

# **THE CLASSICAL FOIL FENCING LESSON**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores how foil lessons were taught in the classical period (1990-1939) to better understand the practice of classical Fencing Masters so that modern classical instructors can better replicate the teaching of the period. A large volume of surviving texts allowed a qualitative content analysis determine the type and the general characteristics of lessons taught by Classical Fencing Masters, and the specific types of instructional methods used. Using a modified grounded theory method, the study identified common approaches to individual and group lessons and a variety of teaching drills used. The techniques of the classical period largely survive today in modern fencing lessons, demonstrating at least the assurance Fencing Masters then and now have had that they are effective ways to convey technical and tactical material to students. The result is a solid body of andragogical technique that can authentically be used to transmit classical fencing to the modern student in the way it was taught from 1880 to 1939.

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# **THE CLASSICAL FOIL FENCING LESSON**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. The Research Question**

This paper will explore how foil lessons were taught in the classical period to better understand the practice of classical Fencing Masters so that modern classical instructors can better replicate the teaching of the period.

### **B. Background**

Use of modern lesson concepts in teaching classical fencing may be a prochronism that, given the difference in the balance of classical and modern technique, changes in the rules, the increased speed and power of modern athletes, and the influence of sports science in coaching, risks distorting the classical fencing experience. Equally important is avoiding the fantasy of classical fencing that has been created by a number of instructors who present the classical period as one of perfect technique, exceptional manners, and great ceremony. Evangelista's condemnation of what classical fencing had become in 2006, with cult like characteristics and the promotion of form over function based on neither training from a master of the classical period nor study of the surviving literature, is particularly appropriate.

If we are to teach classical fencing in a way consistent with how it was actually taught in the classical period, identification of the characteristics of the lessons as they were originally taught must be a priority for research. This requires work in the contemporary sources. The

primacy of use of original sources in research into historical fencing practice has been well established by the modern Historical European Martial Arts community, providing a clear model for how we should study classical fencing. However, much of the dedication to classical fencing in the United States today flows from Nick Evangelista's two books, *The Art and Science of Fencing* and *The Inner Game of Fencing* (1996 and 1999), William Gaugler's (1997) extensive manual *The Science of Fencing: A Comprehensive Training Manual for Master and Student; Including Lesson Plans for Foil, Sabre, and Epee Instruction*, and Adam Crown's 2002 volume *Classical Fencing: The Martial Art of Incurable Romantics*. With respect to all three authors, none replace the work of the Masters at the time as a source for understanding fencing in the classical period.

### **C. Assumptions**

1. This paper assumes that what Masters described in their texts is an essentially accurate description of what and how they taught.
2. In addition, I assume that some authors who wrote after 1939 and as late as the early 1960s described teaching as they had learned it in the classical period.

### **D. Limitations**

To provide easy access to the sources used in this study the selection of writings by Masters is restricted to texts originally published in English or subsequently translated into English.

## **E. Definitions**

1. Assault – a bout between two fencers, variously described as informal or of a formal, public nature, with the score not being kept as a determinant of the outcome.
2. Blocked Practice – repetitive practice of a drill under identical conditions for each repetition.
2. Classical Fencing - fencing as it was taught by the Fencing Masters of the period from 1880 to 1939, with an emphasis on blade technique and adherence to a commonly accepted standard of good form.
3. Conventional Exercise – a fencing drill involving two fencers in which the rules of the drill are agreed upon to limit the techniques to be employed, the number of repetitions, the distance, etc., to provide training for both participants in different aspects of employment in the phrase.
4. Fencing Lesson - an organized period of instruction conducted by a fencing instructor to teach technique and/or tactics or to specifically prepare a fencer for competition or a duel.
5. Modern Fencing – fencing in the period after World War II to date, characterized by the development of increased athleticism, a trend toward youth, application of modern training methods, and the development of the sports factory model of national support for sports. Although this period is often keyed to the introduction of electric scoring of fencing bouts, and the introduction of orthopaedic grips, both of these events occur in the classical period, and neither prevent modern fencing with visual judging and the French or Italian grip.
6. Tactics - the combination of blade technique, footwork, distance, timing, initiative, and mental skills to either successfully touch an opponent or to defeat the opponent's attack. For

example, the use of second intention (a technique) to fix in place an opponent prone to retreat on an attack, allowing the hit by counterriposte, is a tactical application of that technique.

7. Technique - a specific fencing action or position of either blade or footwork. For example, a lunge, parry, or double and disengage are techniques.

## **F. Disclosure**

I have studied the practice of classical fencing based on the texts from the period since acquisition of a library of classical fencing manuals in 1970, and have actively taught classical fencing since opening my Salle in a permanent location in 2004. My first studies under a Fencing Master in 1966 were as a student of Maestro Giorgio Santelli, the son of Italo Santelli (one of the founders of the Hungarian school of sabre fencing), and a master whose career bridged the classical and modern periods.

## II. LITERATURE

The best source of information on the teaching of the fencing lesson lies in the surviving fencing manuals from the classical period. A substantial number of these volumes are available through antiquarian booksellers or in modern reprints and translations. They represent the two major schools of fencing, French and Italian (itself a collection of various regional and local approaches to swordplay), as well as emerging hybrid approaches. For the purposes of review, these sources and their authors can be divided into three groups, those before the First World War, those before the Second World War, and those immediately after the Second World War. The cataclysmic events of the two World Wars effectively suspended amateur sports, and the First World War appears to have significantly reduced interest in dueling as a cultural obsession.

It is important to note that the literature of fencing in this period includes two groups of fencing manuals. There is a significant volume of material, some of it by noted Masters or successful amateur fencers, that consists of detailed descriptions of the sport and its techniques, but lack any description of how instruction was given. Examples include H. A. Colmore Dunn's *Fencing* (1889), Walter H. Pollock, F. C. Grove, and Camille Prevost, "Fencing" (1890), Regis and Louis Senac's *The Art of Fencing* (1904), and Leon Bertrand's *Cut and Thrust* (1926). A second body of work is distinguished by instructions on how to teach fencing, ranging from the fleeting to fairly extensive portions of individual titles. For the purposes of this study the first group of material is excluded as not contributing significantly to answering the research question.



## A. Sources Pre-1914

The Baron Cesar de Bazancourt authored a book, available in English translation as *Secrets of the Sword*, in 1862 that provides an alternative view of classical fencing. As a member of the naturalist faction of fencers, his approach is almost ruthlessly realistic, discarding the overly complex and ritualistic approaches to fencing with the foil taught by many Masters in favor of emphasis on fencing as combat. One can see in this volume the discontent that eventually leads to the development of the modern epee as the third distinct weapon.

John Henry Walsh, writing under the name Stonehenge, and J. G. Wood authored a short fencing and archery manual, *Archery, Fencing, and Broadsword*, in 1863. Obviously designed as an introduction to the sport, its description of actions is typical for early classical period texts.

Richard Francis Burton, a Victorian era adventurer and lover of the sword, authored *The Sentiment of the Sword*, a manuscript published in 1911 after his death in 1890. Burton's volume closely parallel's de Bazancourt's, shares the same philosophical approach to fencing, and in some parts is a direct copy of de Bazancourt.

Louis Rondelle graduated from the Fencing Masters academy of Joinville-le-Pont, and served as a regimental Fencing Master in a regiment of Chasseurs a Cheval of the French Army before emigrating to the United States in 1881. He subsequently served as Fencing Master to the Knickerbocker Fencing Club, the Manhattan Athletic Club, the Boston Athletic Association, and the Harvard University Fencing Club. His work, *Foil and Sabre* (1892), provides a detailed description of drills for a wide variety of fencing actions in the two weapons.

Maurice Grandiere is a relative unknown; his 1906 text, *How to Fence*, provides no information on the author. Internet searches and reference to Thimm (1896), Morton (no date), Evangelista (1995), and a variety of fencing texts all proved unproductive in placing him in the

fencing community. However, it is a workmanlike developmental text with a structured approach to lessons that introduces several key concepts in teaching.

## **B. Sources between the First and Second World Wars**

Eleanor Baldwin Cass, an American fencing teacher and the mother of two fencing teachers, does not appear to have had any formal credentials, but her 1930 text *The Book of Fencing* shows an eclectic mix of fencing interest and what we would term today a full rolodex. Her volume covers a wide variety of fencing related topics, including group and individual lesson syllabi and instructions for fencing display drills.

Luigi Barbasetti had a distinguished career as a fencer and as a Master, teaching at the Scoula Magistrale Militare di Scherma in Rome, at the Austro-Hungarian Normal Military Fencing School at Wiener-Neustadt, and in Paris. He authored two fencing manuals during the this period, *The Art of the Foil* (1932) and *The Art of the Sabre and the Epee* (1937), which provide a through exposition of the Italian School of the late 1890s and early 1900s.

Felix Grave, a Maitre d'Armes of both the Academy of Arms of Paris and the Academy of the Epee of Paris, wrote *Fencing Comprehensive* in 1934, a general manual of both foil and epee. Grave's volume is interesting in that it includes a short coverage of Japanese sword technique and a practical set of advice on what to do if one was challenged to a duel. Professor Grave is notable as the first President of the British Academy of Fencing.

By the 1930s, Fencing Masters were beginning to merge the elements of the classical schools. Julio Martinez Castello received his diploma as Maestro de Armas in 1906 at the Sala de Armas Carbonel, a center of the Spanish adherents to the French school. By 1937 he wrote in

his text, *The Theory and Practice of Fencing*, that he was teaching a French system of foil, Italian sabre, and a mixed system based on his own experience in epee.

It is important to note that Castello was not alone. Aldo Nadi in 1943 wrote of combining the most personally useful elements of the French and Italian schools in his fencing, while retaining a preference for the Italian grip. Although there are certainly purist partisans of the French and Italian school in the 1930s and well after, classical fencing was starting to be practiced in a more homogenized international style.

### **C. The Post-1939 Sources**

Joseph Vince, an American fencing coach in New York, authored *Fencing*, an introductory text first published in 1940 (my examination of Vince's approach is based on the 1962 edition of this volume, which, although listed as a Second Edition, appears essentially unchanged, addressing electric equipment only in the context of Epee, and on his earlier and smaller work, *Fundamentals of Foil Fencing* from 1937). Like many manuals of this period, it appears to have been written for the fencer in a club that lacked a professional coach. It does not address how to coach, but it does provide a series of drills that fencers can use that appear to reflect common coaching practice.

The father and son team of Scott Breckendridge and Scott Breckenridge, Jr. authored *Sword Play* in 1941. This is a self-help manual for individuals drafted to serve as fencing coaches and for the fencer with no coach, but it includes interesting perspective from an Olympian and American college fencing coach of the 1930s. Thoroughly French in its underlying method, it is based on the teaching of Maitre Francois Darrieulat.

Aldo Nadi, one of the great amateur and professional fencers of all time, authored a detailed explanation of his fencing theory and practice in *On Fencing* in 1943. Enough people associated with the modern classical fencing movement have claimed to have been influenced by Nadi to make his work worth reading as part of any attempt to understand from whence classical fencing comes. He is particularly valuable as a source because of his emphasis on the practical application of technique in combat.

Clovis Dealdrier was a regimental fencing master in the Belgian Army from 1907 to 1926, and then the Fencing Master of the United States Naval Academy from 1926 to his death in 1947. Deladrier characterized his teaching as French with some unique Belgian characteristics. His 1948 text *Modern Fencing* is one of three texts consulted (along with those of Lidstne and Crosnier) that bracket the end of the classical period, and represent fencing and teaching fencing at the transition point to modern electric fencing.

Squadron Leader R. A. Lidstone, a Royal Air Force Officer, amateur fencer, and coach, wrote the second textbook in this set, *Fencing*, published in 1952. It is a particularly extensive catalog of the wide range of classical French technique, essentially a more modern equivalent of Rondelle's earlier work.

Roger Crosnier, a French fencing master, French Olympic Team coach, and first British National Coach, authored *Fencing with the Foil* in 1951. This volume is a very detailed technical examination of the technique of fencing with comprehensive progressions designed for use in teaching group lessons.

Leonardo Terrone graduated from the Scuola Militare Magistrale di Schirma in Rome, apparently in 1900, and taught in Venice, London, and Philadelphia, coaching at the University of Pennsylvania from 1903-1942. His book, *Right and Left Handed Fencing*, published in

1959 after his death, codifies his teaching notes and manuscript, apparently from the early to mid-1900s. Based on Italian practice, it is unique in advocating that the fencer develop the ability to fence with both the right and left hands. He also provides a surprisingly modern appreciation of how the brain processes learning physical skills in fencing.

### III. METHOD

An initial survey of the literature identified above suggested that two significant items were present in the texts of those authors that addressed the fencing lesson. I examined each title to determine if the author identified, first, the type and the general characteristics of the lessons the master taught, and, second, the specific types of instructional methods used. Using qualitative content analysis, I searched each source to locate any content that related to these items.

Using the data gathered by content analysis, I examined it using a modified grounded theory method. I identified teaching concepts (including methods) applicable to specific categories of lessons, as well as those that appeared applicable across categories. From this it was possible to map the range of characteristics of group lessons, of individual lessons, and of specific drills and techniques applicable to one or both of the lesson categories. These three categories provided the basis for an overall theory of how to approach teaching classical period lessons.

The emphasis throughout was to restrict the analysis to concepts and methods documented in the texts of the period, and to avoid introduction of concepts and methods from modern classical fencing authors. In some cases, there was an apparent correspondence of classical and modern fencing methods, and where applicable these cases are identified.

The result is an initial examination of both sources and the information they contain to identify general characteristics of lessons in the classical period. More detailed examination by further studies of the individual sources is warranted for those interested in the teaching methods of individual schools or even of individual Masters.

## IV. DATA

### De Bazancourt (1862):

Baron Cesar de Bazancourt was a strong advocate for simplification of technique, and reduces the elementary principles of blade use to four (page 41):

Simple Attacks:	Straight Thrust. Disengagement.
Compound Attacks:	One Two. Beat straight thrust. Beat disengage. Feint disengage. Feint cut over. Cut over and disengage.
Simple Parries:	Tierce. Carte. Seconde. Low Quarte or Quinte.
Counter Parries:	Counter-Quarte. Counter-Tierce. Circle.

He made three contributions to our understanding of the classical fencing lesson. First, he refers to many fencers as being puppets of their Masters. In the context of the remark, this suggests a lesson focus on rote repetition of mechanical skills, with only limited instruction in how to use those skills tactically.

De Bazancourt advocated that Fencing Masters should give lessons with the opposite hand, specifically with the left hand, to prepare their students to fence against left handed fencers. He noted that some Fencing Masters were doing so at the time he wrote, establishing this as a legitimate component of teaching early in the classical period.

The final contribution was his suggested lesson for the individual with no experience with the sword who has to fight a duel the next day. This is the ultimate beginner's lesson and was crafted by de Bazancourt to provide the best chance of surviving the encounter. In doing so, he effectively, and perhaps unintentionally, showed that it is possible to fence after the first lesson, and that extended instruction prior to bouting is not an absolute requirement. This dueling lesson consisted of teaching, in order:

1. a natural guard position.
2. a short retreat step, to be executed with small steps to maintain distance.
3. extension of the arm to threaten the opponent.
4. varying the extension between high and low lines.
5. periodic changes of the line by disengage.

The result was a neophyte fencer who could significantly increase the difficulty of the more experienced opponent in the attack, all based on a narrow and easily taught skill set.

Walsh and Wood (1863):

John Henry Walsh and J. G. Wood offered one drill of value in teaching classical fencing. In this drill one fencer stood on the defense and parried the attacks of the opponent. The opponent executed all of the attacks in his or her skill set, including compound and prepared actions. Walsh and Wood suggested that the value of this drill lay in the development of decision making under circumstances in which the fencer could concentrate solely on offense or defense.

Burton (prior to 1890, published in 1911):

Burton was an advocate for simplification in technique, and reduced the basic elements of blade technique to two. His list is quite similar to that of de Bazancourt:



Attacks:

- a. Simple Attacks:                      Straight Thrust.  
    Disengagement.  
    Cut Over.
  
- b. Compound Attacks:                    One Two.  
    Beat, followed by straight thrust.  
    Beat, followed by disengagement.  
    Liement (bind) high to low line.

Parries:

- a. Simple Parries:                        Tierce.  
    Carte.  
    Seconde.
  
- b. Compound Parries:                    Counterparries or demicircles.  
    Full Circles.

Burton described in passing his approach to the fencing lesson. His criteria for the length of the lesson was to stop when the fencer is exhausted; however, he also referenced 30 minutes in a context that implies that was his standard lesson length. From the start, he drilled the student in advancing and retreating, emphasizing lively and rapid movement. For Burton, fast execution was far more important than perfection of the actual pattern of movement. This carried over into strong disapproval of the decomposition (what Rondelle termed analysis and Crosnier included as the core of his group lesson technique). At the end of the lesson Burton critiqued the student's performance, suggested methods of improvement, and expected the student to practice by himself, so as to be able to show the improvement in the next lesson.

The theme of not allowing loose play or the assault until some extended study is complete was a common theme through most of the sources consulted. Both de Bazancourt and Burton disagreed with this. Burton believed loose play and the assault were part of the lesson process that gave the student an understanding of why he had been learning the technique,

confidence in the value of the lessons, initiative, and a motivation to continue. As a result, his goal was to introduce students to the assault with the Master as soon as possible, in his view within a month.

Burton supported this with reference to the impact of lessons on the ability to actually fence. On the granular level, he instructed his readers to abandon the practice of advancing the chest to receive the hit as contributing to errors of distance. In terms of administering a class he suggested that students with a reasonable command of technique should be given a plastron and assigned to teach lessons to improve their understanding. And he suggested that the phenomenon (also commented on by others) of fencers who took beautiful and highly complex lessons on the plastron in the salle, but were incapable of fencing in the assault, resulted from excessive dependence on the lesson in preference to actually fencing.

#### Rondelle (1894):

Rondelle provided teaching drills for a wide variety of classical fencing actions. He does not describe how they are to be used. However, the format he used suggests these were executed with a combination of commands and physical cues by the Master. The following three sequences show the variety of his approach to teaching.

In the first example, for a relatively simple skill, the disengagement, he presented a straight forward sequence of movements that were probably taught by oral commands (page 27). The sequence of steps is similar to the sequence that Crosnier uses much later for group lessons. For the majority of techniques Rondelle provided instructions for two fencing lines in the engagement as columns (as opposed to the use of the two columns by many subsequent authors to indicate the roles of two fencers of Master and student).

1. Engage the blade in Quarte	1. Engage the blade in Sixte
2. Disengage and extend your arm	2. Disengage and extend your arm
3. Lunge	3. Lunge
4. On guard	4. On guard

Beneath the table for each technique, Rondelle included a line titled “without analyzing.” This provides a command for the progression of the exercise to a single command. In the case of the disengagement, the text reads:

Without Analyzing
Disengage.
On Guard.

The second version of these technical lessons introduced what appears to be a physical cue by the Master, indicated by use of italics in the text. In this case, the technique is the one-two and coupe (page 51).

1. Engage the blade in Quarte	1. Engage the blade in Sixte
2. Feint disengagement	2. Feint disengagement
3. <i>I oppose Sixte</i>	3. <i>I oppose Quarte</i>
4. Feint second disengagement	4. Feint second disengagement
5. <i>I oppose Quarte</i>	5. <i>I oppose Sixte</i>
6. Coupe, lunge	6. Coupe, lunge
7. On guard	7. On guard

Without Analyzing
One-two and coupe.
On Guard.

The third version of the format introduced choice, in this case choice by command by the Master to modify the drill as a surprise, presumably to encourage the fencer to remain alert and be ready for opportunities. In this case, the technique is the parries against the thrust in the low line, followed by a lunge in high line (page 133). In this case Rondelle introduced one advance or one retreat (a large percentage of the total number of drills involve no footwork beyond the lunge).

1. Engage Quarte, and advance or retreat	1. Engage Sixte, and advance or retreat
2. <i>On my feint of low thrust</i>	2. <i>On my feint of low thrust</i>
3. Oppose Septime	3. Oppose Octave
4. <i>I lunge in high line</i>	4. <i>I lunge in high line</i>
5. Oppose Quarte	5. Oppose Sixte
6. Riposte direct	6. Riposte direct
7. On guard	7. On guard

Without Analyzing	
Oppose Septime and Quarte.	Oppose Octave and Sixte.
Riposte direct.	
On Guard.	
<i>Command</i>	
Parry as in numbers 3 and 5 above, riposte in low line.	

When the Command was introduced the exercise changed. In this example the regular sequence becomes (in this case for the engagement in Quarte) when the parry is successful in number 5:

1. Engage Quarte, and advance or retreat
2. *On my feint of low thrust*
3. Oppose Septime
4. *I lunge in high line*
5. Oppose Quarte
6. *Command:* Riposte in low line

Rondelle described four specific exercises. The first was lunging at a wall pad, an activity which he believed every fencer should perform prior to receiving a lesson. It improved accuracy and prepared the fencer's legs and entire system for the activity of the lesson.

Rondelle also described a fingering exercise, capable of being used in Quarte, Tierce, Sixte, Septime, and Octave to improve the precision, control, and accuracy of touch. Engaged in Quarte, the fencer relaxed the three aid fingers to move the point to the right, and then, using the fingers only, returned the blade to engagement with a sharp tap on the opponent's blade. Simultaneously the opponent relaxed the fingers so that his blade was displaced to the right. On

the contact the fencer's blade would point directly at the opponent's chest. The opponent then returned his blade to the engagement in the same way, and the drill proceeded, alternately striking each other's blade.

Rondelle's third drill was a conventional exercise, essentially the same as the exercise termed in more modern times the drill at the wall. Two fencers participate as a pair, one executed an agreed-upon attack and the other an agreed-upon parry. No other technique could be used by either fencer. The attacker could attack at any time using a lunge, but he or she recovered to the exercise on guard line after each attack. The defender could not move any portion of his body, except the arm, wrist, and fingers in executing the parry. Both fencers were required to maintain excellent form in the exercise. The fencers could agree to allow ripostes and parry-counterripostes in the exercise. After a set number of repetitions the fencers changed role, the attacker becoming the defender and vice-versa.

The fourth drill, the Exercise of the Counters, is a conventional exercise in which the two fencers executed a sequence of attacks and parries in a set order. The fencers engaged in Quarte, and without commands, one fencer attacked and the other defended. The defender could be permitted to riposte. After each attack the fencers changed roles, a training technique that modern Masters will recognize as an exchange drill. The individual who was leading the drill determined when to move to a new sequence. The first exercise is shown below (page 147).

Direct Thrust	One opposition parry
Disengagement	One opposition parry
One-Two	Two opposition parries
One-Two-Three	Three opposition parries

Subsequent sequences engaged in Tierce, progressed to more complex combinations of attacks and parries, and eventually repeated the drill starting with double engagements.

Rondelle made a number of important observations about the lesson and the training of fencers. He believed that the lesson must be adapted to the characteristics of the student and should preserve the individuality of the fencer. He suggested that errors should be continually corrected, including even slight details, but he also stated that constant correction of minute errors initially might halt or retard the student's development, and should be avoided.

At the start of learning a new technique demonstrations must be used until the principles of the technique are understood. Drills should start slowly and proceed step by step (the analysis form of the drill). Once the performance is satisfactory, the drill could transition to execution without the analysis with the goal of increasing speed and accuracy.

As the student develops, the Master should increase the difficulty of the drill to prepare the student. One way in which this could be done is by the Master altering body position to more closely mimic how an opponent may present the target. The increase in difficulty will avoid surprises when the student participates in an assault.

Maurice Grandiere (1906):

Grandiere's small volume appears to have been written as a developmental text primarily for those with some familiarity with the foil and epee. Although he included no specific information for those who teach these two weapons, he provides insight into what he asserts was the structure of lessons in a salle in his day. The work is divided into Lessons, replacing the normal term Chapters, with each lesson "being arranged exactly as they would be actually taught at the fencing school" (page 3)." For example, the fifth lesson consists of:

A. Offense

1. attacks prepared by the double engagement
2. attacks in the high and low lines prepared by glide-beats
3. attacks prepared by derobement
4. surprise attacks avoiding the double engagement

## B. Defense

1. various parries and ripostes
2. croise

Grandiere advocated teaching a balance of offense and defense in each lesson with attacks being taught in conjunction with the appropriate parry and riposte. He emphasized that lessons should progress from the simplest to the most complex, which he terms the most scientific. In doing so he opposed mechanical teaching that relied on routine repetition of technique under the same conditions of speed, extent of feinting, and style as contributing to the development of fencers who could not score in the assault. To counteract this, his work provided a set of tactical suggestions as to how the techniques might be employed in the bout for each lesson. These are technique specific and would require some study to identify if there is a unifying tactical doctrine behind them, but this is an unusual approach when compared with texts that group tactical advice in a single section.

### Cass (1930):

Cass provided a complete curriculum for four terms (a term appears to coincide with a school semester) of ten lessons each. Her lessons were intended for a time-period of no more than 45 minutes, and she emphasized the importance of keeping the lesson interesting for the students. A typical lesson followed some or all of the elements in the sequence below:

1. review of the previous lesson.
2. demonstration of the technique to be taught in the lesson.
3. explanation of the technique.
4. drills starting slowly unto the mechanical aspects of the technique are performed satisfactorily, followed by an increase in speed and in number of repetitions – all managed by instructor command.
5. where appropriate, drill partners attempt to defend against the technique.
6. roles are reversed after each set of repetitions.
7. show and explain variants.
8. students are allowed to perform the drill without instructor command.

Cass described the content of each group lesson in some detail, emphasizing what she considers to be key teaching points. In the fourth term, she provided detailed combinations that could be used in the lesson, as shown in the following example (page 166):

Group	Engages in 6th
Fencer 1	Beat and double
Fencer 2	Double and hold
Fencer 1	Double, beat, and disengage
Fencer 2	Keep the feel of the blade, but watch, every nerve keyed, the wrist light, keep threatened line covered
Fencer 1	Lunge in 2 <sup>nd</sup> , quick recover and retreat
Fencer 2	Parry 2 <sup>nd</sup> , followed by advance, disengage cut-over lunge
Fencer 1	Circle parry 6 <sup>th</sup> and simple parry 4 <sup>th</sup>

Cass included a number of references to the appel, the class coming to attention, and saluting (including her own version of the grand salute, the Cass Grand Salute), and had her students march in at the start of class to move into the class formation. Some of this may have been related to her interest in stage work, and she did note techniques which seem to be distinguished by their visual effect. However, she commented at length about the importance of ceremony (page 169):

Being such an old and aristocratic sport, fencing has always been rather stiffened up with ceremonies, and though much of this has been eliminated, it must, however, retain some of the old time elegance or much of its charm would be lost.

The four term model is also applied to private lessons of 30 minutes each, with ten lessons in each term. Cass suggests that much of the detail of the group lesson can be dispensed with in the individual lesson, and emphasizes the importance of each lesson having a drill that stresses the key elements of the lesson. Examples of such drills from the third term are below (pages 196 and 203):



Fencer A	Fencer B
Engage in quarte	Engage in quarte
Feint disengage	Parry sixte
Cut-over lunge	Counter-parry sixte
Guard	Guard

Fencer A	Fencer B
Cut-over feint	Parry quarte
Double disengage and lunge prime	Parry prime and cut-over, lunge
Parry sixte and extend	Keep blade on feel
Disengage, lunge quarte	Parry by counter sixte
Guard	Guard

Cass took a very modern approach similar to the current games approach to coaching (see Martens 2004), stressing that the instructor should avoid large numbers of corrections or extensive explanations. In her view many performance errors would resolve themselves with continued training. It was more important that the student be able to keep a clear mind and not suffer from mental fatigue in the lesson. This was directly counter to the suggestions by some masters that instruction should correct every fault when it is first observed (see, for example, Terrone's and Nadi's comments on lessons).

Her final contribution was detailed instructions for drills and exhibitions suitable for a variety of public performances. These included marching evolutions similar to those of a drill team followed by choreographed demonstrations of fencing skills. These were designed for groups of 2, 4, 6, 16, and large groups of participants. The result was decidedly theatrical in the context of the 1920s and 1930s.

Luigi Barbasetti (1932 and 1937):

Barbasetti's two volumes have relatively short instructions on teaching, but do provide a variety of examples of decomposition of actions into the parts played by Master and student in drilling in techniques. The following is an example from the foil text (1932, page 110) for the

Feint Inward and Disengage Outward. Note the bind reference is to engagement as opposed to a transport.

First Tempo	Invites or binds in tierce.
Threatens inner opening.	
Second Tempo	Parries in quarte.
Threatens disengage outward.	
Third Tempo	Circular parries in tierce.
Circular outward feint; lunges.	

Barbasetti introduced a distinction between technical exercises or drills and what he termed conventional exercises. This category was distinguished by being more tactically oriented and by being intended to be done on a regular basis by two fencers. Modern Fencing Masters will recognize this is a prototype of the choice-reaction and options approaches to teaching tactical reactions. The following examples are the first and third exercises of a series (pages 125-126).

First Exercise:	
Bind or invitation in quarte or tierce.	Blade in line; the distance is measured in such a way that a simple lunge could carry the blade to the opponent's torso.
Performs simple or circular parry, without retreating, taking particular care not to be attacked by surprise.	Tries a touch by means of disengage or straight thrust, by lunging quickly and at the right moment from his immobile position; if he executes the action perfectly as far as the tempo and celerity is concerned, the thrust must succeed.
Third Exercise:	
Any invitation or bind at the fencer's discretion.	Blade in line; moves, trying to arrive at the thrust, by counter-disengage or circular feint, before opponent succeeds in completing two counters.
Performs two circular parries without leaving starting position of trunk and arm.	

Barbasetti offered two specific training events for preparation for the assault. The first is the Scandaglio, which he translated as the Sounding-Out and also referred to as a mute lesson (because the Master would not provide any oral instructions, but simply used the blade to indicate actions). This lesson covered the full range of actions the student had been taught, subject to the Master's determination of the appropriate actions for the lesson. The procedure is as follows:

1. The Master comes on guard.
2. The student attempts various preparations of the attack, such as a feint or a false attempt to engage the Master's blade in order to determine the Master's reaction.
3. The Master will react to one of the preparations at an appropriate moment providing the information the student needs to prepare an attack.
4. The student uses compound actions, second intention, etc. to prepare the attack or attacks with a fast simple attack if there is no reaction from the Master.

The Scandaglio, with slight differences in description, also appeared in the 1937 sabre and epee volume under the heading of Combat Engagement: Silent Lesson.

Barbasetti's second step in preparation for the assault was the Spratico, or Beginner's Assault. This was a transitional lesson intended to take the student from the Master as a teaching opponent to the Master as a fencing opponent, allowing the student to more fully develop his skill and tactical choices. The Master evaluated student performance, with the action scoring if it was correctly done and was an appropriate choice. Incorrect performance was met by demonstration of the error or vulnerability by the Master hitting the student. As student performance improved, the conditions of the lesson would allow increasing success to increase appropriate confidence. In the process the master should avoid intimidating by counterattacks, frustrating correct execution, or very fast ripostes that did not allow the student to recover. Instead the Master would make efforts to encourage the student to develop his or her own unique

skills. Eventually, as the student's performance markedly improved, the Master would increase the speed of actions until the Spratico transitions into an actual assault.

Felix Grave (1934):

Grave provided a suggested foil syllabus for the training of beginning fencers. The syllabus was divided into three sections: elementary lessons, intermediate lessons, and advanced lessons (pages 86-87). This is useful in understanding how one Master used this characterization of lessons. Other Masters taught a much larger volume of technique and used progression of difficulty to order the techniques to be taught, but did not provide a clear boundary as to what a student at each level should be able to accomplish.

- Elementary Lesson: Simple attacks in all lines.  
Attack with one feint in the high line.  
Parries against simple and one feint attacks.
- Intermediate Lesson: Attacks with one feint in all lines.  
Attacks with two feints in the high line.  
Simple attacks with a beat in all lines.  
Simple attacks with a change of engagement or deception of a change in all lines.  
Simple attacks advancing or on the opponent's advance.  
Parries to meet attacks with one or two feints.
- Advanced Lesson: Attacks with two feints.  
Simple attacks in all lines on the advance or the advance of the opponent, with an attack on the blade.  
Parries in the retreat.  
Compound ripostes, counterripostes, and compound counterripostes.  
Remises.  
Redoublement, reprise d'attaque, and redoublement d'attaque.  
Parries of attacks with two feints finishing with several counterripostes.  
Parries of attacks with two feints finishing with compound counterripostes.

Grave noted that he had given lessons to a blind fencer, and that some Masters had recommended that their students take lessons blindfolded to improve their sentiment de fer. He also noted that, in France, many Masters gave silent lessons, with no or few commands. In these lessons students were taught to find and oppose the attacking blade and deceive parries, all on either the advance or retreat. He believed this to be excellent preparation for the assault.

Julio Martinez Castello (1937):

Castello provided the first description of the Master's physical position when teaching, in the context of the Master teaching lessons continuously over a three to four hour period. Under these conditions the Master stood erect with the torso turned toward the student to allow the hit. A short step or short lunge substituted for the full lunge. The Master controlled the initiation of the action as well as its timing and how the technique was executed.

The Master's job was to draw successful execution from the student. He matched the speed of execution to the speed that would allow the student to make correct actions without rushing the movements. Attacks were timed to allow the student to parry and riposte correctly.

Given the control over the lesson exerted by the Master, Castello advocated the importance of student exercises to develop initiative and timing. These exercises were performed without regard to success of the attack or the defense, but rather with close attention to flawless execution. Castello believed the common focus on scoring the hit or making the parry in uncontrolled drills resulted in rushed performance and the actual loss of the accuracy and timing developed by the Master's lesson. He emphasized that the exercises should start slowly, even when familiar, and only increase in speed after repetitions have built smooth execution. They were to be done in a progressive order with the earlier exercises serving as the foundation for the later ones in the weapon. Understanding the theoretical background of the

exercises was also important for successful execution, and Castello combined theory, illustrations of each technique (the only Master in this series of texts to do so), and detailed exercise instructions as an integrated package.

Castello's instructions for the various exercises differed from the formats used by other Masters in that there is no step by step direct comparison between the two fencers' movements. Instead the exercise is presented as a complete narrative for each fencer, as shown in the drill below (page 128):

False Attack of a Disengage in Order to Parry Counter of 4<sup>th</sup>, Opposition of 6<sup>th</sup> and Return with a Disengage:

Fencer A. Being engaged in 6<sup>th</sup>, make a disengage to 4<sup>th</sup> with a half lunge allowing your opponent to parry and return with a double while lunging, which you parry as you recover to the guard position with the successive parries of counter 4<sup>th</sup> and opposition of 6<sup>th</sup>, and finally extend your arm with a disengage touching in the inside line.

Fencer B. Being engaged in 6<sup>th</sup>, parry your opponent's attack with the opposition parry of 4<sup>th</sup> and make a return with a double as you extend your arm, and make a half lunge while your opponent is recovering to the guard.

Joseph Vince (1940):

Vince described a set of five series of fundamental exercises which he believed were of value to fencers at all levels. These were intended to be practiced by a fencer working with a training partner.

First Series – Fundamental Positions.

Second Series – Simple Attacks.

Third Series – Compound Attacks (with a feint followed by a disengage).

Fourth Series - Compound Attacks (attacks against the blade).

Fifth Series – Compound Attacks (attacks against the blade followed by one feint).

Each series consisted of a sequence of actions for the attacker with one or more parries to be executed by the defender. Each series was designed to address the theme of the series as it progresses through the actions. The final Fifth Series provided a good example (page 45):

Attacks	Parries
Glide in sixth and disengage in the low line	7th or 8th
Against a straight arm, bind in second, feint in fourth, and against the parry of fourth, deceive and lunge	4th and 6th, or 4th and counter 4th
Against a straight arm, envelop in sixth, feint with a disengage in fourth, and against the parry of fourth, deceive and lunge	4th and 6th, or 4th and counter 4th
Beat in fourth, feint with a straight thrust, and against the parry of fourth, deceive and lunge	4th and 6th, or 4th and counter 4th
Press in fourth, feint with a disengage in sixth, deceive, and lunge	6th and 4th, or 6th and counter 6th

Vince stressed the importance of slow practice at the start of training to allow every movement to be made correctly and with precision. In his view too much speed too early in learning a technique lead to “inaccurate and inefficient fencing” (page 42).

Scott Breckendridge and Scott Breckenridge, Jr. (1941):

The Breckenridges, father and son, characterized fencing as a sport of movement and emphasized the importance of training the legs for footwork as a component of the fencer’s development. They suggested a leg specific solo drill of taking the guard position at one end of a 40 foot strip and rapidly advancing to the other end as many times as possible while still retaining good form. On every third or fourth step the fencer should execute a lunge and recovery. The same format could be used as a retreating drill. They based the need for this training on the characteristics of the bout in which a fencer would have to execute a large number of advances and retreats and as many as 15 lunges during five minutes.

Two other drills were included in their volume. The first was a variant of the fingering exercise, done as a parrying exercise. The fencers engaged in quarte or sixte well within distance and alternated using a sharp tap of the blade to execute a parry against the opponent's blade in the position of engagement. In the parries of 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> this exercise would be done with fingers only; in 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> some wrist play might have been needed but should be minimized.

The second part of this exercise was based on a reverse engagement with the line of quarte opposed by the blade in sixte, and vice versa. In the position the fencers practiced the circular parry, with the fencer in sixte executing circle 4<sup>th</sup> and the fencer in 4<sup>th</sup> executing circle 6<sup>th</sup>.

In the second drill one fencer attacked with a lunge, and the other fencer either executed a prearranged parry or remained static in the guard position. For example, the two participants engaged in quarte; the attacker might use any attack and the defender either remained on guard or executed a counter 4<sup>th</sup> parry. This exercise developed the fencers' ability to analyze the opposing action, properly time their action, hold the commitment of the parry until the opponent starts to move the front foot in the lunge, and properly synchronize all parts of the attack.

The Breckenridges suggested a specific order of instruction that differs from the common syllabus, based on their perception of the importance of each topic:

1. The position of the elbow of the weapon arm.
2. Four parries, one for each line.
3. The effacement of the rear shoulder to reduce the vulnerable target.
4. Ripostes.
5. Footwork.
6. Counterripostes (which they term concealed attacks).
7. Frank attacks, including attacks on the blade and counterattacks.



Most syllabi started with simple attacks and simple parries, moving to more complicated blade actions with a tendency for offense to be taught before defense. The above priority list is interesting in its emphasis on defense, offense from the defense, and finally pure offense. They conceded that what they saw as a logical order would be difficult to carry into practice because of existing perceptions of proper instruction in fencing and the physical demands of teaching an average load of 10 to 20 lessons in an afternoon on the same subject.

Finally, the Breckenridges provided a syllabus of 15 group lessons designed to provide a logical progression for the study of the foil (notably not coinciding with their previously suggested list of priorities). There are several interesting features to their lessons. First, the intent was to provide a syllabus that can be taught by instructors with minimal experience in teaching fencing. As a result, there was a strong emphasis on the students also observing and correcting each other's performance. This effectively increased the capabilities of the instructor to manage class correction and improvement. Similarly, if the group was working without an instructor, members were encouraged to read and digest the instructions for the lessons before coming to the group session.

Although the syllabus addressed 15 lessons, the authors acknowledged that some lessons might require more than one session to adequately cover the material. In addition, they emphasized the importance of starting each lesson with a physical review of the content of the previous lesson.

In the first lesson, student activity was to be managed in two minute periods, interspersed with rest, so as to allow the muscles to become used to the movement and positions required by the sport. These rest periods should have been used for critique of the more obvious faults in student performance.

After the first two lessons, which deal with basic position and basic movement, subsequent lessons started with what are termed preliminary unopposed exercises. Although not termed such by the authors, they served as a warmup, and more to the authors' point as a consistent review of very basic technique. Although the exact composition was not specified, if the reader used the same drills as in lessons one and two, this period would resemble:

1. Practice sitting on guard.
2. Advancing and retreating.
3. Lunging with an advance or retreat from time to time to emphasize the importance of maintaining the guard position.
4. Assuming the guard with the weapon.
5. Command exercise of (1) thrust, (2) lunge with occasional variant of (1) thrust (2) on guard.

Aldo Nadi (1943):

Nadi addressed the length and frequency of lessons in some detail, stating that a serious fencing lesson should never last more than 30 minutes, regardless of the experience level of the fencer. During this period the Master controlled the tempo based on the needs of the student. In his estimation four, or even three, serious fencing lessons a week were more important to skill development and maintenance than daily lessons in which the student performed carelessly. Fencing only once of week was seen as ineffective and a waste of time.

Nadi advocated what we would term today part-whole practice and the chunking of the serial parts of an action. Each component part of an action was to be practiced separately. As soon as the student understood the parts, the entire action was linked together to create one continuous movement. This approach was applicable to both offense (attacks and ripostes) and defense.

To develop the skill needed to execute the attack against a competent defense, Nadi suggested the use of a drill he termed an alternate exercise, in which the students agreed on the

attack and the parries. One fencer attacked; the other fencer executed the parries that allowed the attack to land. For example, in an attack by one-two, the defender executed the lateral parry against the feint to allow the final attack a clear line in which to hit. The initial action was set up by a small invitation and by the defender's step forward into distance. The final attack was made possible by the defender exposing enough of the desired line to allow the hit, but not so much that the attacker did not have to close the line in the thrust. After an agreed-upon number of repetitions, the fencers changed roles.

The alternate exercise served not only to train in attacking, but also in executing the parry. To progress to this second level of the drill, the defender added one more parry to defeat the final action by closing the line of the attack exactly. This provided the necessary framework to study the offense and the parries linked together, a format that Nadi saw as critical to learning how to do either. Also critical to learning was Nadi's instruction that the drill partners should observe for mistakes in execution and offer corrections.

Nadi advised that the Master should have great patience, note every fault, and not let even the smallest error remain uncorrected. For some problems, this could require years of corrections.

Clovis Deladrier (1948):

Deladrier described a series of 18 lessons to be taught in foil, and a similar set to be taught in epee, over a period of three years:

- First year - lesson 1 through 7.
- Second year - lesson 1 through 14.
- Third year - lesson 1 through 18.

In sabre Deladrier also suggested a series of 18 lessons, but with the timeline compressed so that the sequence was completed in two years:

First year - lesson 1 through 9.  
Second year - lesson 1 through 18.

This time line was consistent with his function as a collegiate coach, although he did state that he had used the same basic instructional plan throughout his coaching career. He envisioned that each lesson would be taught multiple times before moving on to the next one, and emphasized that repetitions of the fundamentals were necessary for even experienced fencers.

Deladrier uses a standard lesson format for his 18 lessons. As an example of this format in a foil, one sequence of parts of the lesson was:

1. On guard, advance, retreat, lunge, change of guard, double change of guard.
2. Simple attacks.
3. Simple parries, counterparries, and ripostes.
4. Compound attacks that deceive parries and counterparries, with two to four parts.
5. Two to four part compound parries with simple and compound ripostes.
6. A counterriposte exercise.
7. A second counterriposte exercise.
8. Speed exercises with attacks, parries, and ripostes.
9. Introduction of new techniques with explanation and demonstration.
10. Correction of fundamental positions, reassembly, and salute.

This is a very complex lesson model that would require some substantial amount of time to complete if the intent was to provide a useful number of repetitions of each item. The basic epee and sabre lesson sequences were similar in content and format.

Roger Crosnier (1951):

Crosnier's book was written to support his role as British National Coach by providing fencing coaches guidance on what and how to teach students in both individual and group lessons. He identified two phases for training. The first was instruction in the mechanics of every action; the second was the development and maintenance of easy, accurate execution through repetition. These two phases were applicable to both individual and group instruction.

The individual lesson was divided into five distinct parts, each of which has lesson characteristic of its own, and was termed a lesson by Crosnier:

1. The limbering, or Routine Lesson, consisted of simple actions followed progressively by compound actions and counterripostes, all executed starting at a slow speed to increase student precision and confidence.
2. The second phase, a Technical Lesson, either taught a new action or corrected previously noted errors in execution.
3. The third phase was a Tactical Lesson in which the student practiced the tactical application of the action under bout conditions.
4. The fourth phase, or Training Lesson, accelerated the student's movement, built stamina and speed, and reduced response time, with the Master varying the actions and requiring immediate response by the student. This phase would not be practiced for an extended period because of the demands it placed on the student.
5. The fifth phase was a Routine Lesson to return the student to a normal level of excitation and effort.

Crosnier noted that the Routine Lesson could be paired with the Training Lesson as a complete lesson in its own right. Although he did not expand on this concept, it would seem that the resulting lesson would be relatively short and consist of:

1. Routine Lesson.
2. Training Lesson.
3. Routine Lesson.

Crosnier believed the minimum length of time for a lesson should be no less than 15 minutes. In a large group the reality of teaching individual lessons meant that students would receive only a very limited amount of instruction, perhaps in the three to four-minute range. One solution to this was the use of group instruction.

Central to his method of group instruction was the use of a progression in the number of discrete movements in executing any technique. This was a command based system in which

instruction started with commands to perform each component of an action in a manner quite similar to the analysis phase of Rondelle's technical instruction. These components were assembled into logical chunks in each successive progression, reducing the number of commands while linking together and synchronizing movements that were serial in nature. The result was a drill structure that could be managed by subordinate instructors and that built proficiency and confidence in the fencers. It could be used for almost any skill, as the examples for an indirect riposte and a stop hit show (page 116):

### Indirect Riposte

#### Class Instructions

Class forms in two rows facing each other.

Class engage in sixte.

Row A attacking row.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Progression

On the command One, row A attacks by disengagement, row B parry quarte.

On the command Two. Row A, on the lunge, parry quarte, row B, by the use of finger-play and without extending the arm, feint of the disengagement.

On the command Three, row B riposte.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Progression

On the command One, row A attack by disengagement, row B parry quarte.

On the command Two, row A, on the lunge, parry quarte, row B disengage and riposte.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Progression

On the command One, row A attacks and row B parries, and ripostes by disengagement.

Stop Hit on a preparation of an attack by step forward with the intent of executing a disengage.

#### Class Instructions

Class forms in two rows facing each other.

Class engage in sixte.

Row A attacking row.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Progression

On the command One, row A step forward will covered in sixte.

On the command Two, row B disengage without lunging, but by leaning forward with the extension of the arm, and hit.

2<sup>nd</sup> Progression

On the command One, Row A step forward, simultaneously row B disengage without lunging and hit.

The sequel to the class progressions was free practice for each technique, with the objective of developing the fencer's reflexes and timing. The Master should allow the students to practice the technique at their own pace, while correcting execution, initiation at the correct moment, and the timing of the action, as appropriate.

Crosnier provided the most complete explanation of the Master's teaching position and movement of any of the sources. Because of the physical strain of giving large numbers of lessons in a working day, the Master did not work from on guard or use fencing footwork. The basic position of the body was with the torso upright and more turned to the front than the normal guard position. The left arm was either placed on the hip or held ready to assist in correcting student action. The feet were closer together than in the on-guard position, and the legs straighter, with the knees flexed to allow mobility. The rear foot pointed as far forward as 45 degrees from the perpendicular.

The lunge was replaced by a step forward with the front foot sufficient to bring the Master into range of the student, followed by the rear foot. The reverse movement was used for the recovery. The Master would pay close attention to returning to the correct fencing measure for the action in his or her recovery.

The weapon arm position was uncovered to allow the student to execute the attack; the weapon hand was in a false position part way in 4<sup>th</sup> when engaged in 6<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> when engaged in 4<sup>th</sup> to make the uncovered line obvious to the student. The presentation of the blade itself was at

a lower height that would be appropriate for a normal guard to correctly simulate the height of the blade in an actual engagement or attack.

R.A. Lidstone (1952):

Lidstone’s manual, like Rondelle’s, was rich in exercises for a wide variety of techniques. For each technique, he established a series of exercises, grouped under capital letters (A, B, C, etc.). Each exercise in a group was lettered in lower case letters (a, b, c, etc.). The resulting division and subdivision for each technique provided a progression in the execution of the skill, so that a student first demonstrated acceptable performance in Aa before moving on to Ab and so forth in order. Initial performance of one of these exercises should be slow; once the sequence is understood the speed should increase. Finally, when the student was performing at speed, two exercises could be conducted together as one flowing exercise. The result was a complicated and sophisticated system for teaching technique as a core skill and with a variety of options. The example below illustrates two series for two feint attacks (pages 78-79):

A		
	Master	Pupil
(a)	On guard in sixte	Engage in sixte
i	Close the line	Feint disengage into quarte
ii	Parry 4 <sup>th</sup>	Feint disengage into sixte
iii	Parry 6 <sup>th</sup>	Disengage into quarte
(b)	Engage in quarte	Recover in quarte
i	Change engagement	Feint counterdisengage
ii	Parry 4 <sup>th</sup>	Feint disengage into sixte
iii	Parry 6 <sup>th</sup>	Disengage into quarte
(c)	Repeat in the other line	Repeat in the other line



B		
	Master	Pupil
(a)	On guard in quarte	Engage in Quarte
i	Close the line	Feint disengage into Sixte
ii	Parry 6 <sup>th</sup>	Feint disengage into Quarte
iii	Parry counter 6 <sup>th</sup>	Counterdisengage
(b)	Engage in Sixte	Recover in Sixte
i	Change engagement	Feint counterdisengage
ii	Parry 6 <sup>th</sup>	Feint disengage into Quarte
iii	Parry counter 6 <sup>th</sup>	Counterdisengage
(c)	Repeat in the other line	Repeat in the other line

Lidstone advocated that a brief warmup should be conducted before attempting the exercises, and provided in his first chapter a series of exercises that serve both for initial instruction and as warm-up exercises. In summary, these included:

1. When on guard, changing from Quarte to Sixte and back.
2. Advancing and retreating when on guard, and then advancing and retreating changing guards.
3. Extending the arm and recovering in a different guard, and then doing so while advancing and retreating.
4. Lunging and recovering, alternating guards.
5. Combination of advancing and retreating and lunging with recovery, transitioning between guards.
6. Placing the point, and placing the point with extension.
7. Loosening the grip (essentially the same as Rondelle's fingering exercise, done with the press, beat, and as circling the blades around each other.

Lidstone's training sequence was designed to be progressive, and he specifically mentioned the importance of moving from simple to complex, of starting with slow execution and progressing to faster, and pairing an offensive action with its defense. In this progression, training:

1. Starts with movement broken down into its parts, and then developing into a flowing sequence.
2. Progresses to choice reaction (which he terms reflex exercises) in which the fencer chooses the action based on the opponent's action.

3. Moves to assault lessons in which the student exercises initiative to attack or to draw an attack, with the Master creating increasingly more difficult conditions.
4. Finally arrives at loose play, initially as a limited number of touches fenced with the Master with explanations and suggestions, moving to fencing with another student with the master offering advice and making corrections.

Lidstone provided additional guidance for the Master's conduct of the lesson. He advised that before starting an exercise, or in an interval between exercises, the Master should advance or retreat, with or without simple blade actions, to develop the student's sense of distance and to keep the student mobile. This suggested that the individual exercises are conducted essentially in a static position, with only the specific footwork identified in the exercise script.

He emphasized that student actions should always aim to hit. Initially the master generally should allow the student to hit, but from time to time parry and riposte to simulate the opponent's actions in an actual bout. In most cases the student should remain in the lunge at the end of the exercise so that the Master could correct performance. However, Lidstone cautioned the Master to not attempt to correct all faults at the same time, overloading the student.

Leonardo Terrone (published 1959 from an earlier manuscript):

Terrone described the typical individual lesson as the basis for "self-Conceited fencing," a term he does not intend as a compliment. In this characterization, the lesson was conducted by the Master calling out each action to be done, and constantly correcting every observed fault to mold the student like clay. Terrone described the process as denying any opportunity for the fencer to use his or her intelligence in solving problems and as not developing the fencer's ability to observe, deduce, and synthesize.

Terrone emphasized the importance of teaching one technique at a time to allow the student to concentrate on assimilating the skill. Techniques should be taught in a way that

allows them, once stored in the brain, to be used as building blocks for further technical development. In his model a lesson as short as 15 minutes could result in intense exercise.

Terrone described the use of progression in building up skill in executing technique, using as a model instruction for beginning fencers. Note that in the example below he advocated the use of a circle 4<sup>th</sup> parry as most useful for beginners as being simpler to execute than the lateral 4<sup>th</sup> parry.

Fencer A	Fencer B
First stage: Invites an attack by opening the line with no blade contact in 4 <sup>th</sup>	Lunges to hit
	Recovers to guard
Second stage: when fencers are performing at an acceptable level	
Invites an attack by opening the line with no blade contact in 4 <sup>th</sup>	Lunges
Parries the lunge with circle 4 parry	
	Recovers to guard
Third stage: when fencers are performing at an acceptable level	
Reverse roles and repeat the first and second stages	Reverse roles and repeat the first and second stages
Fourth stage: when fencers are performing at an acceptable level	
Repeat the first, second, and third stages with the opposite hand	Repeat the first, second, and third stages with the opposite hand

Variants of this progression were used to address invitations in each of the guards, to introduce the riposte, and eventually to teach compound actions, at each step increasing in difficulty.

Terrone noted that fencing against an opponent in a bout does not strengthen the fencer. Rather it introduces faulty movement patterns as a consequence of the increased speed at which the fencer must execute technique. As a result, he stressed the need to return to standard exercises with one or two choices in which the defender knew what one, two, or three actions to expect and the attacker knew what parries would be employed.

## V. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION – A MODEL FOR TEACHING

### A. General Theory

Fencing in the classical period was an activity with competing themes. On the one hand, it was a developing international sport; on the other, it was preparation for serious combat in the duel any gentleman might eventually face. On one hand, it was a formalized and complex discipline, with literally thousands of possible combinations of actions; on the other, advocacy for simplification and the increased athleticism of participants was starting to shape a faster, less complex game (de Bazancourt). On the one hand, there were lessons taught from an essentially static position with the student responding to the verbal commands of the Master; on the other hand, all of the teaching tools we find in modern lessons, including the development of student initiative and tactical sense, the use of silent instruction, teaching with opposite hands, different lessons types for different purposes, etc., were present in at least a rudimentary form. And the primacy of the individual lesson on the Master's teaching plastron in the salle or club was acknowledged at the same time group lessons in school and club settings were commonplace.

Although, at the time, it is highly probable that no one Fencing Master addressed all of these competing themes or used the wide variety of approaches needed to satisfy them, we have the benefit of seeing the scope of what many Masters were doing to prepare their students for sport and for the duel (preparation for the duel was a serious enough concern that authors as varied as de Bazancourt, Grave, Nadi, Terrone, etc. addressed it). The variety suggests that it is reasonable for the modern classical fencing instructor to select any of the lesson models described in this paper as the basis for teaching. There are, however, caveats to this selection process.

First, the instructor should select an approach that meets the needs and interests of the students. Some students may be intrigued by complex attacks and parries; a relatively short technical lesson focused on building up to one combination of a four-tempo attack and four tempo parry with minimal footwork might meet their needs. A beginning student would be lost in that lesson; a lesson in simple actions with more footwork (within the limits of the shorter classical period strip and less rich catalog of footwork technique of the period) would be more appropriate.

Second, the lesson type selected must fit within the capabilities of the available space. If you intend to teach one of Cass's complex formation drills with 40 students, you need a basketball court's worth of floor space. Teaching Grave's a la muette lesson to a single student can be done in 3 feet by 20 feet (with clearance for safety).

Third, the teaching skills required by the lesson must be within the capabilities of the instructor. If your intent is to teach your right-handed students to oppose a left handed opponent, you must be able to realistically deliver a left handed performance for them to practice against. If you cannot demonstrate or perform four part attacks, you will have significant difficulty teaching them.

Fourth, the use of approaches should be consistent with the general theme and time period you have selected. If you are studying a particular Master, the lesson should be absolutely consistent with his teaching in the published record.

## **B. Common Concepts**

### General instructional principles:

As noted above, this period was distinguished by competing theories of fencing, the traditionalist and the naturalist. As an instructor, you can logically present either approach to your students. At both ends of the period, we see texts (Rondelle and Lidstone) with exhaustive lists of complex blade actions. But in the same time-period, we see at the start the extreme simplicity of technique of de Bazancourt and Burton who advocate one and two tempo actions. And by the finish of the classical period there was general agreement that four tempo actions were only useful for training, and that three tempos were the most that could be attempted in the bout (see, for example, Deladrier and Crosnier).

Although none of the sources explicitly say so, there is a common thread (see de Bazancourt) suggesting that a large percentage of the lessons taught in the classical period were based on rote repetition of mechanical technique in blocked practice with little to no instruction by the Master in tactical application.

The andragogical principle of moving from simple to complex was well understood by classical period fencing instructors, whether explicitly mentioned (as Grandiere does) or revealed in the progression of lessons described by the authors (see Grandiere, Breckenridge and Breckenridge, and Crosnier). Classical instruction today should follow this same principle.

Similarly, the andragogical principle of managing the intensity of a lesson by starting slowly and increasing the speed of action was well understood (see Crosnier's progression from Routine Lesson to Training Lesson). Although none of the classical sources consulted framed this progression in speed as supporting specific goals in understanding the synchronization of actions or in allowing the easier identification of faults in technique, there is an understanding of

the demands of a fast lesson on a student and the need to restrict this level of stress. Classical instruction today should follow this same principle.

However, this is not to say that slow movement was an objective. Burton, in particular, emphasized the importance of quick action over perfection of movement (this was consistent with the general naturalist approach).

#### The Master's teaching position and actions:

The Master uses a teaching position and teaching footwork, not the standard position and footwork of the fencer (Crosnier). The torso is upright and more turned to the front than the normal guard position; note that Burton emphasized the importance of the Master not advancing the chest to facilitate the hit, as it distorted the student's understanding of distance. The non-weapon arm either hangs at the hip or is ready to be used to correct the student's action. The feet are closer together than in the on-guard position, the legs straighter, but with the knees flexed to allow mobility. The rear foot points a far forward as 45 degrees from the fencing line.

Footwork is based on the step forward and the retreat step. The lunge is simulated by a longer forward step with the front foot to bring the Master into range, followed by the rear foot with the reverse movement for the recovery. The Master should return to the correct fencing measure for the action in his or her recovery.

#### Command lessons:

Many of the sources used a command based approach to lesson instruction. In this model, the action to be taught is decomposed into its smallest constituent parts, and each part is executed on the verbal command of the Master. Rondelle provided the first example of this. The command model has the advantage of breaking even complex actions down into specific movements the student can execute with relative ease and in the correct sequence. Rondelle did

provide for the parts to be reassembled as a whole and practiced as a whole once the student had gained proficiency in the step-by-step commands.

Although Nadi did not specifically advocate the command model, he did support the use of part-whole instruction. However, Crosnier represented the most complete development of this model. He assembled the smallest elements into larger chunks, and those larger chunks into still larger chunks, eventually ending up with the student executing the complete action on one command. He further simplified the command process by assigning numbers to elements and then chunks. For example, the straight thrust and lunge could be taught in the progression:

1 – lower the point 2 – extend the arm 3 – lunge 4 – recover	1 – extend (includes previous 1 and 2) 2 – lunge 3 – recover	1 – attack (includes previous 1 and 2) 2 - recover	1 – attack (includes previous 1 and 2)
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It is important to understand the limitations of this approach. Although the command model does an excellent job of teaching the sequencing of the elements of a skill, the sequence taught is artificial and may actually present an incorrect version of the skill. For example, in our straight thrust above, lowering the point does not have to be completed before the extension starts, and the lunge does not have to wait until the extension is completed. Doing so creates ample opportunity for even a glacially slow response by the defender to result in a successful parry. The instructor using commands in the lesson must ensure that the students understand the skill as a flowing action, not as a series of independent steps.

Movement in the lesson:

Movement was a significantly lower priority in the classical lesson than in the modern lesson. Several authors addressed having the student take advances and retreats occasionally during the lesson as a form of relaxation or to improve understanding of distance. Lidstone



suggested that before starting an exercise, the Master should have the student retreat and advance to develop his or her sense of distance. Only Breckenridge and Breckenridge emphasized extensive movement. This suggests that the instructor may use actions from short distance, or medium distance with either: (1) the student and instructor working at short distance, (2) the instructor advancing with the cue to be hit, (3) the student advancing with the attack with the instructor static, and then stepping back to the original distance, or (4) the student lunging with the instructor static, and then recovering to the original distance.

#### Managing the correct distance:

Not addressed in detail in the texts examined was the issue of who is responsible for the correct distance in the lesson. Because distance is important to hitting or avoiding the hit, students should be taught to recognize the distance for both. This means that if the Master is serving as a static partner, the student must be instructed to find the right distance for each repetition. When the Master advances or retreats the student must take the correct distance for the expected action. And if the Master attacks the Master must recover to the desired distance (or stay forward or move forward again) for the student's action.

#### Cueing actions:

Student actions in both individual and group lessons were cued by verbal commands by the Master. Today we accept that the command model has significant limitations, as it uses stimuli not present in an actual bout and does not allow the student to exercise initiative and tactical judgment in executing a technique. As a result, much has been made of cuing as a modern technique. In actuality, cuing was frequent in the sources examined in this study, starting with Rondelle. The complex, multiple tempo actions favored in this period cannot be performed in a drill situation without Master (or drill partner) executing the specific initial

actions or responses needed to allow the student to perform the next part of the action. Although not specifically addressed, there is no obvious reason that drill partner and Master actions should not follow the basic guidance used in teaching cueing to modern coaches: (1) larger, smaller cues for less experienced students, smaller, faster cues for the more experienced, (2) realistic actions that mimic what an opponent would do, and (3) using unambiguous cues designed to elicit the desired student response.

#### Corrections:

Generations of fencing coaches have worked under the assumption that every error in each execution of a technique should be relentlessly corrected. This course of action was strongly advocated by Nadi. However, two authors (Rondelle and Cass) suggested that excessive corrections for minor errors have a negative effect. De Bazancourt and Terrone were even more dismissive of this practice, citing it as a primary cause of bad fencing, and Cass was willing to allow many problems to correct themselves. Modern sports science research based on the games approach suggest that Rondelle, Cass, and Terrone were right in their approach to corrections and that excessive correction retards development over time.

The constructive approach to correction would appear to be to allow several trials of a technique so that the student can self-correct. If self-correction does not occur use (1) one correction at a time, (2) with priority being given to finding the root cause of the problem, (3) and focusing on problems associated with the technique being taught.

#### Lesson length:

Lesson length is a factor of the number of students, the experience of the students, the complexity of the material, whether the lesson is individual or group, and the number of repetitions desired for student learning. Several authors suggested lengths for lessons ranging

starting with a minimum of 15 minutes (Crosnier) to an upper limit of 30 minutes (Burton) or 45 minutes (Cass). In one case (Burton), the length of the lesson was tied to student exhaustion. It is difficult to understand how some of the more complex lessons (such as Deladrier's) could have been conducted in less than an hour while providing sufficient repetitions for learning. In fact, Deladrier and Lidstone specifically suggested that multiple repetitions of their lessons may be necessary to adequately cover the material.

Length of time before being allowed to bout:

Burton identified a common problem that has been remarked in a number of texts, the student who took a beautiful lesson in the salle, but was incompetent when asked to actually fence a bout. Excessive dependence on lessons without the reality check of facing a non-cooperative opponent resulted from delays in introducing students to bouting. In Burton's view, the student should have started bouts with the Master within a month. It is important to note that a bout with a Master is a considerably more orderly environment than having to fence another student or in a duel against an opponent of unknown skill.

In today's environment, it is difficult to insist that a student wait for a month of frequent lessons to be allowed to actually use the skills against an opponent. The instructor who insists on a year or more of lessons before being allowed to bout will have great difficulty retaining students. It may be useful to set a target of teaching students basic footwork (advance, retreat, and lunge), one simple attack, and high-line parries and ripostes by the third or fourth lesson, and then using bouting against a more experienced fencer or coach as a tool for motivation and correction, finally releasing the student to fence generally in the club or salle after he or she demonstrates an acceptable (not perfect) level of control and fidelity to basic technique.

### **C. The Importance of a Curriculum**

Throughout the available sources, starting with de Bazancourt and Burton and extending to Crosnier, classical period texts provided curricula for teaching fencing in individual and group situations. These plans differed in detail and reflect the doctrine of the individual Masters. If your intent is to focus on a specific Master, you should follow that Master's curriculum.

Closely associated with the curriculum is the need for progression in training. Using Lidstone's model as a basis, the following would provide a structured progression of the types of training for a student:

1. Start with command based acquisition of skill and sequence of movement, progressing to flowing execution based on initiation by non-verbal cuing.
2. Progress to choice reaction in which the fencer chooses the action based on the opponent's action.
3. Moves to combat lessons in which the student exercises initiative to attack or to draw an attack, with the Master creating increasingly more difficult conditions.
4. Arrives at bouting, first with a limited number of touches fenced with the Master with explanations and suggestions, then fencing with another student with the master offering advice and making corrections, and finally to regular bouting in the class or club.

### **D. Individual Lessons**

In this time period, there are multiple models for the individual lesson, of varying orders of complexity. Terrone's evidence suggests that a common lesson model was an instructor driven, command model in which the student was expected to execute the technique on oral command of the Master. It is, therefore, historically correct to teach solely using this approach. However, the literature clearly establishes that Masters used more sophisticated models for teaching, in some cases models that are quite modern in their concept.

### The general format of lessons:

The individual lesson formats suggested by Cass, Deladrier, and Crosnier offer the basis for development of a model individual lesson format applicable to individual lessons:

1. Introduction
  - The subject of the lesson
  - How this relates to previous lessons
2. Warm-up
  - Fencing specific footwork
  - Blade control work
3. Main body of the lesson
  - Review of any building block skills for the lesson
  - Demonstration of the technique
  - Explanation of the technique
  - Progressive drills to develop the technique
  - Defense against the technique
4. Lesson conclusion
  - Cool-down blade and footwork
  - Summary of the lesson
  - Questions
  - Subject of the next lesson

In this model the degree of warm-up and cool-down will depend upon whether or not the fencer has been engaged or will continue to be engaged in fencing activity.

### Single action lesson:

Rondelle provided the first examples of lessons that can be taught with single actions, in his case cued by oral commands and specific blade movements by the Master. Following Rondelle, most drills described in period texts could be taught as a single action lesson if the Master plays the part of the opponent or training partner in the drill. The single action lesson has the benefit of brevity and allows the Master to provide multiple lessons to multiple students in a class or practice period. It ideally fits in a situation where the students are already engaged in fencing activity, eliminating the need for warm-up, and will return to fencing, thereby eliminating the need for a cool-down.

### Action and counter lesson:

The benefit of teaching a lesson with an action and its immediate counter lies in the student having both available when he or she is able to perform the two techniques satisfactorily. The student is more likely to understand the tactical employment of the two techniques. In addition, both participants in a drill are actively engaged in learning, and, if the drill partners rotate roles, neither is training to be hit. A related benefit is that when each fencer is actively engaged in the drill, they both learn not only how to execute the technique, but also how to recognize the technique when it is being employed by an opponent. This extends to the simplest skills – the fencer executing an invitation to cue a drill partner’s attack is learning not only how effective his or her invitations are, but also what the resulting straight thrust looks like in its entirety.

Virtually all of the drills described by period texts that are designed for two participants can be used as action and counter lessons in a group lesson.

### Multiple action lessons:

Lessons in which multiple actions are being taught necessarily consume more time if the students are to execute sufficient repetitions to begin to internalize the skills. Incorporation of multiple actions in a lesson may include: (1) the use of standard footwork and bladework drills as warm-up or cool-down, (2) review of previous techniques, especially if they are related, (3) the inclusion of techniques that are building blocks for the actions that will be taught as part of the development of those actions, (4) a counter to the technique being taught, or (5) a key variant of the technique being taught. The closer the actions being taught are to a common theme, the more likely that a multiple action approach will be successful.

### Opposite handed lessons:

De Bazancourt introduced the lesson with the Master teaching with the opposite hand; for example, a right-handed Master should teach some portion of his lessons with his left hand. The intent was to familiarize students with the problems and opportunities created in bouts with an opposite handed fencer. Because left handed fencers have traditionally been viewed as problematic by right handed opponents, this has the potential to teach correct distance, movement patterns, and specific target limitations and vulnerabilities. However, the second advantage is that the Master is now prepared to train the left-handed fencer in technique and tactics for dealing with the fencer she fences relatively infrequently, the left-handed opponent.

Teaching lessons with the opposite hand requires that the Master be highly skilled in dominant hand technique. The results of skilled technique with one hand are partly transferred to the non-dominant hand, with the result that the Master does not start from a blank slate. Practice will fairly rapidly develop an acceptable skill level with the non-dominant hand. This must be combined with an examination of the tactics employed by opposite-handed fencers so that the presentation in the lesson is consistent with the performance of the opponents the student will fence.

### Choice reaction and options lessons:

The modern options lesson is not addressed in the texts consulted in this study. However, parts of it are clearly present. Choice reaction exercises are present, either specifically (as in Rondelle or Lidstone) or through the use of drills to explore all of the probable reactions in all probable lines in a specific sequence of actions. The outcome is improved student ability to adapt to opponent actions in the bout. Choice reaction exercises can be simple and deal with the most basic concepts. For example, consider a choice reaction exercise based on engagement:

1. Fencers Engage			
2. Fencer A changes the engagement			
3.a. Fencer B transitions the blade to establish the new engagement.	3.b. Fencer B transitions the blade but does not correctly engage leaving an opening in the new line	3.c. Fencer B pushes back against the change of engagement	3.d. Fencer B attempts to counterchange to the original line
4.a. Fencer A does not attack	4.b. Fencer A attacks in the new line with straight thrust (with glide or opposition if appropriate)	4.c. Fencer A attacks with disengage	4.d. Fencer A attacks with counterdisengage

With this many alternatives, this is a complex and difficult exercise, which could be built up with one option, adding a second option, then a third, and finally the fourth. In modern use, there would be an additional progression from blocked practice of each option, to serial practice, and finally to random practice, but there is no evidence in the texts that the blocked to random progression was employed in the classical period.

Blind lesson:

Grave advocated the blind lesson as a way to improve sentiment de fer. In teaching a blind lesson the topic and progression of the exercise should be carefully explained to the student, and for less experienced students demonstrated with eyes open. It can be done as a command lesson or cued simply by a start command. For those components that require a hit against the Master or drill partner, it is important to maintain the target in a predictable location that the fencer can visualize – a moving target makes the exercise very difficult. An example of one blind drill and its progression follows:

Fencing Master	Student
First Progression	
Engage in 6 <sup>th</sup>	Engage in 6 <sup>th</sup>
Disengage	On feeling the blade detach search laterally to parry 4 <sup>th</sup>



	Riposte in 4 <sup>th</sup> to hit
Second Progression	
Engage in 6 <sup>th</sup>	Engage in 6 <sup>th</sup>
Disengage	On feeling the blade detach search laterally to parry 4 <sup>th</sup>
Deceive the attempt to parry and continue as one-two into 6 <sup>th</sup>	On not finding the blade, immediately return to parry 6 <sup>th</sup>
	Riposte in 6 <sup>th</sup> to hit
Third Progression	
Engage in 6 <sup>th</sup>	Engage in 6 <sup>th</sup>
Disengage	On feeling the blade detach search laterally to parry 4 <sup>th</sup>
Deceive the attempt to parry and continue as one-two into 6 <sup>th</sup>	On not finding the blade, immediately return to parry 6 <sup>th</sup>
Deceive the attempt to parry and finish as a one-two-three in 4th	On not finding the blade, immediately execute circle 6 <sup>th</sup> parry
	Riposte in 6 <sup>th</sup> to hit

Silent lesson:

This lesson is described in brief by Grave (1934), but appears to be identical to the silent lesson taught as late as 2005 at the Portland, Maine annual conference of the United States Fencing Coaches Association by Maitre d'Armes Tony Gilham, a former student of Maestro Fortunato Delzi, a Fencing Master of the classical period. The lesson is conducted by the Fencing Master providing all cues for movement and execution of techniques silently. By changing action movement patterns as techniques are executed, the Master can train the student in quick reactions to opponent changes in tactics and in gaining the initiative. The following two scenarios provide examples of how these may be applied.

Training in reaction to opponent changes in tactics depends upon the fencing Master cueing the student to execute a technique, providing sufficient repetitions to achieve stability in its execution, and then introducing a counter to the attack with the expectation that the student will rapidly identify the change and adapt his or her technique. For example:

Fencing Master	Student
(1) Cues by opening the line in sixth Repeats several times	(2) Attacks sixth with straight thrust Repeats several times
(1) Cues by opening the line in sixth, and (3) then parries sixth and ripostes	(2) Attacks sixth, (3) is parried, and (4) either hit by the riposte or escapes the riposte with a quick recovery and parry
(1) Cues by opening the line in sixth, (3) parries in sixth	(2) Feints straight thrust in sixth, and (4) and deceives the parry of sixth with a disengage to fourth to hit

Training in taking the initiative requires a transition from the Fencing Master leading the lesson to the student assuming control of the key elements. The silent lesson is particularly useful for this as the student must solve the problem unaided by oral commands or instructions.

For example:

Fencing Master	Student
(1) Comes on guard with an open line in sixth as an invitation	(2) Student lunges in sixth with straight thrust
(1) Comes on guard with an open line in sixth as an invitation and (2) retreats one step, as ...	(2) Student lunges in sixth, falling short
(1) Comes on guard with an open line in sixth and (3) reacts with a retreat on student start of extension	(2) Starts the attack with initiation of an extension against the open line and (4) finishes with the appropriate footwork

In this example, the Fencing Master initiates the student's attack with footwork by retreating. But in the second part of the drill the Fencing Master does nothing (apart from having a poorly positioned guard creating an opportunity for the student) until the student initiates. The student can assume that the Master will retreat on initiation of the attack because he or she has retreated previously when inviting.

### Combat lessons

Barbesetti's two lessons in preparation for the assault offer a framework for teaching tactical applications under bouting conditions. The spratico and scandaglio can be combined

into one lesson model, preserving the intent and elements of Barbasetti's lessons while simplifying their acquisition as a teaching skill. This is a silent lesson with the Master providing input to the student in the form of cues, both blade and movement, and countering actions (defensive, offensive, and counteroffensive). Barbasetti uses the full range of actions the student has been taught as the framework for the lessons. However, for less experienced students, I suggest that the Master restrict the number of actions to a set of actions that logically might be applied together in a bout. The focus of the selected set could be varied based upon the training objectives for the lesson. This results in the following lesson structure:

1. Both fencers come on guard at the normal distance for the start of a bout.
2. Either the student or the Master may attack or defend based on the objectives and actions being trained.
3. The student will conduct reconnaissance, such as false attacks, feints, or false attempts to engage the Master's blade in order to determine the Master's reaction.
4. Based on the Master's reaction, or lack thereof, the student will prepare and execute an attack at the appropriate time and distance.
6. The Master may, or may not learn from the student's reconnaissance or subsequent attacks and defend or counterattack against the student's following actions.
7. If the student exposes a vulnerability, loses focus, or an opportunity presents itself to disorder the student's tactics, the Master may attack.
8. If the student commits an error in preparation or execution of the attack, the Master may counterattack.

The frequency, speed, and sophistication of the Master's actions in this lesson are keyed to student capabilities. Initially, the student should be successful in any action that is well formed and properly timed at the correct distance. Incorrect performance is corrected by frustrating the student's action and presenting a riposte or counterattack. As the student increases in ability, the difficulty should be increased by increasing speed of reaction by the Master and demanding faster and more accurate execution.

De Bazancourt's lesson for the neophyte preparing for the duel is an interesting piece of history that can be taught early in a fencer's instruction, either for its own value as a tactical exercise or as a reminder of the serious nature of sword combat in this period. Although this lesson was presented in the period well before the evolution of the dueling sword into the sport epee, and therefore was probably a foil exercise in the salle, it could also be taught as an epee lesson. The key elements of the lesson are:

1. The student assumes a comfortable guard position.
2. Footwork is a series of short retreat steps to maintain distance against a cautious advance by the Master.
3. The student is taught to extend the arm to threaten the Master, either continually, or on the Master's advance, and
4. To vary the threat between high and low lines relative to the Master's guard, while
5. Making periodic changes of the line by disengage.
6. Upon the Master's attack, execute a stop hit.

## **E. Group Lessons**

### Format of group lessons:

Cass and Deladrier provided the best look at lessons taught in a group setting. Cass's explanation focuses on a standard format for lessons with an emphasis on formations as a way of organizing the students, with an emphasis on single and double line work. This is consistent with a number of surviving photographs of groups work that emphasize line formations. Although further research is required to determine if single line, double line, and possibly even triple line (all heading in the same direction) were the only formations in use, there does not appear to be a lot of evidence of other class management approaches.

A composite of the texts examined in this study offers the following as a possible outline for a group lesson based on classical practice:

1. Introduction – 2 minutes
  - The subject of the lesson
  - How this relates to previous lessons
2. Warm-up – 10 minutes
  - Fencing specific footwork
  - Blade control work
3. Review of previous lesson – 5-10 minutes
  - A drill to review the key concept of the last technique taught
3. Main body of the lesson – 20-30 minutes
  - Review of any building block skills for the lesson
  - Demonstration of the technique
  - Explanation of the technique
  - Progressive drills to develop the technique
5. Extension of the technique – choosing one – 10 minutes
  - Defense against the technique
  - Tactical application of the technique
  - Key variant of the technique
  - Speed exercises
6. Bouting or assaults – as permitted by schedule
7. Lesson conclusion – 10 minutes
  - Cool-down blade and footwork
  - Summary of the lesson
  - Questions
  - Subject of the next lesson

Master-pupil instruction:

Burton introduced the concept of assigning more experienced students to teach portions of the lesson. We know a variant that model today as the master-pupil lesson. Both models serve as a way to increase the trainer's reach; Burton emphasized that it also increased the student masters' understanding of the technique being taught. The modern Master-Pupil model assigns pairs of students in a group lesson, one student to serve as the instructor for another student, ideally a more proficient student to one who is less experienced. The student Master performs the actions that an instructor would perform in an individual lesson, and the pupil performs the student role. When all of the participants are at a similar level of proficiency, the master and pupil can exchange roles after a set number of repetitions.

## **F. Specific Drills**

The data gathered in the detailed review of the sources used for the study establishes that the following types of drills were in use for training fencers.

### Lunging pad exercise:

Rondelle believed every fencer should practice lunging at a wall pad prior to receiving a lesson to improve accuracy and prepare the fencer for the lesson.

### Solo footwork drill:

The Breckenridges suggested a solo footwork drill in which the fencer comes on guard at one end of the strip and rapidly advances to the far end as many times as possible while maintaining good form. On every third or fourth step the fencer executes a lunge and recovery. With substitution of a retreat for the advance, the same format will serve as a retreating drill.

### Fingering exercise:

This blocked, conventional exercise is suggested by Rondelle to be used in fourth, third or sixth, seventh, or eighth to improve accuracy and point control. Engaged in a line, the fencer relaxes the three aid fingers to detach the point to the right, and then, using only the fingers, returns to engagement with a sharp tap on the opponent's blade. Simultaneously the opponent relaxes the fingers so that his blade is displaced to the right. When properly executed, on the contact the fencer's blade will point directly at the opponent's chest. The opponent then returns to the engagement the same way. The drill continues with the fencers alternately striking each other's blade.

### Parrying exercise:

The Breckenridges offered a variant of the fingering exercise as a parrying exercise. The fencers engage in quarte or sixte well within distance and alternately execute a beat parry against

the opponent's blade in the position of engagement. In the parries of 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> the exercise is done with fingers only; in 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> minimal wrist use may be needed.

A progression of this exercise starts with reverse engagement with the line of quarte opposed by the blade in sixte, and vice versa. The fencers practice the circular parry, with the fencer in sixte executing circle 4<sup>th</sup> and the fencer in 4<sup>th</sup> executing circle 6<sup>th</sup>.

#### Conventional exercise:

In Rondelle's blocked conventional exercise one fencer executed an agreed-upon attack and the other an agreed-upon parry. The attacker may attack at any time using a lunge, but must recover to guard after each attack. The defender may only move the arm, wrist, and fingers in the parry; no body or footwork movement is allowed. The exercise may progress to ripostes and parry-counterripostes. After a set number of repetitions the fencers change role. This exercise in more recent times has been termed a drill at the wall because the defender is not allowed to move; in class situations the defender was often positioned with a wall at his or her back.

#### Defense-offense drill:

In the most complex form (Walsh and Wood) of Rondelle's Conventional Exercise, Fencer A is restricted to defense with the full range of parries he or she knows. Fencer B is restricted to offense with the full range of simple, compound, and prepared attacks. A parries B's attacks. There is no mention of footwork, other than B's lunge, in this drill, making it possibly a variant of the standard drill at the wall.

#### Alternate exercise:

Nadi offered another blocked conventional variant on this theme, the alternate exercise, to study the relationship between attack and defense. The students agreed on the attack and the parries. One fencer attacked; the other fencer executed the parries that allowed the attack to

land. For example, in an attack by one-two, the defender (1) made a small invitation and advanced into distance (2) attacker feinted (3) defender made a lateral parry to expose the line for the final attack, but only enough so that (4) the attacker still had to close the line in the thrust. After an agreed-upon number of repetitions, the fencers changed roles.

In the second level of the drill the defender added the second parry to close the line of the final thrust and defeat the attack.

#### Analysis exercise:

The Breckenridges described a drill in which one fencer attacks with a lunge and the other fencer either executes a prearranged parry or remains static in the guard position. For example, (1) the fencers engage in quarte; (2) the attacker attacks with any attack and (3) the defender either remains on guard or executes a counter 4<sup>th</sup> parry. This exercise develops the ability to analyze the opposing action, time their action, hold commitment of the parry until the opponent starts to move the front foot in the lunge, and properly synchronize all parts of the attack.

#### Exercise of the counters:

Rondelle describes a role changing drill that is essentially the modern exchange drill. Fencer A executes a technique, and the partner Fencer B executes the response to that technique. In the next repetition of the drill, Fencer B executes the technique and Fencer A the response. This switching of roles back and forth ensures that both fencers train in both technique and counter and simulates the flow of actions in a bout. Rondelle expands the scope of the modern exchange exercise by suggesting that a series of actions in a progression be included in the exercise, with one fencer determining when to move to the next action sequence.



## **G. Conclusion**

The modern instructor of classical fencing has a wide variety of techniques that are applicable to teach both individual and group lessons. The techniques of the classical period largely survive today in modern fencing lessons, demonstrating at least the assurance Fencing Masters then and now have that they are effective ways to convey technical and tactical material to students. The result is a solid body of andragogical technique that can authentically be used to transmit classical fencing to the modern student in the way it was taught from 1880 to 1939.

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