

38. What are technique, tactics, and strategy in relation to fencing?

ANSWER – technique is the individual footwork movements and blade actions in reconnaissance, offense, defense, and counteroffense. A straight thrust is a technique. Tactics are the combination of technique with distance, tempo, timing, direction of movement, position on the piste, bout planning, and psychological factors to score or deny a hit. Strategy addresses how the bout fits into the plan for a competition, and the competition into a plan for the season, and the overall development of the fencer. Classical fencing texts do not make the clear distinction between technique and tactics, but commonly do include tactical advice on how to employ the techniques, indicating that the difference was understood. There is no discussion of strategy in period texts, but from a training standpoint it is necessary to understand how the design of the training program supports the development of today's classical fencer.

39. What basic data can a fencer derive from observation of an opponent prior to a fencing bout?

ANSWER – basic physical data including height, arm and leg length, and weapon hand can be determined by observation of any opponent, allowing characterization as a right or left handed opponent and an estimate of the possible reach of the individual's actions. Observation of a fencer warming up with other fencers or a trainer can reveal the basic school in which he or she has trained, speed and accuracy of blade and footwork actions, smoothness of execution, and the fencer's favorite actions. Fencing with another fencer in warm-up assaults is a problematic means of observation, as the fencer may reveal the characteristics and variety of possible actions, or may conceal these to deny useful intelligence to you. Watching bouts is the best observation technique as the potential opponent will use favorite techniques and tactics in the actual conditions of the bout. Watching posted video on Internet video sharing sites or club websites may not identify individual opponents, but it will allow you to assess the school and overall skill level of fencers in a particular classical fencing club.

40. What is the difference between a bout and an assault?

ANSWER – a bout is a contest between two fencers in which a score is kept to determine a winner. Bouts are fenced for training for competition to train the fencer in competitive conditions and evaluate the ability to apply tactics and techniques to result in a victory. Bouts are the scoring format for individual competition. Assaults are friendly encounters between two fencers in which no score is kept. Social fencing is often conducted in the salle as assaults to avoid the appearance of competition or the embarrassment of one of the fencers suffering a defeat. Assaults are also used as public exhibitions of skill and artistry of technique for the edification of other fencers and friends.

41. What is the difference between the three types of counteroffensive action:

ANSWER – the stop hit arrests by direct or indirect movement without contact with the opponent's blade, relying on either being a tempo ahead or the opponent having committed an error in the execution of the attack. A time hit arrests with opposition controlling the opponent's blade so that the opponent cannot hit. The point in line hampers the opponent's ability to deliver an attack by presenting a threat that must be dealt with before the attack can be delivered safely.

42. What is the difference between technique and tactics?

ANSWER – technique is the mechanical execution of a footwork or bladework action by itself, without the context of the bout. Tactics is the combination of technique with initiative, distance, timing, the balance of the score in the bout, the position on the piste, the direction of movement, the physical state and fatigue of the fencers, the mental attitude of the fencers, the prior history of technical and tactical application in the bout, and the psychological moment, with the objective of defeating the opponent in this and subsequent phrases.

43. How do you compose a bout plan?

ANSWER – a bout plan is the fencer's plan for either winning the bout or minimizing defeat in the bout, based upon the assessment of the opponent's tactical abilities as compared with the fencer's at the moment the President of the Jury gives the command to fence. It should consider how much risk the fencer is willing to tolerate, prior experience with this opponent, the conditions imposed by the piste, and the character of the Jury. The fencer should identify the balance of offense, defense, and counteroffense that he or she will employ, the first action, and if that succeeds how the bout will be built upon it.

44. How do you modify the bout plan during the bout?

ANSWER – during the break between “halt” and “fence,” the fencer notes how the President of the Jury has called the action and compares it quickly with his or her understanding, determines if and how the plan needs to be modified, and selects a new action. In this process the fencer incorporates new information, learned about the opponent in the phrase, and determines whether to stay with the plan, build on a previous action, exploit an observed opportunity, or shift tactics to protect a weakness.

FOIL

1. What are the distinct characteristics of fencing with the foil?

ANSWER – the foil was originally the training weapon for the sword, the artistic technical weapon of the classical period, and generally assumed to be the weapon of initiation of new fencers. It is distinguished by: (1) touches arrive with the point, (2) the torso as the target, and (3) is a conventional weapon governed by right of way.

2. French classical foil fencers often came on guard and engaged in fourth. Why?

ANSWER – the engagement in fourth was seen as offering a faster and stronger sixth parry than the fourth parry executed from a sixth engagement. Engaging in fourth channeled indirect attacks into the stronger parry.

3. What was the purpose of the orthopaedic grips used in the classical period?

ANSWER – orthopaedic grips start to appear at the end of the 19th Century, designed to improve finger play and blade control over the traditional French and Italian grips. At least one model of orthopaedic grip was developed as adaptive sports equipment for use by fencers with injuries that limited the ability to conduct fingerplay.

4. What was the original purpose of the foil?

ANSWER – the classical period foil was originally a training weapon for the duel. The use of the French foil evolved into a form of play distinct from dueling play and became a highly technical weapon suited primarily for sport. Italian foil practice retained a greater degree of fidelity to dueling practice well into the classical period.

5. Which school emphasized finger play?

ANSWER – the French, Italian, and Spanish schools all emphasized the importance of finger play, although there were differences in the technique.

6. Which patterns of guards were in general use for foils in the classical period?

ANSWER – foil guards included circular, double convex shaped, rectangular, lunette (a pierced figure 8 shape), and circular with a crossbar (Kreusslerian, Spanish, and Italian) patterns.

7. Why were low line foil parries in the French school in the 1800s often executed with the blade slanted downward from the same raised arm position as used by the high line parries?

ANSWER – because the lower border of the foil target at one time was approximately at waist level, resulting in a smaller target that could be covered by a parry executed by lowering the hand in either supination in 7th or pronation in 2nd.

8. What is the Grand Salute?

ANSWER – a formal choreographed series of movements by two fencers to demonstrate basic technique in the format of a salute, done as a preparatory exercise before fencing and as an opening ceremony for public demonstrations and competitions. Although theoretically it could be done with any weapon, it is almost always included with foil material.

9. What are the seven movements in the most formal version of coming on guard in foil?

ANSWER – there are a number of different variants of the seven step, five step, and 3 step sequences to come on guard. A reasonable composite model is: (1) the prepare position, blade low to the front, feet together at 90 degrees on the fencing line, (2) weapon raised in front, (3) lower the blade swinging back to the rear and catch the point with the non-weapon hand, (4) raise the foil horizontally over the head, (5) release the blade with the rear hand leaving the back arm in the guard position and lower the front arm to the guard with the blade forward, (6) bend the legs, (7) step forward with the front foot or backwards with the back foot (to open the distance to prevent a surprise attack) to the normal guard. The sequence can end with (8) a double appel to test the fencer's balance.

10. Describe the key elements of the principle of right of way in foil.

ANSWER – the fencer first executing an attack retains the right of way until the attack is either parried or evaded. Right of way may also be lost through hesitation or through the opponent successfully landing prior to the start of the final tempo of the attack. If both fencers score a material hit, right of way determines which hit will be considered first for award of the touch. If only one hit is scored right of way plays no role in determining validity. It is important to note that period rules normally defined right of way as a series of statements addressing specific scoring scenarios, not necessarily as a clear statement of right of way as a principle.

11. What influence did the height of the blade in the attack have on scoring?

ANSWER – in the earlier years of the Classical Period the height of the weapon hand and the height of the blade influenced the decision of the President of the Jury as to which action had priority. The fencer with the higher hand and blade was said to have the more honorable attack, and thus was awarded the touch.

12. What are the various combinations of time and touch limits in foil?

ANSWER – bouts might be fought for a set number of touches with no time limit. These might be described as either the best of 5 (a fencer wins by winning the majority of the 5 touches) or as for 5 touches (the winner must score 5 touches on the opponent). Alternately, a bout could be fenced for a time limit with each fencer being able to score as many touches as they could. These evolved into the fencers fencing for a set number of touches within a time limit, the achievement of either of which ended the bout.

13. What are the common parries of the schools of the classical period?

ANSWER – in the French School, four pronated parries (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th) and four supinated parries (4th, 6th, 7th, and 8th). These cover the high outside line (3rd and 6th), the low outside line (2nd and 8th), the low inside line (5th and 7th), and the high inside line (1st and 4th). In the Italian School there are four parries, 1st (low inside – in some schools substituted for by half-circle), 2nd (low outside), 3rd (high outside), and 4th (high inside). The Spanish School uses the same parries as the common French system. Kreusslerian thrust fencing uses four parries, Second (high outside, hand and blade up), Third (high outside, hand lowered and blade up), Half Third and Half Fourth (an intermediate parry between third and fourth), and Fourth (inside high line parry). The Hollandsche Methode uses two high line parries (the Parry Left and the Parry Right), three low line parries (the Parry Low Left, the Parry Low Right, and the Parry Low Right with the Hand Inverted), and two parries executed with the hand high, blade low (the Parry High Right and the Parry High Left).

14. What are the five simple attacks?

ANSWER – the straight thrust, disengage, coupe, counterdisengage, and countercoupe. There are three simple attacks initiated by the fencer (straight thrust, disengage, and coupe) and two which require an initial circular attempt to take the blade by the attacker (counterdisengage and countercoupe). One simple attack (the straight thrust) is a direct attack, starting in and remaining in the same line throughout. The other simple attacks are indirect attacks, starting in one line and transiting into at least one other line.

15. What are the basic methods of execution of parries in foil?

ANSWER – parries are executed as opposition parries which deflect the opponent's blade by closing the line, beat parries which deflect the blade by percussion, or ceding parries which use the opponent's pressure to move the blade from one parrying position to another.

SABRE

1. What are the distinct characteristics of fencing with the sabre?

ANSWER - the sabre was originally a dueling weapon. It is distinguished by: (1) touches arrive with the point as thrusts, and with the front cutting edge, or the rear, short edge of the blade as cuts, (2) the torso above the points of the hips, the head, and the arms and hands as the target, and (3) is a conventional weapon governed by right of way.

2. What are the cutting edges in sabre?

ANSWER – the forward true edge of the blade from the guard to the tip, used for direct cuts, and the reverse false edge of the upper part of the blade, used for the counter-cut.

3. How is the hand positioned in the point thrust in sabre and why?

ANSWER – the arm is fully extended with the hand in pronation (French and Spanish) or in second (Italian). This position aligns the blade and guard and hand with the bones of the arm for stability, with the guard providing good all-around protection against cuts to the hand.

4. What is a moulinet?

ANSWER – a moulinet or molinello is a circular movement of the blade used to deliver a cut by departing one line and landing in either the original line or another. Moulinets may be vertical (for example, the moulinet from prime landing as a head cut), diagonal (the chest cut from the opponent's high 4th diagonally downward to return to guard in the fencer's 3rd), or horizontal (a moulinet from 3rd landing in 4th), and may be executed either direct or in reverse (for example from 4th a moulinet may circle backwards from below to land on the head or circle backwards from above to cut under the arm). Early moulinets were made with a complete forearm movement from the elbow to deliver a hit of considerable authority. These evolved to cuts executed with the wrist, hand, and fingers.

5. What are the two varieties of the cut?

ANSWER – the slicing cut either with the blade moving forward or withdrawing from the target and the dry cut delivered as a direct cut to the target without any slicing movement.

6. Which patterns of guards were in general use for sabres in the classical period?

ANSWER – sabre guards included Radaelli, Pecoraro, Olympic, and Hungarian patterns. Both the Radaelli and Pecoraro guards disappeared from use due to concerns about the safety of their design.

7. Describe the key elements of the principle of right of way in sabre.

ANSWER – the fencer first executing an attack retains the right of way until the attack is either parried or evaded. Right of way may also be lost through hesitation or through the opponent successfully landing prior to the start of the final tempo of the attack. If both fencers score a material hit, right of way determines which hit will be considered first for award of the touch. If only one hit is scored right of way plays no role in determining validity.

8. What are the various combinations of time and touch limits in sabre?

ANSWER – bouts might be fought for a set number of touches with no time limit. These might be described as either the best of 5 (a fencer wins by winning the majority of the 5 touches) or as for 5 touches (the winner must score 5 touches). Alternately, a bout could be fenced for a time limit with each fencer being able to score as many touches as they could. These evolved into the fencers fencing for a set number of touches within a time limit, the achievement of either of which ended the bout.

9. What is the difference between a cut and a counter-cut?

ANSWER – the majority of cuts are delivered with the long, front cutting edge of the sabre, typically to vertical, diagonal, and outside horizontal cuts. The counter-cut is delivered with the short, rear cutting edge of the sabre, typically in rising cuts under the arm, cuts to the inside cheek, remise cuts, or cuts of opportunity.

10. Which taking of the blade is used in sabre and how is it employed?

ANSWER – theoretically a full range of takings of the blade are possible, but in practice in classical texts actions with takings are restricted to the glide. The glide is employed as an attack with opposition or as a riposte with opposition, alone, or in combination with feints.

11. What are the common targets for cuts?

ANSWER – the head (for vertical cuts); the inside and outside sides of the head (also known as cheeks), the outside flank, and the abdomen (for horizontal cuts); the chest (for a diagonal cut); and the arm (for vertical cuts and counter-cuts).

12. How is the point used in sabre?

ANSWER – the point is used for the distinct point actions of the point thrust and the point-in-line. In addition, the chest cut and abdominal or belly cut is correctly executed with the point as the cutting surface of the weapon.

13. What are the two defensive triangles in sabre?

ANSWER - The concept of defensive triangles is a way to teach a complete system of three parries that cover the sabre fencer's target. One triangle is composed of first, fifth, and second (taught as a defense for the flank). The other triangle is composed of third, fifth, and fourth. Absent from either triangle are sixth and seventh.

14. Can compound attacks in sabre combine cut and thrust actions?

ANSWER – yes. Sabre compound attacks can be a cut or cuts as a feint with a final cut, cuts with a point action, or two or more point actions.

15. How is the blade used in the beat in sabre?

ANSWER – the Sabre beat is executed with the cutting edge of the blade. Most beats are delivered with the front edge either a direct beat or as a circular beat. However, the beat can also be delivered with the back short cutting edge against the back of the opponent's blade.

16. How can parries of 3rd and 4th be modified to increase the protection they offer?

ANSWER – in the Classical Period it is common to find parries of 3rd and 4th modified to form a total of six parries: (1) the basic parry executed with the forearm level at the waist, (2) the high parry with the forearm raised to bring the guard to shoulder height to form the high, or cheek, parry, and (3) the low parry with the guard lowered to thigh level to protect the thigh and abdomen.

17. How is the sabre target modified during the Classical Period?

ANSWER – there are at least three sabre targets used during the Classical Period. In the late 1800s, the thigh of the forward leg was target at various times. During the 1930s in American collegiate fencing the entire torso was allowed as target. However, the primary target area was the torso above the waist, the arms including the weapon hand, and the mask.

EPEE

1. What is the genesis of the epee as a fencing weapon?

ANSWER – in the late 1800s in France a group of Masters became dissatisfied with the use of the foil and foil technique as the basis for training for the duel. Foil technique no longer retained the realism of combat. To adequately prepare their students for impending duels, these masters developed a model of dueling practice suitable for use in the salle, and taught a simplified body of technique that could be applied on the dueling ground.

2. Why did the Epee not initially evolve as a distinct weapon in Italy?

ANSWER – Italian foil technique was more closely related to dueling technique, and the Italian Masters were thus not under pressure to find a more efficient training weapon for the duel.

3. What are the distinct characteristics of fencing with the epee?

ANSWER – the epee preserves the character of the duel: (1) touches arrive with the point, (2) entire body is target, (3) distinct first hit is awarded the touch, (4) simultaneous hits result in touches against both fencers, (5) for much of the classical period epee bouts were fenced for a single touch.

4. What is the theoretical basis for one touch epee bouts?

ANSWER - the one touch epee bout simulates the duel fenced for first blood, the predominant type of duel from the late 1890s through 1967. Because the duel was fought without time limit, there was originally no time limit for one touch epee bouts.

5. How and why is priority determined in an epee bout?

ANSWER – in a double hit situation, the touch is awarded against the fencer whose hit can be observed as landing second. If no difference in the timing of the arrival of the hits can be discerned by the Judges and President, both fencers are touched. This simulates the condition of the duel in which the first wound inflicted would halt the action for intervention by the physician and the seconds.

6. How and why does the one touch epee piste differ from the piste for foil and sabre?

ANSWER – the duel with the Epee de Terrain was fenced outdoors on a variety of surfaces as late as 1967. The one touch Epee bout was fenced to simulate the conditions of the duel, and thus was the only weapon to be frequently fenced outdoors on a gravel path. Until recently, the epee piste was always longer than the foil piste.

7. Differentiate between epee de combat, epee de terrain, epee de salle, and dueling sword.

ANSWER – the epee de combat and the epee de terrain (terrain being the dueling ground) are the same weapon with a sharp point. The epee de salle is the fencing weapon, also termed in English the dueling sword.

8. What was the purpose and function of the pointe d'arret?

ANSWER – the pointe d'arret, typically a 3 pronged point attached to the nail head of the epee blade by waxed string, was designed to provide both a secured hit and marking for that hit. The prongs caught and arrested in the jacket, and marking fluid on a small cotton ball within the prongs would mark the location of the hit with a red mark. This mark could be crossed out by a pencil or erased by dabbing with vinegar. The pointe d'arret, and its predecessor the tin-tack point, posed a safety hazard by damaging jackets and cutting the fencer on the weapon arm.

9. What is pommel? What are its advantages and disadvantages?

ANSWER – holding the epee by the end of the French grip and the pommel to increase the reach of the weapon. The increased length allows an earlier hit with less exposure for the attacker. However, the hand is more exposed due to its position further behind the guard, and the grip is weaker in comparison to Italian or orthopaedic grips.

10. Why did the number of epee touches in a bout increase over time from fencing for one hit to fencing for as many as 5 hits?

ANSWER – there was a realization that one touch epee bouts had a significant element of chance in the scoring of that hit. In the duel in which the expectation was that the principals would be reconciled after honor was satisfied being willing to fight was the victory itself. However, in a sporting contest determination of victory by chance was not a satisfactory outcome. This led to bouts for 2 hits, 3 hits, and eventually 5 hits to reduce the impact of hits by chance.

11. Which patterns of guards were in general use for epees in the classical period?

ANSWER – epee guards included circular with a center mounted blade, circular with an offset blade, and circular with quillons patterns.

12. What are the options for extension of the arm when in the guard positions?

ANSWER – in the classical period epee fencers fenced with the weapon arm fully extended, executing parries, attacks, and counterattacks from this position. Fencers also fenced from a bent arm position in which the upper arm was brought back relatively close to the torso with the forearm parallel to the ground. And some fencers fenced from an intermediate position with the arm extended approximately half-way.

13. How do parries in epee differ from parries in foil?

ANSWER – in general the standard foil parries can be used in epee. However, epee parries tend to be combined with the accompanying riposte as a single flowing action, and these parries tend to rely on control of the opponent's blade by opposition, with that opposition retained throughout the riposte. In addition, the bell of the epee can be used to parry by itself, displacing an opponent's blade upward, to the inside or outside, or downward.

14. How can the epee target be divided?

ANSWER – because the entire body is target for the epee there are a number of possible target zones based on proximity of the target to the fencer. The advanced target is the weapon arm. The torso, the forward leg and foot, the back leg, and the back arm are all target zones requiring deeper and more risky commitment of the attack.

15. What is the role of the counterattack in epee?

ANSWER – the counterattack is a more significant part of epee fencing than in foil or sabre because of the expanded target, the lack of right of way rules, and the primacy of the earliest arriving hit. An error in the execution of the attack allows an opponent to negate the poorly covered or incorrectly executed attack. The counterattack is at least as important as the parry and riposte in defeating attacks, and, when highly developed, can be the primary basis for a fencer's tactics.

16. What is the reassemblment or riunita, and how is it used?

ANSWER – the reassemblment is a footwork movement executed as a primary way for the delivery of the stop or time hit. It is executed by withdrawing the front foot and hips, straightening the back leg, pivoting the chest forward, with a full extension of the weapon arm. This reduces the available target for the opponent's attack while maintaining balance and achieving maximum reach without forward movement of the legs.

17. What is the role of opposition in epee?

ANSWER – opposition of the blade to close the line or control the opponent's blade is a key component of attack, parry, riposte, and counterattack technique. It denies or delays the opponent's hit by displacing the blade and point to prevent an early hit by the opponent or the double hit.

18. What is the primary target for classical epee fencers, and why?

ANSWER – the opponent's weapon forearm. Hitting the forearm reduces the time spent in the attack, riposte, or counterattack, making it more likely that the action will land more than 1/25th of a second ahead of the opponent. It also reduces vulnerability by not requiring deep penetration into the opponent's target area, and keeps the fencer's body as far away from the opponent as practical.

TEACHING

1. You are teaching an individual technical lesson by the command method to a student in Foil using French technique. The action is an indirect riposte by disengage against the opponent's riposte against a straight thrust. What commands and what physical cues would you use, in order?

ANSWER – (1) Engage (cue: providing the instructor's blade); (2) (cue: open the line); (3) Straight Thrust; (4) Lunge; (5) (cue: parry 6); (6) Recover; (7) (cue: instructor's blade presentation as a riposte); (8) Parry 6; (9) (cue: instructor starts to recover); (10) Disengage; (11) Extend; (12) Lunge; (13) Recover.

2. What are the advantages and limitations of the command method of teaching?

ANSWER – the command method works well in the initial instruction of a skill and in teaching the synchronization and progression of actions and can be useful in correcting errors in technique. However, it does not teach execution under realistic conditions.

3. As an instructor, why should you use the teaching position and teaching footwork during lessons?

ANSWER – the teaching body position and footwork allow a reasonable simulation of combat conditions while requiring less physical effort, allowing the instructor to teach more lessons in a working day.

4. Why does the Classical Academy of Arms start its instructor training programs with developing competency in teaching with the foil?

ANSWER – this is in keeping with the period view that the foil was the basis for all further training in the sabre and epee. Lower ranks of classical instructors should be capable of the initial development of foil fencers. We recognize today that fencers can develop equally well by starting initial training with any weapon, but the foil first model extended well into the 1990s, even for modern fencers.

5. How should physical cues be presented?

ANSWER – cues should be realistic and mimic the opponent's action in a bout. Offensive and counteroffensive blade cues should especially present a threat directed accurately to the target area. Footwork and tempo cues should be consistent with blade cues. The width of the action, speed of presentation, depth of penetration, etc. should be based on the skill level of the student with larger and slower cues being required for beginning students and smaller and faster for advanced students.

6. Why would you choose to teach an action and its counter in a single lesson?

ANSWER – for individual lessons this provides a complete set of offense, defense, or counteroffense paired appropriately so that the fencer can execute the action or its counter without having to wait for a second lesson. For group lessons this facilitates drills so that both sides of the drill are able to work on learning tactically useful technique.

7. What is the purpose of the tactical lesson?

ANSWER – to allow the instructor to release control of the lesson to the student so that the student can learn to seize the initiative and employ a variety of actions under conditions that simulate the bout with the instructor reacting in the way an opponent would.

8. What is the learning outcome of a choice-reaction options lesson?

ANSWER – because an options lesson presents a technique and then explores tactical options that a fencer might select based on opponent reactions, the lesson results in: (1) increased understanding and mastery of the basic technique and (2) the ability to execute options based on that technique in the bout.

9. What principles govern making corrections?

ANSWER – (1) correct one fault at a time, and do not present the student with a number of corrections to be executed at the same time, (2) to the greatest extent possible identify and correct the root cause of a performance error, (3) correct errors directly related to the technique being taught first, (4) allow the student to self-correct when possible, and do not intervene until three or four incorrect repetitions occur with no effort to correct.

10. What is the purpose of the silent lesson?

ANSWER – to use footwork, bladework, and tempo actions to cue students in a way consistent with the performance of opponents in bouts, rather than relying on the unrealistic use of instructor verbal cues or commands.

11. What is the purpose of a lesson conducted with the student's eyes closed?

ANSWER – to develop sentiment de fer and the ability to use the character of the opponent's blade movement to guide the fencer's defensive and offensive actions.

12. Why should an instructor develop competence in teaching with either hand?

ANSWER – so that the instructor can simulate both right and left handed opponents. There are two additional possible considerations: (1) so that the instructor can teach Leonardo Terrone's left and right handed fencing, or (2) to allow the instructor to continue to teach in the event of an injury to his or her dominant hand.

13. How can distance in the lesson be controlled, and who is responsible for distance control?

ANSWER – when the trainer wants the student to remain static and execute the blade action only, the trainer will control distance by stepping into short distance to trigger the student's action. When the student is using footwork, including lunging, the student should be responsible for adjusting the distance for the technique being taught, and for returning to the correct distance after every execution. When both student and trainer are moving, the student is responsible for finding the correct distance for the technique and closing, opening, or maintaining that distance based on the trainer's actions.

14. What is the relationship between the group and the individual lesson?

ANSWER - the group lesson is the basic form of instruction when teaching more than 1 student at a time. It is the most efficient form of instruction for beginner and intermediate skill level classes, and for group training for advanced students. It allows the student to practice against a variety of opponents improving the ability to adapt to different opponents' skill level, hand, speed, etc. However, the individual lesson is the most effective lesson format for improvement of skill in execution of tactics and technique, allowing optimization of student performance under direct supervision of the trainer.

15. What is the importance of defining the knowledges, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required of trainers?

ANSWER – KSAs are a modern way of systematically organizing the set of capabilities a trainer needs to effectively teach classical fencing. Over the centuries the apprenticeship, training, and examination process to create Fencing Masters addressed these KSAs, but not necessarily in a coherent and systematic manner. The modern KSA approach allows the knowledges, skills, and abilities to be defined and mapped to the equivalent set of knowledges, skills, and abilities required for a fencer who wishes to develop a high level of skill. The objective of training should be to meet the needs of the individual classical fencer through the development of an appropriate capability to effectively use their weapon against an opponent. The trainer KSAs establish what the trainer must be able to do to reach that objective.

16. How can you teach assessment of opponents to students?

ANSWER – fencers have two essential assessment challenges: what is my opponent capable of, and what is happening in the moment. Both of these can be addressed through a combination of lecture and demonstration performance, drills, and bouts. Assessment of capability can be taught by a discussion of elements that can be developed through observation, demonstration of how those characteristics appear, exercises in analysis of available video, and practice with fellow students in drills and bouts. Assessment of what is happening must be taught in normal technique drills by insisting that students be able to identify the technique their drill partner is using visually and by sentiment de fer. Students must also be taught how to use assessment in bouts through development of a mental drill to identify what has happened, what the implications are, and how the student should react.

17. What considerations should be applied in designing drills?

ANSWER – when designing drills the trainer should consider (1) the characteristics and components of the skill to be taught, (2) the skill level of the students, (3) whether or not the drill will teach new material or train in a skill already known, (4) what knowledge the students already have that can be used as a building block for the skill, (5) the number of students, (6) the number of trainers available, (7) the most efficient formation and activity pattern for the drill, (8) the space available, both total size and shape, (9) the time available, (10) where the drill fits within the class or practice session, and (11) the overall training objectives of the drill.

18. The student lunges and hits during the individual lesson. What should he or she and you then do to release the student for recovery to guard?

ANSWER – many instructors hold the blade on the target to make corrections and then release it with a blade action of some force. This is justified as teaching the student good form. However, it actually teaches the student an unrealistic movement pattern which is not found in the actual bout. With visual judging the fencer who hits (which may or may not be seen by the members of the Jury) should not wait for hard blade contact (the opponent's parry) to start a recovery. The release of the student under normal conditions should be the hit itself – arrest and recover, arrest and remise or redouble, etc. as the lesson requires. If correction is necessary or if the trainer wants the student to pause at the hit to assess the opponent's movement or other factors for a parry, etc., that can be accomplished by instructing the student to hit and hold.

19. What are the essential differences between blocked, sequential, random, and choice reaction drills and their employment?

ANSWER – blocked drills are drills in which every repetition is performed under the same conditions. If the distance is changed or movement is introduced, the result is a different blocked drill. Blocked drills are most effective as a deliberate practice training technique. Although often used to teach technique, after the student has achieved a basic level of performance of the technique, random drills should be introduced. Sequential drills are drills in which a series of known techniques are executed in the same order in each repetition of the drill. This can be used as a transition to random execution. Random drills present different techniques in a random order and the resulting choices are the most effective way to develop skill in a new technique. Choice reaction drills present an unexpected stimulus to the fencer, requiring a choice of possible alternatives based on the nature of the stimulus, and are excellent in teaching rapid recognition and response to changes in tactics and technique. All of these drills that employ more than a single technique should be limited to 2 or 3 options for response.

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