

Order of the Rose

Fencing Handbook



Introduction to Order of the Rose

Period Fencing

As a member of Order of the Rose, you will learn period fencing. The term “Period Fencing” means that you will be learning European fighting techniques used primarily during the 1500’s and 1600’s, rather than Olympic fencing taught in the modern day. Most of our officers learned this technique through their participation in a group called the SCA, and all of our safety and fighting techniques will correlate with those of the SCA.

SCA

So what is the SCA? It stands for the Society of Creative Anachronisms, and is a medieval reenactment group. The SCA’s web site defines the group as follows:

The Society for Creative Anachronism is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to learning and recreating aspects of the middle ages. It covers a time period roughly from 600-1600 AD, and has a wide variety of activities and interests in which one may participate.

If you want to know more about the SCA visit their web site at sca.org, or ask one of the officers for more information.

It should be noted that while we teach SCA style fencing, Order of the Rose is not officially affiliated with the SCA. When we do attend SCA events and associate with Scadians, we are known as the “Terra Sylvan Fencers.” When you attend any SCA events, you will be required to sign an official SCA waver form.

How is Period Fencing different from Foil?

Many new comers are familiar with modern day Olympic fencing, and may wonder how period fighting differs.

1. Period fencing does not rely on electronic scoring or a referee, as does Olympic fencing, but rather relies on the fighter’s honor in calling valid shots.
2. Olympic fencers fight back and forth on a straight line. In Period Fencing, a fighter may attack from all angles.
3. In Olympic fencing, primary weapons may include
 - a. Foil
 - b. Epee
 - c. Saber
 - d. Two hands and multiple weapons are never allowed

4. In Period Rapier Fencing, fighters may use:
 - a. Rapier
 - b. Rapier and dagger
 - c. Rapier and Rigid Parry item (buckler)
 - d. Rapier and non-rigid parry item (cloak), or case of Rapier
 - e. Fighters may use both hands to either hold weapons or block shots. If a fighter uses his hand to block, he must wear a glove, and may never grab the blade. See the “Off Hand” section of this pamphlet for further information.
5. To “Kill” an opponent in Period Fencing, a fighter must land a blow to a vital area, including:
 - a. Torso
 - b. Head
 - c. Neck
 - d. Groin
6. In Olympic, dueling is the only form of fighting. In Period Fencing, fighters may duel, but may also participate in full-on battles, or “melee,” which may include any number of fencers.
7. Our outfits are much more stylish.

Levels of Importance

In Order of the Rose we use four levels of importance in all our fencing activities.

1. **Safety:** First and foremost, we expect all our fencers to be safe. Period Fencing is a contact sport, and most fencers will take home a token bruise now and then. However, if all safety requirements are met, we are confident that fencers may engage in combat and avoid any major injuries. Please make this your first priority.
 - a. **Gear:** All fencers must wear appropriate safety gear any time they are fighting (see the “Gear” requirements section of this pamphlet).
 - b. **Holds:** Any time you hear – or even *think* you hear – the word “Hold” called, cease fighting immediately and repeat the word loudly and clearly to those around you can hear. Holds can mean any number of things have occurred on the field, from tangled blades to an onlooker wandering into the fighting area. (See “Holds” for further info.)
 - c. **Fighting techniques:** Though it may sound a bit incongruous, the fighting techniques we will teach are designed to make a fight as safe as possible. Though we use the term “kill” frequently, we are not really trying to “kill” each other. Fencing is more of a game of tag, and you will learn how to stab, cut, and skewer SAFELY. Please attend all fencing classes, for these classes are designed to make you a safe fencer.

- d. **Area:** When ever you engage in a fight, please be aware of your surroundings. We will fight in buildings, woods, fields, and castles. You don't want to run your opponent into a tree. You don't want to miss a step on a staircase. You are responsible to know the area you are fighting in, and to keep yourself and your fellow fencers safe.
2. **Honor:** Your honor is what will define you as a fighter. In Period Fencing, there is no referee. There is no electronic method of telling whether or not a shot is good. It is up to each individual fencer to call and take any shot given them. Call and take any shot you believe to be good. Call and take any shot you aren't sure of, and let your opponent dismiss the shot if it's invalid. Don't let your opponent take invalid shots you have given. Go to fencing class and learn to be a safe fighter – being safe will help you become more honorable. It takes years to become a truly skillful fencer. Let yourself be honorable the first time you pick up a rapier, and you will be respected no matter what your skill level is.
3. **Fun:** In Order of the Rose, we are here to have fun. That is the whole reason we fence. Many of us have failed in other sports, or don't feel comfortable in football helmet. Wearing a three-weapons mask with leather backing is fun. Holding a swept hilt rapier with a wire wrap hilt is fun. Saluting the King and Queen of Artemnesia (even if we still don't know their names) is fun. Knowing we are honorable fencers (even if we still can't get past Sedos's guard) is fun. Coming off the field, sweating, after fighting hard in a barroom brawl melee battle is fun. Or it should be. Period Fencing can be frustrating at times, because all of us want to become better fencers, win the fight, or kill Damian once in a while. If you find yourself getting discouraged, try readjusting your attitude. Remember why we're here. Being a member of Order of the Rose isn't about winning. It's about having a darn good time.
4. **Skill:** Though we rank skill last in the "levels of importance," it is still important enough to make the list. Everyone who becomes a member of Order of the Rose dreams of becoming a Master Swordsman. We train every week in hopes that we may become great fencers. The pursuit of swordsmanship should never come before safety, honor, or fun, but it is a noble endeavor, and the feeling of having delivered a successful "kill" is intoxicating. Take your lessons in swordsmanship seriously. With practice and determination you can improve your fencing skills. With increased skill, you can feel more confident in dueling and melee fights, and your enjoyment level in Order of the Rose will grow. Being a skillful fencer will help you have fun, but it can't replace it. Also, remember that becoming a skillful fencer takes time and hard work. Don't expect to pick up a sword and win every fight. You can learn more from a lost fight than an easy win. Learn from your losses. Work hard. But feel confident that you will become a Master Swordsman.

Rank System

In Order of the Rose we have established an Officer's Core in order to run the company more effectively and efficiently. We have chosen military names to correlate with the ranks, which are as follows:

- Captain
- Lieutenant
- Sergeant

On your first day a Captain will introduce him/herself and the other officers. We choose officers based on their commitment to the group as well as their quality as swordsmen. We feel confident that our officers are qualified to teach Period Fencing basics, and hope you will come to respect them.

We have also established a rank system according to skill level. As you attend Order of the Rose week by week, you will move through the ranks as you improve yourself as a fencer. The skill levels are as follows:

- Newcomer
- Initiate
- Novice
- Swordsman
- Master Swordsman

The specifications for achieving each skill level will be discussed later in this pamphlet.

Summer Flag System

From approximately May through September, we will hold practice at Woodland Park in Farmington Utah. Directions and a map may be found below. From time to time we have to change the location of practice, or cancel it all together, so have devised a flag system to let you know the status of the practice. Each practice, one of four flags will be tied to the gate at the top of Woodland Park. If the flag is:

- a. Green - Practice will be held at Woodland.
- b. Red - Practice will be held at the Farmington Main Park.
- c. Yellow - Practice held at Shepard Park.
- d. Black - Practice is cancelled.

Forget What You Know

Many people come to Order of the Rose with past experience in other forms of fighting. Though some of this knowledge can be helpful, we ask that you leave it behind when you begin to learn Period Fencing. Rapier Fencing has its own style and rules, and we ask you to learn the basics before you start to establish your own style.

The Vision

Order of the Rose was established by Michael Kovacs (Lord Damian Azure) and Christopher Barber (Lord Fenton Montero) in 1999. The first practice was held in the foyer of Viewmont High School and had a grand total of 3 attendees. From the outset, Damian and Fenton hoped to have a good fencing team in roughly 5 years. Two years later (2001), the Terra Sylvan Fencers were noticed by the SCA at a summer fighting event as a group of honorable, dedicated, and skilled fighters, and a force worthy of praise. The Company has had as many as 40 fencers at a practice, and has had as many as 90 active members on its web site orderoftherose.org. The Terra Sylvan Fencers hold an annual event in Woodland Park called Woodland Wars, to which they invite the SCA. Swordsmen are invited to wear the official uniform, the black tabard with their choice of color inside. Though the number of members rises and falls sporadically, we still remain as a well respected company.

Order of the Rose was established as a company open to anyone who wanted to learn how to fence, without fear of ridicule or judgement. We welcome safe, honorable, fun-loving people who desire to become skilled swordsmen.



Skill Levels

The five skill levels you will achieve as you attend Order of the Rose fighter practice are: Newcomer, Initiate, Novice, Swordsman, and Master Swordsman. In this section you will learn what knowledge and skills are required for advancement in the Company.

Knowledge:

1. Newcomer: Demonstrates a basic knowledge of dueling
2. Initiate: Demonstrates a basic knowledge of dueling and melee
3. Novice: Demonstrates a complete knowledge of dueling and melee
4. Swordsman: Demonstrates a full and complete knowledge of dueling and melee
5. Master Swordsman: We don't feel qualified to bestow this title. It takes many years of training to achieve Master Swordsman, probably more than even we have

The officers will award you advancement in rank as they see you have gained a working knowledge of each skill.

Checklist of Skills and Requirements for Advancement

Though the officers ultimately will decide when you're ready to move on, below is a list of skills and requirements you will need in order to advance. You may refer to the list and use it as a gauge as you attend practice.

Newcomer:

- 8 Basic Blocks
- 3-4 Block Attack
- Basic Attack
- Movement: Forward/Backward
- Stance
- Know:
 - Four Levels of Importance
 - Basic Protection/Gear Requirements
 - Kill Zones
 - How and why we break shots
 - Dueling Holds
- Death from Behind
- Melee Hold

- Gauging Shots

Initiate:

- Attend 3 Practices
- Introduction
- Lesson 1
- Lesson 2

Novice:

- Rules of Engagement for Order of the Rose
- Melee
- Off Hand
- Safety 1
- Attacks and Combos
- Blocking
- Breaking Shots, Point control, Draw Cuts

Swordsman:

- Requirements:
 - Come 3 months as Initiate
 - Write Novice Paper
 - Fight with 2 Lieutenants and 1 Captain
 - Pass Novice Test
- Melee
 - Hold/180 and 120 degrees/DFB/Hit Rule
 - Basic Formations
- Dueling
 - Rules of Engagement
 - Attack combos
 - 3 Attack, 3 Retreat
 - Breaking Shots/Point Control
 - Draw Cuts
- Main Gouche
- 40" Blades
- Tarquesh Blocks

- Cloak
- Case, 35" and 40"
- Buckler
- Off Hand Advanced
- Staff
- Gauging shots
- Death From Behind
- 8 Blocks
- 3, 4 Block/Attack
- Basic Attack
- International Sword Height
- Stance
- Rush attacks in close duel
- Draw Cuts
- Tip Cuts
- Movement on the Field
- Tactics Formation/Tactics Advanced
- Lord Aaron Range Exercise

Not all of these terms may make sense right now, but as you attend each class, you can refer back to this list and mark off each skill as you gain knowledge of it.

Lesson One

This lesson focuses on the basics of Period Fencing. Though these techniques may seem trivial or “too easy,” they are the very fundamentals of fencing. Think of them as the foundation of a building – without the foundation, a building will collapse in an earthquake, no matter how fancy the architecture or sturdy the walls.

1. **Stance:**

- a. Stand with right foot in front of you and your left foot behind you, with your feet about hip-distance apart.
- b. Place your feet at a 45 degree angle, with your right toe pointing forward, and your left toe pointing directly to the left.
- c. Bend your knees slightly and balance your weight evenly between both feet. This will give you the ability to either advance or retreat with equal speed and agility.
- d. Lift your sword in front of you, with the point about eye-level.
- e. Lift your “off hand” into a guard position.
- f. For lefties, follow the directions above, but insert “right” for “left.”

2. **Footwork:** Footwork is a term you will hear frequently in fencing, and can make or break you as a fencer. You will use your footwork any time you are in fighting stance, to either move forward or retreat. Good footwork will allow you to move with speed and agility, and bad footwork will only make you trip over yourself or your opponent.

3. **Forward and Retreat:**

- a. **Forward:** To move forward, take a step forward with your forward-facing foot, then step the back foot up so that you are once again in basic fighting stance.
- b. **Retreat:** To retreat, take a step back with the back foot, and follow it with the front foot.
- c. Don't take too big a step, or too small a step. The normal step you take when you are walking should suffice.
- d. Try to maintain equal distance between your feet. This will help you keep your balance.
- e. Remember to keep the knees slightly bent. This will help you balance, and have speed and agility.

4. **Basic Attack:** When you attack an opponent, step forward with your forward-facing foot, and extend your sword so that the pointy end goes in the other guy. As you do this, there are several things to know and remember.

- a. **Grip:** There are various ways to hold a rapier, and you should choose the one that is the most comfortable to you.
- b. **Keeping the point on line:** When you hold your rapier, you should keep the point, or “tip,” of the rapier in line with the middle of your

opponent's chest. Don't keep the entire blade on line. Just the tip. This will allow you to "aim and shoot" more accurately, and is called "Point Control."

5. **Eight basic blocks:** There are eight basic blocks in fencing, though you will use blocks 3 and 4 more than any other
 - Block 1:** Drop the tip of your rapier towards the floor, and move the blade across your body to the left. Blocks leg shots
 - Block 2:** Drop the tip of you rapier towards the floor, and move the blade across your body to the right. Blocks leg shots.
 - Block 3:** Keeping your point "on line," move the rapier hilt across your body to the left. Block body shots.
 - Block 4:** Keeping the point "on line," move the rapier hilt away from your body to the right. Blocks body shots
 - Block 5:** Lift your sword into the air, with the rapier hilt about level with your chin, and move the hilt across your body to the left. Blocks high head shots.
 - Block 6:** With your sword in the air and the hilt level with your chin, move the hilt across your body to the right. Blocks high head shots.
 - Block 7:** Drop the tip of your blade towards the floor and sweep the blade across your legs to the left. Blocks leg shots.
 - Block 8:** Drop the tip of your blade towards the floor and sweep the blade across your legs towards the right. Blocks leg shots.
6. **Kill Zones:** Anytime you take a shot to any of the following areas, you are "dead," and loose the fight. These zones are:
 - a. Head
 - b. Torso
 - c. Neck
 - d. Groin
7. **Taking legs:** If you take a shot to the legs, you are not dead, but must go down on your knees, since a fighter with no legs cannot walk. When taking or loosing legs, there are a few things to remember.
 - a. If you take your opponents legs, allow him to kneel or sit, and ask him, "Are you comfortable?" before you proceed with the fight.
 - b. If you are "legged," you cannot move from the spot where you have fallen. You can't bounce on your knees, or shift in any way. You have no legs.
 - c. If you loose one leg, you cannot hop. The pain would be too excruciating, and your footwork would be non-existent.
8. **Hand shots and arm shots/Staples:** If you loose an arm or a hand, you may continue to fight, but must remember the following:
 - a. If you loose an arm, you must place the arm behind your back and cannot use during the rest of the fight.

- b. If you loose a hand, you may still use your arm to block shots, but you must ball you fingers into a fist and may not use your hand or fingers.
- c. If your hand or arm blocks a “point-in” shot that would ordinarily have skewered your body, this is called a staple – your opponent’s sword has stapled your limb to your body, and simultaneously killed you. You are dead.

9. **Taking Kills and Giving Shots:**

- a. **Taking Kills:** Remember the 2nd level of importance. If you receive a shot that you believe to be good – take it as a kill. If you aren’t sure, ask your opponent and allow him to make the call. If he calls the shot good, take it. If you think he is wrong, take the kill anyway and discuss it after the fight is done.
- b. **Giving Shots:** Be honorable about giving shots. Do not allow an opponent to take a shot you know to be invalid. If he calls “dead” and you know you haven’t killed him, tell him so and continue the fight.
- c. **Speak Loudly:** If you are killed, call out “Dead!” loudly and clearly, and either fall to the ground, or exit the field.

10. **Safety Rules to Note:**

- a. **No Hacking:** Although we do allow “draw cuts” – or kills delivered with the edge of the blade – we don’t allow hacking or slashing. Draw Cuts are a controlled, practiced technique, and you will learn to do them later on.
- b. **No Body Contact:** Grappling, wrestling, hitting, scratching, kicking, or any other form of body contact are not allowed.
- c. **No Pummeling:** The guard on your rapier is to protect your hand. Do not pummel your opponent with it.
- d. **No Grabbing Blades:** You may not grab an opponent’s blade during the fight. You will learn techniques to “trap” blades with your hand, but if you grab a blade during a fight, consider the hand severed, and continue the fight without it.

11. **4 Levels of Importance:** Always remember: SHES.

- a. **Safety**
- b. **Honor**
- c. **Enjoyment**
- d. **Skill**

12. **Fencing Safety Gear:** Any time you engage in a fight, you must be completely geared up. We provide loaner gear for those who don’t have their own, so there is no reason to fight without full protection. If you aren’t wearing full Fencing gear, you will not be allowed to fight.

- a. **Mask:** Fencers must wear a 3 weapons mask, and must have a puncture resistant cloth backing

- b. Gorget: Fencers must wear a gorget made of steel or other rigid material
- c. Vest: A vest must be sewn of V4 oz or 110 g leather, four layers of trigger cloth, or the equivalent.
- d. Cup: Men must wear a protective cup. No exceptions.
- e. Long-sleeved shirt
- f. Leather gloves: Welding gloves can be bought at Home Depot

13. **Dueling Hold**: When a hold is called during a duel, you should adhere to the following rules:

- a. Freeze where you are
- b. Assess the problem – find out why the hold was called
- c. Wait for the marshal to call “lay on” before you continue the bout.

14. **Center yourself**:

15. **Don't be stupid, Don't feel stupid**:

- a. Don't Be Stupid: We hope this basic rule is self-explanatory. We are engaging in a contact sport. Don't do anything that is unsafe, dishonorable, or stupid. Your safety and your fellow fencers safety depends on you.
- b. Don't Feel Stupid: If you do happen to make a mistake, please don't feel stupid. None of us are perfect fencers. We make mistakes that loose battles. We occasionally throw a shot that is a little hard. Learn from your mistakes, but don't feel stupid about them. We won't yell at you if you make a mistake, but we may pull you aside and ask you to change something if we feel you have been unsafe. We aren't here to make you feel stupid. We're here to help you become a safe and skillful swordsman.

16. **Restrictions as Initiate**: When you become an initiate, the officers will enforce certain restrictions. These restrictions are in place to help you become a safe fencer, not to limit your enjoyment. These restrictions include:

- a. No 40” Blades
- b. No case or off hand parrying item
- c. No dagger on dagger
- d. No tip or draw cuts
- e. No melee

Lesson 2

1. Stance
2. 8 Blocks – quick rehash
3. Basic Attack – bend in blade
4. 3, 4, Block and Attack
5. 3 Step Block, 3 Step Attack
6. Off Hand Position and Basic Parry
7. Breaking Shots: How and Why
8. Gear: Basic Requirements to Pass
9. Dueling Hold
10. Taking and Giving Shots – Honor calling, no marhalls, talk
11. 4 Levels of Importance

Melee

Rules, Formations, Maneuvers, Tactics, Commands

1. Group Movements: Formations and Maneuvers
 - a. Formations:
 - i. Killing Pockets
 - ii. Falling Wedge
 - iii. Barricade
 - iv. Hammer and Anvil
 - v. Forty-Five
 - vi. Large Formations – defensive shifting
 - vii. Personal Position – Cross-shots
 - b. Team Fighting: 2 or 3 man teams, fighting together
 - c. Tactics
 - i. Planning: Areas, terrain, Edge of the World
 - ii. Scenarios: Keeping the Objective or Fighting
 - d. Maneuvers:
 - i. Large Scale Maneuvers – Offensive, Taking Gaps
 - ii. Personal Engagement: Creating Gaps, Finding Gaps
2. Commands
 - a. Commanding:
 - i. Giving Orders – Punch Words
 - ii. Communication as an officer
 - b. Following Orders – Communication as a Soldier
 - i. Dress Rank
 - ii. Advance
 - iii. Keep the Line

- iv. Retreat/Fall Black
- v. Shift
- vi. Flank

3. Rules:

- a. DFB
- b. Edge of the World
- c. 180 degrees 120 degrees
- d. Calling Shots
- e. Rules for Dead
- f. Watch out Behind
- g. Hold
- h. Scope behind enemy to not push him in the ditch
- i. Follow Marshalls

4. Field Rules:

- a. Don't be stupid
- b. 2 on 1 wins
- c. If you don't know who's in charge – you are

5. Punch Words

- a. Barbecue
- b. Scotland Rules
- c. Aces

6. Leader

- a. Inspire
- b. Clear, strong commands
- c. Teach
- d. Tactics

Main Dueling

Rules, Position, Movement, Off Hand, Sword Work

1. Off Hand:
 - a. Secondary Weapons
 - b. Non Lethal
 - c. Handwork
 - d. Side Weapons
2. Sword Work:
 - a. Attacks
 - b. Blocks
 - c. Controlling Blades
 - d. Evasive Blade Maneuvers
 - e. Combos
 - f. Main hand/Off hand
3. Movement:
 - a. Range
 - b. Footwork
 - c. Forward/backward
 - d. Circle
 - e. Keeping Distance
 - f. Attacking
 - g. Line Movement:
 - i. Forward – no shift of shoulders
 - ii. Backward – lord of the dance
 - h. Stance
 - i. Sword Level
 - ii. Forward and Repose
4. Rules:
 - a. Honor

- b. Safety
 - c. Hold
 - d. Taking and Receiving Shots
- 5. Melee:
 - a. Rules
 - b. Death From Behind

Novice Papers

Before a novice in Order of the Rose becomes a swordsman, they are asked to write a one-page novice paper in which they are asked to say why they joined fencing, what honor means to them, as well as offer a critique of the group as a whole. Below are excerpts from past novice papers, which we include in the hopes that they will inspire you both to become a member of Order of the Rose, as well as to write your own novice paper when the time comes.