



## FOOTWORK

On the surface, Footwork may not seem like much, but its impact on fencing is incalculable. I truly believe that good fencing starts with your feet and if you ever want to take advantage of a good opportunity, you'll need your feet to carry you there.

Footwork encompasses things like your stance, how you step, and the distribution of your weight. It can be the difference between 'floating' through a fight with ease and stumbling over yourself.

Too often Footwork is an afterthought when in reality, it should be at the forefront of your mind. Always present. Always influencing the fight. There are nuances in the realm of Footwork that, if tapped into, can drastically change how you fence.

All it takes is one meaningful step to change the fight.

## WORK ON FOOTWORK



Consider what efforts you've made to study and train your own Footwork. How has that effort affected your fencing experience? It may seem basic, but you must occasionally return to the basics to improve.



Take a moment and feel the pressure throughout your feet. Is it evenly distributed or does the pressure vary? What might the variations say about your stance and how you stand? Do you think it might impact your fencing?

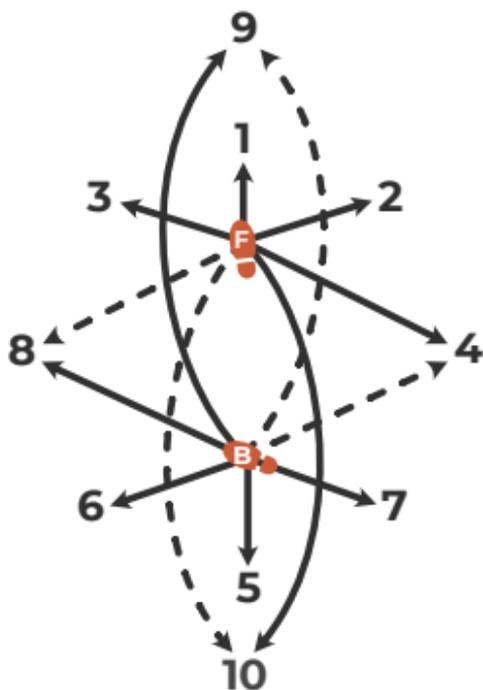


List the defining attributes of "good" footwork. Do any of them apply to you or can you think of others that demonstrate what you imagine good footwork to be? What can you learn from them?



Go into a fight without a sword and survive with footwork alone. Don't solely retreat. Consider how you could be offensive, as well as defensive, with your movement.

## TEN STEP SYSTEM



This diagram shows a series of ten steps designed to promote all-around movement while engaged in a fight. Each step should be made with one foot only, removing the reset after each step.

The goal is allowing your feet to flow from point to point, and preparing you to fight from any position.

## WORK ON TEN STEP SYSTEM

- ➔ Proceed through each of the ten steps slowly to develop familiarity with the movements. Advance (1), Front Right (2), Front Left (3), Sidestep Right (4), Retreat (5), Back Left (6), Back Right (7), Sidestep Left (8), Swoop Forward (9), Swoop Backward (10). Consider how each step might be useful to you.
- ➔ List out reasons why a footwork system may be beneficial. Are they even necessary? How many distinct footwork systems are you familiar with?
- ➔ When moving through the Ten Step System, are there any steps that are more comfortable than others? Why would that be? How can you still use steps that might feel more awkward or unnatural?
- ➔ In a fight, take as many of the ten steps as you can, one at a time. Pay attention to how your opponent responds to each step and try to discern why they responded the way they did.

How you stand in a fight says a lot about you. You might be leaning forward, ready to attack. Maybe you've sunk low, firmly planted where you are.

No matter how you stand, your stance can determine your options at any given moment, and committing deeply to one stance or another may limit those options.

So stay loose. Stay flexible. A basic stance with your knees slightly bent, feet spread out comfortably and holding your weight directly above your hips lets you adapt and move freely.

Your stance should be as natural as walking. If something feels off or out of place, adjust until you almost forget you're in a fencing stance at all.

## WORK ON FLEXIBLE STANCE



Time how long you can remain in stance before needing a break. Start with just standing in place, and then begin to incorporate movement and various steps. You don't need to last for hours but aim for at least a few minutes.



Consider how different stances affect a fight. What information can you glean when you observe someone in a low stance? A high stance? What might someone be able to infer from how you stand?



Most stances are based on personal preference. What are you hoping to accomplish in a fight? Experiment with different stances to facilitate that goal.



In a fight, restrain yourself from using your normal stance. Pay attention to how it impacts your fighting.

Being in stance is only really useful when you are directly engaged with your opponent. In most fights, all parties involved engage at the same time, fall into stance at the same time, and remain in stance until the fight is over.

Alternatively, you can drop in and out of stance whenever you may or may not be engaged with your opponent.

It's the idea that while out of stance, you are free to move around, observe, and choose a line of attack at your leisure. When you are ready, drop into stance and engage with your opponent. Once the engagement is complete, drop out of stance and leave the engagement.

This transition should be seamless and smooth. A natural flow develops as you become more familiar with the timing of moving in and out of stance.

## WORK ON DROPPING IN & OUT OF STANCE



From a standing position, practice dropping into stance as quickly and smoothly as possible. When you're comfortable with that, try dropping into stance as you move forward or backward. Now, reverse it and incorporate other angles.



Break down a fight into sequences of engagement and non-engagement. How do you know when you're engaged? When do you know the engagement is over? What can you do with that kind of information?



In a fight, do not drop into stance and engage your opponent immediately. Take a few moments to walk around and formulate a plan on how you want to enter engagement. Afterward, talk with your opponent to get their point of view.

The concepts of stepping offline and attacking offline are nothing new. Fencing is a sport of angles and finding the right angle can make a huge difference. But take it one step further.

Where in the “rules” of fencing does it say you must always fight your opponent head-on? It doesn’t. So take the whole fight offline.

Every block and attack that you can do directly in front of you, is possible to be done on either side. You don’t even have to face your opponent to strike at them or block an incoming attack.

This frees you from always fighting in a straight line and can enable your feet to move in circular patterns, taking advantage of all the available space.

You’ll find there are many more angles to play with.

## WORK ON FIGHTING OFFLINE



Grab your sword, drop into a basic stance, and go through a simple set of blocks. Once you've finished that set, repeat the set of blocks off to either side, but keep facing forward. How does it feel? Are you able to passably perform various blocks?



What effect can fighting offline have on a fight? Does it impact the experience mentally or physically? How can you change your mindset to incorporate fighting offline more?



In a fight, don't face directly at your opponent. Instead, keep your shoulder pointed at them and fight them to your side. What challenges do you see in doing this? Are you able to fight them without turning your body towards them? How can you use your feet to get a better angle?

A Place of Safety is any place where you have a relatively low chance of getting killed by your opponent. Being out of range is the most common example.

Additionally, the best Places of Safety are where there is low risk to you, but your chances of striking at your opponent are increased.

In a fight, these become very valuable areas to recognize and move into with a few calculated steps. Is one side safer than the other? Has a small adjustment in grip or footing changed where the place of safety is?

Sometimes Places of Safety aren't very obvious. On occasion, the safest place to be is right next to your opponent. Other times it's just standing still.

## WORK ON PLACES OF SAFETY



Doodle out a diagram of what a fight might look like from above. Write down where you might find Places of Safety. Consider who you are fighting, what either of you are fighting with, and even what terrain might be around.



What is the balance between being in a Place of Safety and risking yourself to get a kill? How much are you willing to risk to capitalize on an opportunity?



Footwork is required to reach Places of Safety, but are there ways to create a Place of Safety? Is it possible to move a Place of Safety rather than finding a new one? If so, how?



In a fight, look for different locations you can move to and see if they are Places of Safety by moving to them. Were you correct? Did you feel safer, or did it not work out? Why not? Keep track of where you go and see if there is a pattern.

Every step has an impact on the fight. Where you step, how you step, and when you step says a lot. If you're fluent in the language of Footwork, you can communicate and even understand intention.

In the spoken language, choosing your words carefully or intentionally can convey great meaning, while slinging a smattering of words may end up as a jumbled mess. Footwork is no different.

A carefully chosen step might allow you to accomplish something in a single step that otherwise might have taken three. How about triggering your opponent's defenses just by inching closer or moving into position just before striking?

You shouldn't move for movement's sake alone. There has to be a reason. Taking intentional steps demonstrates fluency in Footwork.

## WORK ON INTENTIONAL STEPS



Interpret what other fencer's footwork says about them and their fighting preferences. What can you glean about a fencer solely on how they move their feet? What might people say about you?



List out what different steps might "say" about your intentions. Consider how things like angles, distance, speed, and timing change the meaning.



In a fight, limit yourself to only five steps for the entire duration. Once you've used all five, you're not allowed to move anymore. What steps are worth taking? How can you gain the most with each step?

Playing with Space requires that you are able to see available space and know how to create it. This spatial awareness helps you recognize different areas around you, your relationship to them, and the possible pathways to utilize it.

Space is a dynamic aspect of fencing because it's constantly changing. There are pockets of space opening and closing all around you and once you begin to see those pockets, you can use your footwork to move into them.

Then it's just a question of how you want to play with or manipulate the space around you. What would happen if you stepped into the space created behind your opponent's sword as they lunged? What if you used your footwork to expand the space between your opponent and their ally?

## WORK ON PLAYING WITH SPACE



Doodle out a diagram of what a fight or melee might look like from above. Circle different spaces and label them. What areas do you find yourself in the most? What areas could you use more?



With a small group of fencers, wander around an enclosed space randomly or as if you were fighting imaginary opponents. Look around to see spaces opening and closing as people move. Use your footwork to move into those areas.



Brainstorm different ways you could manipulate and play with space. Think of something you'd like to accomplish in a fight and consider how you would use space to accomplish it. How might you use space as a weapon?



In a fight, choose an area of space before you begin and try to reach that area before the fight is over. How did you get there? What helped or hindered?

In Fencing, a lot can happen in a matter of moments. Time is a currency that, if spent well, can pay dividends. Tie that in with your footwork and suddenly you have an interesting toy to play with.

Take, for example, how a simple step forward or backward can manipulate the timing involved in a fight.

One step forward and things feel much faster. You're closer to your opponent and the time required to cover the distance is shortened. One step back and things slow down. There is a lot more time to see your opponent coming and what they might do.

You don't have to be moving at high speed all of the time. Adjusting your speed, or even taking a moment to pause, is what makes time so much fun to play with.

## WORK ON PLAYING WITH TIME

- ➔ Analyze what your average fighting speed might be. Is it fast? Slow? Somewhere in between? How does the speed at which you move affect your fighting?
- ➔ Watch other fencer's footwork and compare how their feet move to how they fight. Is there a correlation?
- ➔ Consider different ways that you could play with time. Is there a difference between manipulating actual time and merely our perception of time? Is your opponent's perception of time different than your own?
- ➔ In a fight, consciously switch between a "slow" gear and a "fast" gear. What changes? How can you use your feet to promote this change of pace? How does your opponent react to the switch?



## STEP IN TANDEM

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If your sword is an extension of your arm, then it should be an extension of your feet as well. Your steps should be in tandem not only when your sword moves, but also with what you're working towards.

It isn't enough to just step and strike at the same time. As you strike, your feet should be moving or repositioning to support it. When you block, your feet will be your anchored foundation.

This unification requires a nuanced approach to matching footwork with swordplay: developing muscle memory and ease of mind to allow subconscious movement, but also enough control to know when and how to engage those connections or when to break them.

It's a joint effort and you can't rely on one without the other.

## WORK ON STEP IN TANDEM



Make connections between various sword movements and your footwork. Move your sword around in different ways and consider how you could move your feet to support that action.



Develop a kata, or series of actions, that involve moving your sword and feet at the same time. Focus on what you want to accomplish and determine different ways to achieve that goal.



Think of moments where it may be beneficial to break the connection and have your feet and sword be out of sync. What can you gain? What are you giving up?



In a fight, pay attention to how your opponent's sword moves in conjunction with their feet. Are they in sync? Out of sync? Discuss with them ways they remain in sync and apply those ideas to your own fighting.



## PROFICIENCY

Proficiency is less about mastery and more about tipping the scales in your favor. It's a numbers game to increase your own odds of success by becoming proficient in as many areas as possible.

Every technique, skill, tactic, attitude, mentality, or action can be considered a weight on the scales of possibility. The more weight you have on your side of the scales, the better your chances.

That also applies to your opponent and so the struggle to tip the scales in your favor begins.

Proficiently knowing which weights to add, when to add them, and when to swap things out will give you the flexibility and adaptability to face any situation and give yourself the best possible chance to be victorious.

## WORK ON PROFICIENCY



List out every technique, skill, tactic, attitude, mentality, or action that you regularly use. Which of these “weights” do you consider the biggest or most influential in your fighting? How can you add weight to the others?



Observe other fencers and write down what weights you see them using to tip the scales in their favor. Discuss with them why they use those things instead of other possible options.



Choose a weight that you don't normally use and try adding it to your fighting for practice. How did it affect your chances of success?



In a fight, experiment with different combinations of weights. How does it affect your fighting? What were the most effective combinations? Do the same combinations work against different opponents?



## BETTER IS BETTER

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The most effective way of tipping the scale in your favor is by getting better in general. If your ability to block, attack, understand range, or observe increases then so do your chances.

So often, the term “better” gets caught up in direct comparisons of other fencers or in an unbalanced pursuit of skill. But you should not be comparing yourself to other fencers and their innate skills. Rather, you should look at what you can bring to the fight and figure out how to improve those elements to make them better.

Constantly search to improve and optimize what you do. When facing an opponent, consider how you can adapt and better match what you have with what your opponent brought too.

Every single, small optimization better prepares you for the next fight and the next opportunity to be proficient.

## WORK ON BETTER IS BETTER



List out what you are best at. Include why those are your best things and what helped make them that way. List out what you consider are your weaknesses and think of ways you can improve them.



Dissect how you fight a variety of fencers. What works against one person, but doesn't work against another? Do you need to try something different or is there something your opponent is bringing to the fight you haven't considered?



Randomly select one of your skills and brainstorm ways to optimize it. Can you make the movement smoother? Can you introduce more control? Can you look at it from another angle?



In a fight, pick one thing to improve and use it as many times as you can in a fight. How did the first time compare to the last time?



## NO SURE BETS

There is no amount of proficiency that can guarantee a win. A burst of confidence, a spark of passion, or a stroke of luck will be like a finger pushing down on the scales. Accept that reality and incorporate it into your fencing.

What can be done is finding ways to proficiently incorporate your own confidence, passion, and luck into your fighting.

Can you remain confident despite loss and doubt? Will your passion shine through in times of struggle and difficulty? Do you have faith that a little luck is all you need?

You can develop proficiency in soft-skills and mental attitudes. They can tip the scales just as much, if not more, than knowing how to wield a sword.

## WORK ON NO SURE BETS

Define what your confidence, passion, and sense of luck looks like. How familiar are you with each of them? What can you do to internalize them more?

How do confidence, passion, and luck affect your fighting? Write down examples of each that you have seen.

What does it feel like to fight against a confident, passionate, or seemingly lucky fencer? How can you promote those same feelings when others fight you?

In a fight, go out and lose. Don't just stand there and accept the defeat. Make your opponent work for it and familiarize yourself with loss. What effect does loss have on you and how can you accept it as a part of fencing?



## THE WALL

The Wall is a technique to increase your defensive potential in two ways. The first is by raising your sword tip higher until your blade is almost vertical. The second is by keeping your blade between you and your opponent's blade.

Raising the tip up takes your point offline, but defends a larger area. Without any adjustment, you can catch an incoming blade anywhere between your head and your waist.

Keeping your blade between you and your opponent's blade creates an impassable barrier, or wall, that you can stand behind. Your opponent must work harder to bypass your Wall, giving you a chance to adjust and remain safe.

The Wall promotes a defense-first mindset. You will need to constantly adjust your sword's position, your footwork, and your body to maintain your Wall.

## WORK ON THE WALL



Starting in a basic en garde position, raise your sword up until it's almost vertical. Visualize the Wall that you've created. With a training partner, reposition your Wall as they move their blade to different positions. Try to keep your blade perpendicular to their's and try to keep your body behind your blade.



Block incoming strikes against you without moving your sword from the basic Wall position (held directly in front of you, vertically). You must use your footwork and body rotation to block. Pay attention to the Walls created.



In a fight, maintain contact with your opponent's blade and keep your blade between you and their blade. Wherever they move, adjust your sword and body to maintain contact and stay protected.



## FIND YOUR TARGETS

When it comes to finding your targets, there are really two parts: what are all the possible targets and what targets are open at any given time.

A target is any spot that you can specifically aim for, and there are a lot of possibilities. You can aim for general targets like the torso, or get specific and aim for something like their left collar bone.

Either way, you have to find those potential targets and then narrow them down based on what is open.

Your opponent is trying to defend as much of themselves as they can, but it's impossible to defend everything. There will always be something that isn't actively defended.

These openings can change and adjust as your opponent moves, blocks, and attacks. Your job is to find those potential openings and find a way to strike.

## WORK ON FIND YOUR TARGETS



Chart out all the potential targets you can think of. Start with the general targets and slowly get more specific. Consider how knowing what potential targets are available can help you in a fight.



With a training partner or life-size outline, practice striking at each potential target. Adjust speed, angle, grip, or a combination as you become more familiar with a variety of targets.



Brainstorm reasons why you would choose one target over another. Is a specific target open because it's hard to defend, out of mind, or relatively stationary? What do you look for when finding a target?



In a fight, pick a target and constrain yourself to only hitting that target. Experiment with ways to open that target, hiding your intention, or landing the strike.



## KEEP YOUR POINT IN THE FIGHT

Just because the point of your sword is offline or not directly aimed at your opponent does not mean it is out of the fight. Your point is only out of the fight when it's not being used to threaten your opponent.

The point, or tip, of your sword, is the most dangerous part and the thing most likely to kill your opponent. At all times, your opponent should feel like your point could swoop in and make the kill.

If your point is swinging around, finishing a block, or waving about as a distraction it's possible that the sensation of threat will diminish because your opponent knows your point is preoccupied with something other than killing them.

Whatever you do, keep your point in the fight and make sure your opponent feels threatened.

## WORK ON KEEP YOUR POINT IN THE FIGHT



How can you tell when your point is in the fight or not? Discuss with others how they can tell the point is a threat and how they feel when it's not. Are you making your point a threat?



Investigate the full spectrum of ways to keep your point in the fight. Try everything from keeping it in their face to hiding it from view. How does your opponent respond to each?



Identify situations when your opponent has taken your point out of the fight. How did they do it? Consider different ways you could bring your point back into the fight quickly for each situation.



In a fight, practice bringing your point back into the fight after a variety of actions. Include bringing the point online at different angles and positions instead of only directly in front of you.



## HINGING

As your sword is an extension of your arm, you must remember that there are bending points and that you are not limited to only moving in a straight line.

Hinging utilizes those joints to dynamically change the angle of the blade and how it can be used in the fight. Instead of striking directly at your opponent, a hinging maneuver would be angling your blade from below or the side to hit the intended target.

Starting with your shoulder, then your elbow, and finally your wrist, each joint gets more precise as you move down the arm. Each action should end with a final adjustment from your wrist.

Your wrist is where most of the fine control comes from when wielding your blade. It has the range of motion needed to direct your blade precisely and hinging is when you use that control to find angles for your attacks, blocks, and other actions.

## WORK ON HINGING

Grab your sword and wave it around by only moving your wrist. Write your full name in the air. Go at various speeds and test your accuracy against a variety of targets. Circle a door knob or door hinges as closely as possible.

Practice a variety of actions through your shoulder, your elbow, and then your wrist. Compare the difference it makes when you perform a block or an attack starting with your wrist then moving up the arm. How does it affect your accuracy and control?

Choose a target and brainstorm ways to hit that target at a variety of angles. Adjust range and positioning to challenge yourself to think of new ideas.

In a fight, keep your wrist at a single angle and resist the urge to straighten it. How can you land a strike without straightening your wrist? Do the same with your elbow and shoulder.



## THE RANGE GAME

Range should really be considered a weapon, rather than an attribute. It can be a very powerful tool in your arsenal.

The Range Game in particular is a process of discovering your opponent's physical range, their perception of it, and then turning it against them.

First, find out the limits of your opponent's range and then stand just beyond it. Keep in mind any modifications they make and adjust yourself accordingly.

Second, poke around and figure out how your opponent perceives range and what their level of comfort is. How close are they willing to let you get before they attack or retreat?

Finally, every fencer has an 'Aw, Crap' moment where they sense danger. Experiment and see if you can overwhelm or disguise that sensation in your opponent so they can't trust when they feel threatened.

## WORK ON THE RANGE GAME

Watch other fencers and examine what kind of range they have. Do they overextend often or do they only use their arm to strike? Do they lean when they attack or do they pull back?

Work on your perception of range and judge what your opponent's range is. Start with getting within a foot of that point. Then slowly trim that down until you can stand within an inch of your opponent's full range.

What makes your 'Aw, Crap' moment go off? Talk with other fencers and document all the reasons someone might feel threatened. Brainstorm how you can use those in a fight.

In a fight, focus solely on playing The Range Game. Find your opponent's range and stand just behind it. Ask where they are comfortable and when they have their 'Aw, Crap' moment. Think of ways you can use that against them.



## ATTACK-BLOCK COMBOS

You may have heard of a Block-Attack Combo or a Parry-Riposte, but what about reversing those ideas? Attack-Block Combos are attacks that are immediately followed by a block as you pull away and reset.

The time immediately following an attack is one of your most vulnerable moments and an easy time for your opponent to strike back at you.

As you pull away from your opponent, performing a block can negate any return attacks your opponent might try. Even if there isn't a return attack, being in the habit of defending that reset can keep you safe when you might have been vulnerable.

It's a way of maintaining control of the space between you and your opponent until you are completely clear and out of danger.

## WORK ON ATTACK-BLOCK COMBOS

As you practice attacking potential targets, experiment with different blocks as you return to an en garde position. What blocks go with each attack? Are there a few blocks that work with many attacks?

What makes the time after an attack so vulnerable? Discuss with others how they capitalize on those moments. Brainstorm other ways you can negate those methods.

A good portion of Attack-Block Combos is muscle memory. What muscle memory have you already developed? Is that muscle memory beneficial or is it impeding you in some way?

In a fight, every attack must be followed by a block. No multiple attacks unless there is a block in between. Try to transition from each block into the next attack to encourage flow.



## MANIPULATING THE DIALS

Every action in fencing has a spectrum, like a dial. Understanding what that spectrum is allows you to manipulate the dials and fine-tune how you fight to better suit the situation.

For example, controlling a blade might have a range of barely making contact with your opponent's weapon to completely dominating or binding the blade. That would be a spectrum.

Additionally, you might be able to broaden the spectrum when you ask questions like, can you control an opponent's blade without touching it?

Once you know the spectrum, you can adjust your dials. Some dials are simply on and off switches. Some have a few settings, while others can get quite granular.

The more dials you are familiar with and can control, the more granular your fighting will become.

## WORK ON MANIPULATING THE DIALS

→ Create a dial diagram where you can chart various spectrums. Note where a particular technique or idea ends and begins, along with points in between. Is that the full spectrum or are you only seeing a small sliver?

→ Choose one of your favorite principles or techniques and imagine ways you could “turn it down.” How can you make the principle more subtle? Repeat the exercise, but “turn it up.”

→ How many dials do you have access to in any given fight? Once you have access, how many can you consistently manipulate?

→ In a fight, choose a dial and try to hone in on where that dial fits the opponent you're facing? Is it somewhere near the bottom? Near the top? Just a hair to the left? Do you think this setting will work for the next person you fight?

Body Mechanics focuses on what you and your opponent are physically capable of and how it plays into fencing.

It touches on the subject of sports science which includes elements of physiology, psychology, anatomy, biomechanics, and biokinetics. All of these are big words saying that if you understand how the body works, you'll have an advantage.

Understanding how your body works can give you direction on how to improve and how to maximize your abilities as a fencer.

Every fencer is different and our bodies work differently. Different heights. Different builds. Different strengths and weaknesses. It's your job to accept what you have then make the best use of it.

## WORK ON BODY MECHANICS

Research the following subjects and document interesting things you learn and how they might apply to fencing: Sports Science, Physiology, Psychology, Anatomy, Biomechanics, Biokinetics.

Ponder how your body works. Consider actions that are easy/difficult for you. Investigate why that may be?

What previous influences have had an impact on your own Body Mechanics? Include influences on both your physical and mental development. How do those influences play into your fencing experience?

In a fight, pay attention to how Body Mechanics fits in. Take note of your own Body Mechanics, as well as your opponent's. Start with the most obvious details, but try to dig deeper. You may have to discuss it with your opponent afterward.

Eliminate the noise and focus solely on what is possible in the current situation. Just like you wouldn't waste time anticipating your opponent to do a triple backflip, why would you waste time on things that are physically impossible in the moment?

Possibility abounds in fencing, but in a singular moment, there are really only a few options. Our bodies only bend certain ways. If the sword is on the left, it's physically impossible to strike at the right without first moving there.

If you can methodically process what is possible, you can adjust and make plans to open new possibilities or prevent the most likely actions of your opponent.

This brings clarity to your fights as you recognize what is possible.

## WORK ON WHAT IS POSSIBLE

How do you recognize a possibility? What are the things you look for? Do you focus on what you can do or what your opponent can do?

Sit down and meditate. Practice setting things aside in your own mind and focusing on a single subject. Research and develop tricks or aids that can help you focus.

What is possible for one person, may not be possible for another at any given moment. How do others use what is possible for them and how can you incorporate that in your fighting?

In a fight, take a moment every now and then to pause and look at what's possible. Consider how stance, body positioning, angles, and other factors contribute to what is possible. Make a plan solely on what's possible and then continue the fight.

Your Center of Gravity is where all of your weight is centralized and the point of origin from where it is distributed. Where and how you hold your Center of Gravity affects your ability to move.

When you stand up straight, your Center of Gravity is somewhere in your belly. As you squat into a basic stance, that Center of Gravity drops into your pelvis. Its position changes based on how you stand.

This is important to know because, in fencing, you want to move and flow easily. Almost like you're floating.

You can only do this when your Center of Gravity is being evenly supported by your legs. If your Center of Gravity drifts away from that support, like when you lean, you'll have to bring it back before being able to move easily.

## WORK ON CENTER OF GRAVITY



Play around with your Center of Gravity by standing in different positions and feeling how the pressure and sensation of weight change. Lean in different directions. Squat. Try to move around and see what makes it easier or more difficult to do so.



Write down a series of steps that you can perform consistently. Proceed through that series in different stances. How does a low stance affect your ability to move? How does leaning change your footwork? In what stance are you able to move most easily?



In a fight, position your Center of Gravity in your pelvis and set a goal to keep it there as you fight. What causes your Center of Gravity to drift? What are the ways you can bring it back quickly? Make sure to move around often as you experiment.

There is always an easy way and a hard way of doing things. As it pertains to Body Mechanics, your body wants to find the path of least resistance: the actions or movements that your body can perform with a minimal amount of effort or strain.

When you find the Path of Least Resistance, you develop flow and fluidity in your movements. It also conserves energy that you could use elsewhere.

Adaptation is involved because not everyone's Path of Least Resistance will be the same. Just because one person can easily do something in a particular way, doesn't mean you can in the same way. You may have to adjust the action to better fit how your body works.

This doesn't mean you can't learn how someone else does something. It just takes more effort.

## WORK ON PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE

What aspects of Body Mechanics come easily to you? Is it footwork? Is it body control? Hand-eye coordination? What makes things difficult for you to do?

Self-analyze how you fight and identify moments where you struggle and face resistance. How can you adapt those moments to follow the Path of Least Resistance? Experiment and examine how it changes your fighting.

What comes easily to others that is difficult for you? Interview people who can shed light on how they do those difficult things and brainstorm how you might adapt their methods to yourself.

In a fight, focus only on what comes easily to you. Set aside any challenges or goals that might interfere or get in the way. What effect does that have? How can you focus on what comes easily without getting complacent? How can you challenge yourself on the Path of Least Resistance?

Your eyes and their ability to keep up with the fast-paced chaos of fencing play a large role in your capacity as a fighter. Training your eyes is a necessary process that shouldn't be forgotten.

When you first start fencing, it's hard to see what is going on. You miss details and everything is a blur. As time goes on, your eyes grow accustomed to the speed and are able to observe more.

Your eyes are where you receive the majority of the information needed to fight effectively. You must be able to see details before you can begin to interpret them. If you miss a detail, you might not have the crucial piece that affects how you respond or plan.

Eye Training is more than just looking and watching. It's observing and heightening your visual abilities.

## WORK ON EYE TRAINING

There are many aspects of visual ability to consider. Research some of the following visual skills and take notes on how you might develop them for fencing: Eye Tracking, Focusing, Hand-eye/Body-eye Coordination, Peripheral Awareness, Dynamic Visual Acuity, Depth Perception, Reaction Time, and, Contrast Sensitivity.

Dedicate time to observation. Don't just watch, but observe and analyze what you see. Spend time watching other fencers and writing down what details you see. Try to see general details and then dive deeper.

Watch a high-speed activity that you are unfamiliar with. Write down what you notice and then research the activity to see if you were correct. Repeat with the new information.

In a fight, alternate between focusing on a single point and broadening your focus. How does it change the fight?

There is a lot you can do in fencing. In a single fight, you could run circles around your opponent, clash blades, block fourteen times, respond with a flurry of strikes, and then finally dispatch your opponent with a draw cut.

Or you could wait for just the right moment and snipe them in the head. You end up with the same result.

Lazy Fighting is finding a way to accomplish your goal in the fewest actions possible. Just because you can do something complicated, doesn't mean you have to.

Sometimes the simplest actions are the most effective. Sometimes you can let your opponent do the work for you. Sometimes all you have to do is wait and be patient. Sometimes you just have to be lazy.

## WORK ON LAZY FIGHTING



Analyze how you fight and identify areas where you exert the most energy. What do you do that makes you tired? Consider ways to streamline those areas and how to do them lazily.



Think of a move or technique that requires multiple actions to complete. What is the end result? How can you get the same result, but in fewer actions?



Watch your opponents and ponder on ways that you can make them do the work for you. What do they do that you can springboard off of?



In a fight, limit yourself to five actions. Once those five actions are spent, you must stop fighting. How can you accomplish your goal in just a few actions? Adjust the number of actions as needed.

Physical and mental endurance have a great impact on your ability to fence. Even though a single fight happens over a very short period, the high-intensity in which they occur can be absolutely draining.

Extending your endurance over time should always be a part of your fencing journey. Training and pushing through fatigue can extend your physical endurance so you can fight harder for longer.

Including your mental endurance in that training should also be a high priority. Remaining focused for extended periods of time is taxing on the mind and should be addressed.

Additionally, finding the will to fight through your own fatigue and give that little extra can make all the difference.

## WORK ON EXTENDING ENDURANCE

Establish a plan to regularly exercise your physical and mental stamina. Identify areas where you could develop more endurance and aim to increase it in small increments.

Research cross-training strategies that you might be able to add to your fencing routine. What non-fencing activities can increase your endurance?

At what moment does fatigue get the best of you? What are some signs that you are getting tired and how can you address them before it's too late?

In a fight, when you find yourself tired and ready to sit down, try to leave everything you have left on the field. Put all your remaining energy into one last fight. If you feel you have a little more energy left, fight again.

Breathing is something you are always doing, but how often are you aware of and controlling it?

The air you breathe is just as much fuel for your body as the food you eat and drink. You need oxygen to function properly. Without it, you can't be as effective as you could be.

Taking control of your own breathing, especially in times of high-intensity action, has a wonderful calming effect on the mind and slows everything down amid all the chaos.

Whether it's a few deep breaths to center yourself or several quick breaths to flood your body with oxygen, breath control can easily be incorporated into any fencing journey.

## WORK ON BREATH CONTROL

Examine how you breathe. How would you describe it? Do you use mostly your lungs or is your diaphragm involved?

Research breathing techniques and their various applications. Include breathing techniques for sports and meditation. Document what you learn and try using them throughout the day.

Find time to meditate and practice your breathing. Try listening to guided meditation courses.

In a fight, take a momentary pause and just breathe. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Repeat this several times. Observe what effect it has on the fight and your own body/mind.

Fencing is a full-body sport. Everything from your brain to your toes plays a part in sword fighting. This means your whole body can be incorporated into your fighting.

You may not think to use your forearm to block a strike or to use your hip or shoulder to throw off an incoming draw cut, but you can. You can even use your leg to step in and push away a low shot to free up your blade. There are a lot of ways you can use your body to help you out.

Leveraging Your Body also means you're aware of your body and the signals it's trying to convey. Have you ever paid attention to the sensations of pressure in your hands? What about the strain in your knees when you over-extend a lunge?

Don't ignore what your body is capable of and is trying to tell you.

## WORK ON LEVERAGE YOUR BODY

➔ Meditate. Focus on the sensations that largely get ignored. What does the air feel like on your skin? What quiet sounds can you hear? What can you smell or taste? What details do you notice when you actually look?

➔ Starting with your toes, clench and unclench each muscle group, staying mentally focused on each group. Proceed through the same process all the way to the top of your head.

➔ Brainstorm ways that you could use your body in place of your sword or other weapons. How could you defend with your forearm? How can you dominate a fight with your shoulders? How can you use your legs offensively?

➔ In a fight, go out without any weapons and try to survive as long as you can. Don't rely solely on your hands or flee, but incorporate your whole body to stay alive and go on the offensive.

There isn't just one way to hold a sword. Every sword is different and every hand is different. Every grip changes the way a sword handles and plays within the fight. All it takes is a little adjustment.

Adjusting Grips takes into account the multitude of ways to hold your sword. This includes the position of your fingers, the strength of your grip, and the portions of the sword managed by your hand.

But even being familiar with a bunch of different grips isn't enough. Changing how you hold your sword in the middle of a fight throws a lot of variety into the fray.

Your sword should be a supple companion to your hand, familiar and right at home, however you choose to hold it.

## WORK ON ADJUSTING GRIPS



Grab your sword and just hold it. Swing it around. Fiddle with it. Carry it with you as you go about your day at home. Play little games like holding your sword in different ways and trying to flip light switches.



Interview other fencers and examine how they hold their swords. Ask what other grips they use. Pay attention to how their sword is built and how that can influence their grips. Pick your favorites and try them yourself.



Watch a few fights and pay attention to when fencers change their grips. What did they change about their grip? Why do you think they adjusted? How did it play out in the fight?



In a fight, restrain yourself from using your normal grip. Try out different grips you've learned about and see which ones you could add to your rotation.

Attack Their Weapons isn't meant to be taken literally, even though attacking your opponent's weapons does come into play with this idea. No, it's about asserting control on the fight and attacking the tools your opponent has at their disposal.

Most fencing is about what you can do as an individual. How do you block? How do strike accurately? Attack Their Weapon flips that and asks what can you do to your opponent.

How can you prevent your opponent's ability to block? How can you discourage them from striking a certain way? How can you limit the number of choices they have?

It's time to take the fight to your opponent and really declare that you own the fight.

## WORK ON ATTACK THEIR WEAPONS



Self-analyze and determine how often you are in control of the fight. What is the ratio between when you are reacting to what your opponent does or your opponent is reacting to what you do? What is keeping you from being in control?



Brainstorm what “weapons” might be available to your opponent. Consider physical and mental tools. Additionally, are there tools they might have in only a certain situation?



What does “ownership” mean in a fight? How do you know who is in control and who is not?



In a fight, pay attention to what weapons your opponent is using against you. Which ones are the most effective? Afterward, discuss or plan how you might attack those things specifically.



## DOMINANCE

Dominance is asserting your control over the fight. When you dominate a fight, you get to call the shots and your opponent works to react to whatever you do.

Physical displays of Dominance include controlling your opponent's blade or dictating where the fight is going to happen. When you step into your opponent's range and push their sword out of the way, you are declaring dominance at that moment.

There are also mental displays of Dominance. How you enter the fight and your own attitude can radiate dominance, which your opponent will need to respond to.

You won't be able to dominate a fight 100% of the time, but if you can be in control the majority of the time, you'll see a difference in your fights because you're the one calling most of the shots.

## WORK ON DOMINANCE



Observe a variety of fencers and take note of when each is dominating their respective fights. In what ways are they in control? What displays of dominance do you notice?



Study physical displays of dominance. Why do they work? How does it influence individuals? Do the same with mental displays. Which is more effective in certain kinds of situations?



Choose one specific display of dominance that you would like to work on and practice it with a training partner. Break down the technique into smaller pieces and work through each together.



In a fight, set a goal to dominate 50% of the total fight. What methods are the most effective? Once you can consistently control 50% of the fight, increase it to 60%.



## ATTACK THE BODY

When you Attack the Body, you take away the physical tools at your opponent's disposal. Things like their weapons, legs, offhand, and line of sight. Every tool you can take away from your opponent means one less tool to be used against you.

Each one of us relies on a variety of tools to help us fight. Some more than others. If you can identify the tools your opponent utilizes the most, you'll have an immediate plan of attack.

But don't worry if you can't eliminate the biggest threat right away. If you can chip away at your opponent's offensive capabilities, the little things will add up.

Sometimes the best way to defeat an enemy is to slowly pick away at them until they're much more manageable to face.

## WORK ON ATTACK THE BODY



Practice your point control and ability to hit small, moving targets like arms and feet. Start slow to develop accuracy before increasing speed.



Discuss with others what physical tools are the most valuable and most detrimental to lose. Investigate how they would eliminate those tools.



Think about how hit-and-run tactics can be employed in a fight. What benefits do they have? How can they be done while still remaining engaged?



In a fight, don't go for the kill until after you've eliminated some of your opponent's tools. Try to strike their legs or arms. Remove a secondary weapon or break their line of sight. Pay attention to how the fight changes as tools are removed.



## ATTACK THE OPTIONS

A limited set of choices is a challenge for any fencer to face. When you Attack the Options, you remove potential choices your opponent can make.

Say you're facing someone who excels at circling and loves to come at you at an angle. Attack their options and restrict their ability to move. Push them into a corner, place them in unfavorable terrain, or cut them off. You've limited their ability to do what they want to do.

If your opponent relies on a particular technique or strategy, find ways to throw a wrench in their tactics.

Even though you're not attacking your opponent directly, you're laying the groundwork for when you eventually do. Every option you take away will make the final confrontation easier.

## WORK ON ATTACK THE OPTIONS



Research some common options most fencers utilize. Things like movement, types of attacks, or basic strategies. Consider how you would negate or attack each one to prevent your opponent from using them in a fight.



Imagine a sword fight in a three-act structure. What happens in each act? How does it change your mentality to build towards something rather than jumping straight to the climax?



What options do you rely on? If they were taken away, how would you respond? Discuss with other fencers how they react when options are taken away from them.



In a fight, don't focus on getting a kill. Focus on making the fight as difficult as possible for your opponent by removing their options. Pay attention to how limited choices affects the fight.



## ATTACK THE MIND

A lot of thinking is involved in fencing and if you can attack the mind, you can impede your opponent's ability to think or focus on the fight at hand.

There are really two fronts to every fight: the physical side and the mental side. When you attack the mind, you focus on that mental aspect of the battle. Win there and the physical side will be that much easier to defeat.

All it takes is getting inside your opponent's head and gumming up the works. Distraction, intimidation, and perception can all interrupt your opponent's train of thought. It's all about taking their mind out of the fight.

Even if it's just for a moment. That split-second mental lapse is all you may need to claim victory.

## WORK ON ATTACK THE MIND



Ponder about what is happening in the mind during an average fight. Consider all the things that might race through it at any given moment. What might it take to interrupt that process?



Ask other fencers what their mental process is like when they fight. What do they think about and focus on? What helps them stay in the fight mentally? Also, ask what gets in the way and distracts them.



Brainstorm different ways to attack the mind. What methods might be the most effective? Which are the easiest to implement? How can you keep your mind in the fight when you are trying to do the opposite for your opponent?



In a fight, experiment with ways to take your opponent's mind out of the fight. What works? What doesn't? How long do their mental lapses last?



## HIDDEN INTENTIONS

Most of the time, it doesn't matter if your opponent knows what you are planning. Even stating your intentions out loud might not change the outcome. Sometimes though, keeping your intentions hidden can be incredibly useful.

Incorporating stealth into your fighting can be tricky. Your opponents are observant and may notice when you're trying to hide something. So it's vital that you learn to be subtle or, at the very least, how to misdirect.

You're always working towards an end goal or your overall intention. Keeping those intentions hidden just takes covering up a few of the key details that point out what you're aiming for.

The whole idea is that if your opponent doesn't know about it, they can't prepare for it. It's one of the rare cases where what they don't know can hurt them.

## WORK ON HIDDEN INTENTIONS



Study the concept of misdirection. How do you hide something in plain sight? What aspects of your fencing can you imbue with more subtlety?



Pick an end goal that you would want to do in a fight. Write down all the steps needed to reach that point. As you look at your list of steps, consider which are key steps and which would be the easiest to hide. How would you hide them?



Discuss with other fencers what they look for when they fight. What are the signals they notice and what do they often miss?



In a fight, choose an action and tell your opponent what you're going to do. Try to keep them from noticing when you do that thing. After the fight, ask them if they noticed, and if so, why?



## BINDS

Normally associated with your quillions, a bind is any effort to lock up and prevent an opponent from doing what they want. In the case of the quillions, it's when they are used to essentially grab your opponent's blade and keep it from moving freely.

But binds aren't limited to your quillions. Your hands, legs, arms, and position can all "bind" your opponent and inhibit their ability to move.

This puts them into a position where they must escape or remain locked in your bind. It's a golden opportunity when your opponent isn't focused on killing you, but on getting free.

However you choose to bind your opponent, the opportunity created can be very small. Don't waste time and capitalize on the openings that come from the bind.

## WORK ON BINDS

- ➔ Look at your sword. Examine how it's built, including the quillions. Research how to do basic binds and what binds might work well with your sword.
- ➔ Watch for examples of binds in other fencer's fights. Are there moments where they are locked up or prevented from doing what they want? How did they get into that situation?
- ➔ With a training partner, practice a variety of different binds. Start with quillion binds and locking up your partner's blade. Move on with how you might use your arms, legs, or positioning to perform a bind in a safe and controlled way.
- ➔ In a fight, try to place your opponent in a bind. Pay attention to their immediate reaction and watch for moments where they are more focused on getting free than on getting a kill.



## TERRAIN

Some fights are in the woods. Some are in the street. You'll fight on hills, over walls, and across sand pits. You may not have direct control over the terrain and where you fight, but that doesn't mean you can't use it to your advantage.

The terrain is one factor of fencing where all it takes is a little creativity and some clever thinking to incorporate it into your fighting.

A tree can guard you against being outnumbered. A boulder can restrict where your opponent might be able to attack. A hill might slow the enemy's advance.

Using the terrain against your opponent is a fantastic strategy because it lets the environment do the majority of the work and lets you focus on other, more important things.

## WORK ON TERRAIN



Walk around and take a close look at the different environments you might fight in. Analyze each type of terrain and define its key features and how they might be useful in a fight.



Categorize terrain into several different categories based on how they can be used in a fight. Consider specific elements of terrain as well.



Grab a partner and fight on every type of terrain you can find. Take note together how they affect the fight and what your favorites are.



In a fight, look around you and choose one part of the terrain to use. Try to use that piece of terrain in as many different ways as you can think of. Ask your opponent how they might have used it too.



## DISARMING THREATS

Disarming threats should be a constant endeavor for you. Every threat that you can negate or prevent is one less threat that you have to worry about.

Before you can disarm a threat you have to recognize one. A threat is anything that may be the death of you. A charge, multiple attacks, or a flanking opponent could all be considered a threat.

Once you've identified a threat, you have to shut it down as quickly as possible. This is what it means to disarm a threat.

When you see your opponent rising up to charge, step in, and cut off their momentum. Disarm multiple strikes by quickly retreating. That flanking opponent can be disarmed as you move with them to negate their advantage.

Don't leave threats unattended for too long. They can be quite dangerous.

## WORK ON DISARMING THREATS



Identify some of the most threatening techniques used by a variety of fencers. Pay attention to the moments before they are used. What can be done in those moments to prevent what comes next?



What threatens you the most? How are you able to recognize those threats more quickly? Consider what your response has been to those threats and how you can improve your response in the future.



Practice your ability to reset an engagement. How can you go from the middle of a conflict to a complete reset?



In a fight, identify one threat from your opponent and do everything in your power to prevent them from using that threat against you.



## KNOW THE ENEMY

One of the best ways to bring the fight to your enemy is to know them. Understand how they fight, what they use, common strategies, and their signature techniques.

Every piece of knowledge that you know about your opponent is something that you could potentially use against them.

Does your opponent love to charge? Use that. Do they favor their dagger over their sword? Take that into account. Do they always start the fight in a similar fashion? Prepare for that opening.

When you understand your opponent beyond just the basics, the entire fencing experience changes. You're not just fighting. You're fighting that person, specifically.

## WORK ON KNOW THE ENEMY



Analyze each fencer individually. Take notes about what you see and notice. Talk with others and pick their brains about specific fighters. Interview the fighters themselves and get to know their perspective and how they got to where they are now.



Challenge a fencer to a dozen fights. Explore how they fight and change things up to see how they respond. Your goal is to walk away with a new understanding of your opponent.



Try to imitate aspects of how a particular fencer fights. What does walking in their shoes reveal about that fencer?



In a fight, formulate a plan specifically on what you know about your opponent. Tailor your fight to them and how they fight instead of fighting like you always do.



## MENTALITY

It's important to have a firm grasp of the mental aspect of fencing. The way you think, process information, plan, and feel about fencing is part of the overall experience.

This makes Mentality a robust portion of your fencing because it comes into play in so many ways. How you decide to use your attitude, knowledge, and experience in your fighting is all up to you.

Overall, you're looking to think like a swordsman. What do you know that will help you in this fight? How can you incorporate what you've learned? How can you strengthen your mind to hold up to the rigors of sword fighting?

Give your mind the attention it deserves and find ways to make fencing both a physical and mental exercise.

## WORK ON MENTALITY



Put your brain to work. Just sit down and think about fencing. Think about your favorite parts. Think about your overall journey. Think about what you've learned and would like to learn.



Consider what makes your mentality unique and powerful. What mental strengths do you have? How can you incorporate those into your fencing?



Talk with other fencers and document the different various types of mentality you find. Is there anything you find in common with other fencers? How does each mentality play into their fencing experience?



In a fight, dedicate a portion of the fight to thinking. Find ways to give yourself time to think. If you find that you stop thinking, ask yourself why and try again.



## CONFIDENCE

Confidence is not a fixed attribute. It is not something a few lucky people are born with and the rest of us suffer without. It's a feeling.

Confidence is the outcome of your thoughts and actions. It's the belief in your eventual success, combined with a realistic assessment of your current ability, and dedication to improving.

There is a great deal of fencing that is determined by how you incorporate your own confidence into how you fight.

It is something that others can feel, especially your opponent. Whether they recognize it or not, when you're confident, the fight changes.

You should always be cultivating and nurturing your own confidence so that it can be a tool and support in your fencing.

## WORK ON CONFIDENCE

Study the differences between pride and confidence. How can you overcome the fear of being prideful while still being confident?

Research techniques on developing and nurturing confidence in yourself and others. What strategies intrigue you? What methods have others tried that work? Implement a few of these ideas in your own life.

Define what confidence means to you. Is it realistic or achievable? Find examples of confidence in your own life or at fencing and examine what effect they have on people and in a fight.

In a fight, find a way to let go of doubt or fear and fight with confidence. What does it do to the fight? Where did you struggle? Where did you succeed? What evidence did you find that shows you deserve to be confident?



## THINKING BEFOREHAND

You don't always have time to think in the middle of a fight. Things happen quickly and you may not be able to fully process what your plan is, what your opponent might do, or how to use a new technique. It's overwhelming!

So why not do your thinking beforehand? Before the fight even begins, think through some of the common questions you normally ask in a fight.

You're trying to alleviate some of the mental strain required to fence and you're also establishing a roadmap for your thoughts to follow in high-stress situations.

Instead of allowing ideas to bounce around sporadically, you can connect thoughts together beforehand so those thoughts more easily flow from one idea to the next.

## WORK ON THINKING BEFOREHAND



Think about the five most common things you do in a fight. Consider what immediately follows and connect the two ideas together. Train your brain to naturally flow to each response.



Brainstorm the moments that you feel the most overwhelmed mentally. What happened? Familiarize yourself with those moments and what causes them. How does familiarity change those overwhelming moments?



Imagine fighting a specific fencer. How do they fight? What things do they do often? In what sequence? Write out a few “If-Then” statements and connect them to your own response.



In a fight, request 30 seconds to think about what you’re going to do before starting. Afterwards, consider how that affected the fight. Don’t pressure yourself to do things exactly as you thought.



## PREEMPTIVE ACTIONS

Every action in fencing takes time. Usually, that's just a few moments, but that can be an eternity in a sword fight.

With a few careful assumptions and educated guesses, you can get a head start on those actions by doing a portion of them ahead of time. You're preemptively acting in preparation for something in the future.

For example, if you can be fairly certain where your opponent is planning to attack, you don't have to wait until they strike to start blocking. You can position your sword partially through the block so that when they do strike, you're already halfway there, saving time.

The trick though is not being so preemptive that it discourages your opponent from doing what you've assumed. If your opponent catches on then they'll look for another option and you're back to square one, guessing what they might do.

## WORK ON PREEMPTIVE ACTIONS

Consider various actions and how they might be performed in different portions. How do you perform 50% of a block? What does 75% of a strike look like? How can you travel 25% of the distance to a desired position?

How can you improve your ability to anticipate what your opponent might do? How do experience, observation, and experimentation influence your sense of intuition?

Recognize at what points various fencers reassess their options. Which fencers are skittish? Which are willing to push through? What can that tell you about how preemptive actions might work for them?

In a fight, try to anticipate what your opponent might do and preemptively take action against it. Is there something you want to do? Can you preemptively prepare for the right moment?



## SURVIVAL

Because fencing is no longer life-threatening, you can sometimes forget that you're sword fighting. Things would be very different if you were facing an opponent with a sharpened rod of steel in their hand.

It would also be easier to remember that as long as you are alive, you have a chance and that learning to survive requires a mental shift in how you fight.

It isn't always about getting the kill right away. The longer you can stay alive, the more opportunities you'll have.

This means that, occasionally, you'll have to forego opportunities that are too risky. Your life and survival are more valuable than killing your opponent.

Eventually, you will find a balance between risk and opportunity. That will be your moment to strike and walk away to fight another day.

## WORK ON SURVIVAL

Imagine what it would be like to fight with live steel. How would it change your perspective of a fight? What would you be willing to risk?

With a trusted and safe training partner, practice fighting with no armor at quarter speed. What does it feel like? What are you thinking about? How can that experience help you in your regular fights?

What is the balance between survival and staying engaged in a fight? Does the fear of losing a fight impede you from actively participating? How are your actions affecting your opponent's experience?

In a fight, recognize the risk that comes with each opportunity. What does a high-risk opportunity look like compared to a low-risk opportunity? What level of risk and opportunity do you aim for?



## PLANNING

Even though plans rarely survive an encounter with the enemy, they're still important to have. Additionally, your ability to plan is important to develop and practice as you fence.

In its simplest form, a plan is just a decision. What are you going to do? When you answer that question, you have a plan. That's it.

Plans can range from simple to complex. The more complex your plan is the more likely it will break apart, but those broken pieces allow flexibility. A simple plan is durable and less likely to break, but it doesn't give you a lot to work off of.

No matter what your plan is, the balance you want to find is not between simple or complex. It's between committing to your plan and knowing when to let it go and try something else.

## WORK ON PLANNING



Make a plan for common activities like killing your opponent. Develop a simple and complex version for each activity. What differences do you see? What are the benefits for each?



Ask yourself, "What are you going to do?", and come to a decision. How long did it take you? What did you come up with? Practice asking that question and set a time limit for how long you have to answer.



Observe other fencers and try to discern what their plans are. Talk with them afterward and compare what you thought. Ask how they like to plan and what tricks they might have.



In a fight, commit to either a simple or complex plan. Commit to your plan, but pay attention to when it breaks and when it may be time to let it go. What can you learn from those moments?



## RELAXED INTENSITY

Inside your mind is a switch that can only be flipped with a combination of relaxation and intensity. It's a switch that controls how much power you're able to exert on any given task.

But getting that switch to flip requires that you give 100% of your attention to what's in front of you. No fear, doubt, or uncertainty. Any need for validation is abandoned. Every outside influence set aside. It's an intense moment of mental exertion.

But you also have to be relaxed. You can't let go of all those things if you're coiled up so tight you might snap.

This relaxed intensity is a state of mind that brings all of your power and experience to bear. Call it the zone or a state of zen, it is a display of mental force.

It doesn't guarantee perfection or victory. It is a state of concentration and determination when you fully commit yourself.

## WORK ON RELAXED INTENSITY

Study the concepts of a “flow state” and being “in the zone.” What can you learn from the research and theories on the subject? What can you apply in your own fencing?

What makes you feel relaxed? What makes you feel intense? Write down causes for each end of the spectrum. What can you infer from what you listed and how can you find the balance between them?

Recall the last time you entered a state of relaxed intensity. What was it like? How did you get there? What was going on? Can you recreate the feeling?

In a fight, practice setting everything aside. Give 100% of your attention to the fight at hand. Take note of any challenges or lingering distractions. How do you plan to address those?



## CRITICAL THINKING

Critical Thinking is “thinking deeply.” It goes beyond memorizing and recalling information, and it’s not just about being critical.

It involves reflection, moving away from “surface” knowledge, and evaluation. Recognize that you don’t stop once you’ve received new information, and that it’s your responsibility to transform what you’ve learned into something just for you.

Critical Thinking is how you can face the difficult challenges that fencing brings. The ability to unbiasedly analyze and assess what is happening in your fencing experience leads to growth and improvement.

When you begin to think critically about your fencing, you can take ownership of it. At that point, you get to decide what to do with it.

## WORK ON CRITICAL THINKING

Study various methods of Critical Thinking. Research the ones you are familiar with and look to see if there are any methods you've never heard of. Spend some time analyzing your own thinking process.

What does it mean to ask an "open-ended" question? When is it beneficial to ask open-ended questions and how can you practice answering them?

Consider how critical thinking comes into play during a fight. Does it only apply at the beginning or end of the fight? How can you think critically while you fight?

In a fight, dedicate time to assess and analyze the situation. Take the information that you can observe and transform it into something that makes sense to you.



## NO HESITATION

Hesitation is a momentary lapse in your brain's processing. It occurs when your mind is overloaded, distracted, fixated, or outpaced. Normally, it's not a problem but a momentary hesitation in fencing can be very impactful.

If you want to reduce the amount of hesitation you experience while fencing, you simply have to address the main causes.

If you are overloaded, you need to simplify. If you are distracted, you need to focus. If you are fixated, you need to loosen up. If you are outpaced, you need to familiarize yourself to similar situations.

Having no hesitation in your fighting allows you to seamlessly move from one moment to the next. This makes for a very smooth fencing experience.

## WORK ON NO HESITATION



Analyze moments when you are overloaded, distracted, fixated, or outpaced. What can you discern from those moments? When do you exceed the limits of your mind's processing power?



What are some common situations for hesitation you and other fencers find themselves in? Discuss those situations and try to find a pattern. Brainstorm solutions to any common situation.



Of the four causes of hesitation, which afflicts you the most? Why is that? What can you learn about yourself and how can you use that knowledge to move forward?



In a fight, pause any time you hesitate. Ask yourself why that happened and make a plan. Go back a few steps in the fight and try again. What happened?



## POOL OF EXPERIENCE

Your Pool of Experience is your source of knowledge and everything that you can pull from as you fence. It's a constantly growing resource.

When you pull from your Pool of Experience, you're using some past experience to help you in the present. This could be as simple as referencing the last fight you had with your opponent or as intricate as combining multiple unrelated experiences into a new perspective.

The more you can add to your pool, the more you can refer to and the more useful it becomes. This happens over time, but you can also contribute to your pool whenever you want.

Contributing to your pool is when you purposefully recognize an experience and then internalize it. This isn't a passive act. It's a very active process to continually internalize what you experience as you fence.

## WORK ON POOL OF EXPERIENCE



Review your Pool of Experience and document everything you've added to it. Include both fencing and non-fencing items. As you do, think about what pieces of experience you could use or add more of.



Discuss how experiences have shaped individual fencers. Interview other fighters and ask what experiences have made them the fencers they are today. What has gotten you to where you are?



Take a non-fencing subject and try to interpret fencing in those terms. What outside experiences lend themselves to developing fencing knowledge and understanding?



In a fight, consider what your experiences have been with your opponent in the past. How can they help you in the current fight? What can you pull from your Pool of Experience about your opponent?



## THE SLEEPING MIND

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The Sleeping Mind is a technique to quiet and simplify the mental process happening during a fight. It works by limiting the amount of information to just a few core sets of data. In this case, two of the five pillars.

Before the fight even begins, select two of the five pillars being Footwork, Proficiency, Body Mechanics, Attack Their Weapons, and Mentality. By choosing only two, this greatly reduces the amount of information to sort through.

When the fight starts, you begin looking for an answer, not the answer, in one of those two pillars. Even if an opportunity pops up immediately, if it doesn't involve the chosen pillars, it gets ignored.

This restricted thinking promotes purpose in the fight. It's easier to focus and zero in on potential opportunities because the path has already been set.

## TIPS ON THE SLEEPING MIND



Don't look for **the** answer. Just look for **an** answer. All you need is a single opportunity to work and there will be plenty of them. No fight only has one path to success. It's okay to let an opportunity go.



It may seem counter-intuitive but sometimes restrictions lead to the most creative solutions. When you are confined to certain rules, you begin to see how a few simple principles can be used in all sorts of ways. Embrace those limits to see the potential.



When incorporating the Sleeping Mind into your fencing, get familiar with your own headspace. Figure out how it works, the quirks, and all the interesting details. Appreciate what your mind is and get comfortable with how you think.



## ORANGES

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This deck of cards is the sequel to my **BIG ORANGE BOOK: APPLES**, even though it follows an entirely different format.

The idea behind **ORANGES** is that my style, or how I fight, is just a collection of segmented principles all mashed together into a whole. The same can be said of anyone's style.

Each principle within this deck can be enjoyed separately or in combination with other slices. I've tried to give you a taste of each idea, rather than a full tutorial.

This allows for flexibility and growth. No style is set in stone and mine continues to grow and develop, but the principles remain the same. They are still oranges, even though they may not always taste exactly the same.

## TIPS ON ORANGES

- ➔ When reviewing each principle, try to be open to the concept before coming to any conclusions. Try to have a child's mindset first, using the suggestions as written, before hacking away and making them your own.
- ➔ Some of these ideas may not work for you or make sense. That's okay. The goal isn't to replicate my style exactly, but to find the things you like and incorporate them, however you want, into your own fencing.
- ➔ There are many principles that I left out and don't incorporate into my style. What missing ideas make up your style and where do we overlap?
- ➔ Don't trick yourself into thinking that how I've defined my style is the only way. You should define your style in a way that resonates with you.



## THE FIVE PILLARS

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The Five Pillars is my attempt to organize all there is in my fencing experience in a way that makes sense to me. I cannot say with confidence that every principle and technique fit inside one of the pillars, but I can say with conviction that they help me find order in the chaos.

Each of the Five Pillars is a buzz word to connect related ideas and principles in my head. They've become helpful anchors to tie down everything that fencing has to offer.

They're also a symbol of commitment. I've chosen to highlight these five categories because they describe how I want to fence. As I align myself with my Five Pillars, I can remain true to the type of fencing I want to develop and not lose my way.

## DEFINITIONS OF THE FIVE PILLARS



**Footwork:** All good fencing starts with your feet. It is the foundation of everything else there is in fencing.



**Proficiency:** It's not about mastery, but about being better, always trying to improve and efficiently manipulating the odds.



**Body Mechanics:** An understanding of the body and how it works can allow you to know what is possible.



**Attack Their Weapons:** Take the fight to your opponent and assert control on whatever you can.



**Mentality:** Use the mind to enable a higher level of fighting. It's thinking like a swordsman.



## INSTRUCTIONS

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The **ORANGE STYLE DECK** is a collection of 50+ principles that define my style with over 200 prompts and ideas to help you learn them yourself.

On the front of each card is an explanation and on the back are several ideas on how you could work on the subject. They are also color-coded to match one of my **FIVE PILLARS** or categories of fencing principles.

As in my first project, **BIG ORANGE BOOK: APPLES**, these ideas should be considered as “food for thought”, which means that this isn’t the only fighting style worth studying or that it will solve all of your problems.

This is a tool to encourage your own creativity and inventiveness on your fencing journey. Take what you like and throw out the rest as you develop your own style.

## WAYS TO USE THE ORANGE STYLE DECK

- ➔ Study each card individually and dedicate time to experiment with each principle in your own fighting. Keep track of what works and what doesn't.
- ➔ Draw a card randomly as inspiration for what to work on. Use it to kick start your fencing studies and practice.
- ➔ Use multiple cards to create new combinations and challenges in your fighting. Can you incorporate two or more random principles into your next fight? What combinations worked?
- ➔ Keep them as references to larger principles and ideas. Associate them with your own notes and theories to build your own understanding of fencing.
- ➔ Any other way you can think of. Experiment!

