

This study guide outlines the basics from Level 1 Academy. You should be able to demonstrate these actions in order to be ready for Youth Academy Level 2. As a reminder, Level 1 fencers need to purchase their own [basic fencing kit](#) after the first two months; additional gear will be needed for Level 2.

*We suggest that parents and youth fencers review this study guide together. It is easier for a fencer to learn these concepts in class if they can explain them to another person. Find a buddy and see how much you've learned!*

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### **Basic safety**

1. When you're not fencing, always keep the tip of your foil pointed low, down towards the ground. (The top of your foot is a good resting spot. The tip shouldn't touch the floor.)
2. Full protective gear must be worn at all times when poking, playing or fencing using a sword.
3. Walk around fencers, never in between or right behind someone fencing.
4. When the coach says **halt**, immediately stop fencing or any activity. (Halt means stop.)

***These rules are very important to the safety of everyone in class. If you aren't able to obey the safety rules, you will be asked to sit out of class.***

### **How to hold the foil**

The **foil** is the name of the weapon as well as a subdivision of fencing. (See glossary for **saber** and **epee**.) The white paint on the **blade** for beginners shows the UP side. Hold the foil with your thumb on the top of the **handle** and your fingers underneath all the way at the top so your fingers touch the **felt pad** under the **bellguard**. The **handle** and **pommel**, the metal end of the handle, should line up with your arm, kind of like the foil is growing straight out of your arm. The **blade** should gently bend downward. The **tip** (rubber button on the end) should be pointing slightly up, slightly toward your opponent's shoulders.

### **The fencing strip and the salute**

Fencing takes place on what's called a **strip**, or **piste**. The two painted lines closest to the middle are called **en garde lines**. That's where the fencers start fencing. It's also where they go back to when someone scores a touch. You're allowed to use the whole fencing **strip**, but you have to stay on the **strip**. If you step off the side of the **strip** with one foot, fencing stops and you have to restart one meter back from where you stepped off. If you step off the end of the fencing **strip** with both feet, your opponent gets a point. Fencers usually fence to 5 points to win. In tournaments fencers also will fence bouts up to 15 points.

At the beginning and end of fencing, you are expected to **salute** your opponent. This means bringing the foil up as a show of respect to your opponent. Then you bring it back down. After that you and your opponent will tap each other's blades (down low for safety).

### **Touching on-target, touching off-target, and returning to en garde**

Once fencing has started, you're trying to score a point by making the tip of your sword hit your opponent on the valid **target area**. That's called an **on-target touch**. The **target area** is the fencing jacket minus both arm sleeves. An **off-target touch** is anywhere else, such as the arms, the head, the legs, etc.

Whenever a **touch** happens, either **on-target** or **off-target**, the fencing stops. To signal a **touch**, raise your back hand up in the air. This is when you figure out if the touch was on or off target, and what to do next. If it was **on-target**, both fencers go back to their **en garde lines** and start again. If it was **off-target** both fencers back up until their straightened arms holding the foils have the tips of the foils touching. This is your "**reset distance**". From here, you can start fencing again.

### **En garde and footwork**

When two people are ready to fence, they get into an **en garde position**. A good **en garde** allows you to stay balanced and ready while you fence. A good **en garde** will help you to set up the best **distance** for attacking and defending.

A good **en garde** means your knees are bent, your feet are shoulder-width apart, and your body is upright, not hunched over. Also, the arm holding your foil is out in front, held in parry 6 position (see drawing below). Your elbow is away from your body.

Your front foot (and knee) point forward, toward your opponent. (If you're right handed, your right foot is your front foot. If you're left handed, your left foot is in front). Your back foot is pointing to the side, at a 90 degree angle. Your feet are in the shape of the letter "L."

Fencing footwork basic moves are: the **advance**, the **retreat**, the **lunge** and the **recovery**.

An **advance** moves you forward. It starts with the front foot and finishes with the back foot. Your feet stay apart for better balance. You finish the same way you started, in a good **en garde** position.

A **retreat** moves you backward. It starts with the back foot and finishes with the front foot. Your feet stay apart. You'll get off balance too easily if you allow your feet to come together. Finish the same way you started, in a good **en garde** position.

Usually, the **lunge** is used to launch your attack. Your front foot shoots forward while you push off from your back foot. The lunge is a powerful and explosive move, but make sure you can stay balanced. Getting back to your **en garde** position after you lunge is called **recovering**. Push off your front foot to **recover** in one smooth, balanced motion. Your back arm copies your

front arm when you lunge by straightening behind and to the side of you. When you recover, your back arm bends to help you **recover**, then it stays bent out to the side of you.

Things that make a good **lunge**: explosive power and a balanced finish. Your front arm (the arm holding your fencing sword) straightens all the way out to get your maximum reach. Your back leg straightens all the way out, because you pushed off of it to get power. Your front leg is bent, so you can push off of it when you **recover** back to a perfect **en garde** position.

In the left drawing below, you see the fencer is **en garde** in **hand position 4**, protecting (or closing out) their **4 line**. In the right drawing, the fencer is **en garde** in **hand position 6**, which completely blocks off any attack that would be aimed at them in that direction. So that fencer is said to have “closed out” their **6 line**.

### **Attack, defense, and right of way**

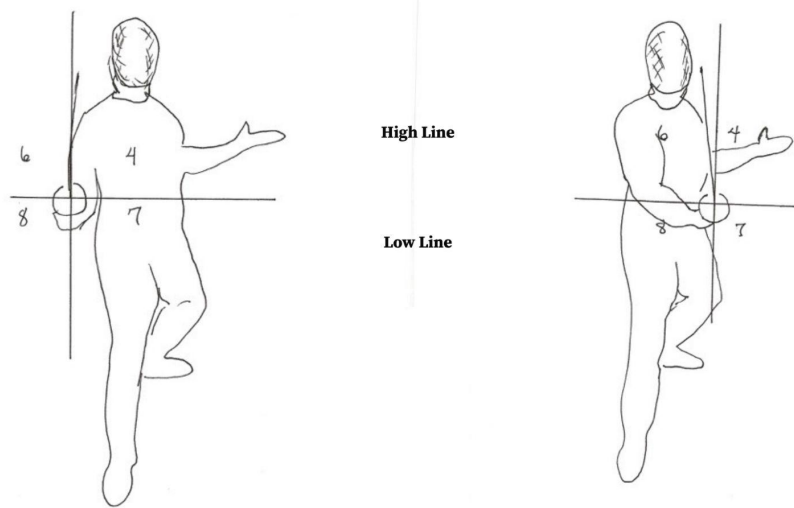
You can score a point in fencing by **attacking** your opponent. When you point your tip at the opponent’s target area and straighten your arm and try to score a touch, usually while also doing a **lunge**, you are **attacking** them. This is called a **straight attack**, also known as a **direct attack**, because you are going directly toward their target.

Warning! A common beginner mistake is to **attack** the opponent’s **blade**. When you **attack**, try to avoid their **blade** and instead aim for their **target area**.

If two people try to **attack**, the person who started the **attack** gets the point. Starting the **attack** gives you the **right of way**. Having the **right of way** means that your touch counts and whatever your opponent does doesn’t count.

If your opponent **attacks** you, you should **defend** yourself by blocking their **attack**. In fencing, a block is called a **parry**. The two **parries** that protect your chest and shoulders are **parry 4** and **parry 6**. The two **parries** that protect your belly and hips are **parry 7** and **parry 8**. You might also hear parries described as protecting your **high lines** and **low lines**.

Note: the **lines**, **hand positions**, and **parries** all correspond. They all use the same four numbers, 6,4,7,8. For example, if you’re **en garde** in hand position 6, you are said to have “closed out” 6. That is also where your hand will return to when you **parry 6**.



### Classical Four Line System

If you **parry**, you gain the **right of way**, and are able to score immediately by **touching** your opponent. **Touching** your opponent after you've parried is called a **riposte**. If you **riposte** straight toward their target, that's called a **straight** (or **direct**) **riposte**.

You can also use a **retreat** to make your opponent's attack **fall short**. This means that they lunge at you, but you make them miss by moving back.

When you **parry** or make your opponent **fall short**, you gain the **right of way**.

So, to review, you gain the **right of way** if you are the first one to attack. If you **parry** someone's **attack**, you get the **right of way**, and should immediately attempt to score a touch using a **riposte**.

If the fencer with the **right of way** scores an **on-target** touch, they get a point and both fencers go back to their **en garde lines** before beginning again. If the fencer with the **right of way** touches **off-target**, no point is awarded, and the fencers extend their foils to get the **reset** distance before beginning again.

You will learn more about right of way during class and as you progress as a fencer. Don't worry if you don't understand it immediately. It usually takes a while.

### **Right of way questions**

*When both fencers attack, they both get a point. True or False?*

A: False. Only one person can score a point at a time. In fact, only the fencer who began the attack gets the point. If both fencers attack at the exact same time, no one scores. This is called a **simultaneous attack**, and nobody scores a point. If you're not sure who started the attack first, you can throw it out and just start over.

*If I attack but my opponent parries, I should just attack again and I'll score a touch. True or False?*

A: False. When your opponent parries your attack, they now have the right away, and will score a point against you by doing an immediate riposte. If you just attack again, and they do an immediate riposte, your attack will not be counted, because you don't have the right of way. If your attack is parried, you are now on defense, and should be ready to parry your opponent's riposte. This is called a **remise** (attacking again after your original attack was parried or fell short) and should be avoided when attempting to fence using the rules of right of way.

*After I parry, I should make sure my opponent can't hit me. True or False?*

A: False. After you parry, you have the right of way. You should immediately riposte. Whatever your opponent tries to do will not count. You have the right of way, so don't be afraid of your opponent after you've parried. As soon as you parry, riposte!

*I have the right of way. It is impossible for my opponent to score a point. True or False?*

A: False. Having the right of way does not automatically get you a point, you have to touch your opponent. If you have the right of way but you miss, you don't get a point, and the right of way now belongs to your opponent. Right of way goes back and forth, like a tennis ball going back and forth over the net. You get one "swing" using your right of way, then your opponent gets one, until someone hits. It goes: attack→parry+riposte→parry+riposte,→parry+riposte, etc., back and forth until someone touches.

*Who cares about stupid right of way, I should just fence faster and harder and I will win! True or False?*

A: False. Understanding the right of way is necessary. Many of the tactics and strategies you will learn in Level 2 classes depend upon your understanding of it. If you ignore the rules, you'll get frustrated when fencers use the rules to beat you.

### **Disengage and coupé: going around your opponent's blade**

As your opponent gets better at parrying, you will need to move your tip to avoid their blade. Each time you start your attack and go around your opponent's parry you're doing a **disengage**. The disengage goes around your opponent's **bellguard**. Sometimes you can do two or even three **disengages** to go around all the parries your opponent is trying to do, as long as your tip

continues toward them. If you freeze, your attack is over, so keep that tip moving toward them as you disengage!

**Disengages** can also be used during your riposte. If you're having trouble scoring using a riposte, try doing a **disengage** at the start of your riposte.

A **coupé** can also be used to avoid your opponent's parry. The coupé goes around the **tip** of your opponent's blade instead of around their **bellguard**.

### **Choosing which parry to use**

As you get better at fencing, you will realize that you can make decisions about what **parries** you use. As mentioned before, **parry 4** and **parry 6** protect the chest and shoulders. If your opponent is aiming lower, you will need to choose **parry 7** or **parry 8** to protect your belly and hips.

### **Fencing using the right of way**

During your fencing in class time, it's important that you are able to demonstrate your understanding of right of way by doing the following: parry then riposte (not just parry), avoid using the **remise** (attacking again after your original attack was parried or fell short), and finally, attacking the opponent's target, not the opponent's blade.

### **Skill checklist**

Check off the items you are able to explain and demonstrate.

- How to salute.
- The four basic club safety rules.
- On-target area, off-target area.
- Reset distance.
- En garde position, advance, retreat, lunge, recover.
- Understanding right of way.
- Attacking straight, attacking using a disengage.
- How to score using defense.
- Parry 4, 6, 7, 8.
- Fall short.
- Riposte straight, riposte using a disengage.
- Basic core fitness/exercises (pushups, planks, jumping jacks, etc).
- Working well with others in a group, trying your very best, obeying rules.
- Equipment purchase: fencing gear—jacket, glove, underarm protector, chest plate if female.
- Coach observation of your use of right of way during your fencing.

### **Glossary, in order of appearance.**

**Foil.** The foil is the name of the weapon used to fence **foil**, one of the three types of Olympic fencing. Foil fencers may hit with the tip of the weapon, aim for the torso, and are subject to the conventions of right of way. Foil right of way and rules are what is being reviewed in this document.

**Epee.** Epee is the name of the weapon used to fence **epee**, one of the three types of Olympic fencing. Epee fencers hit with the tip of the weapon. They may hit anywhere from head to toe, and are not subject to the convention of right of way when scoring. It is about who hits who first.

**Saber.** Saber is the name of the weapon used to fence **saber**, one of the three types of Olympic fencing. Saberists may hit with the tip or the side of the weapon. They may hit anywhere above the waist, and are subject to the convention of right of way, just like foil.

**Blade.** The long metal section of the weapon. Not sharp.

**Handle.** The long thin handle is the French grip, to be held at the very top, thumb on top, fingers curled beneath. The oddly shaped handle is called a pistol grip. A coach will show you how to hold it.

**Felt pad.** The padding at the top of the handle, just beneath the bellguard.

**Bellguard.** The round metal disc separating the blade from the handle, protecting the fencer's hand.

**Tip.** The business end of the weapon. Covered by a rubber "button" which should not be banged or dragged across the floor.

**Halt.** A command given by a coach or referee which means stop.

**Strip, piste.** The area upon which fencers fence.

**En garde lines.** The lines on the strip closest to the center. Fencers' start line.

**Salute.** The motion of bringing your blade up, then down again at the beginning and end of each bout.

**Touch.** When the tip of the foil pokes your opponent enough for the blade to slightly bend. (Or when their tips pokes you enough to make it bend.) A touch can be on-target or off target.

**Target area.** The part of the opponent you are aiming for that will allow you to score a point if you hit it. See also, On-target.

**On-target.** Every part of the fencing jacket except the arm sleeves for foil, whole body for epee and waist up for saber.

**Off-target.** Anything that is not on-target.

**Reset distance.** When an off-target touch happens, the fencing stops and both fencers extend their arms straight and back up until the tips of their foils are touching. Then they can start fencing again.

**En garde position.** It's the fencer's ready position. Knees bent, feet apart, hand in 6, balanced.

**Distance.** The space between two fencers. Measured in footwork units, such as advance distance, lunge distance, advance lunge distance, etc.

**Advance.** Moving forward in fencing. The front foot moves, followed by the back foot. At the end of each advance, the fencer maintains the en garde position.

**Retreat.** Moving backward in fencing. The back foot moves, followed by the front foot. At the end of each retreat, the fencer maintains the en garde position.

**Lunge.** Launching your front foot forward and driving off of the back leg. Finishes balanced with the front leg bent, back leg straight, and both arms out wide.

**Recover.** From a finished lunge, pushing off the front foot, bending the back leg and coming back to a balanced en garde position.

**Attack, straight/direct.** The attempt to score a touch against your opponent by going right for their on-target area. The attack starts when your tip is moving towards the target. The attack must be a continuous threat to the target.

**Parry.** A block. The main parries used in foil fencing are 4, 6, 7, and 8. Each parry closes off one section of the target area. For right handed fencers: parry 4 closes off the upper left, parry 6 the upper right, parry 7 the lower left and parry 8 the lower right.

**Defense.** A way to gain the right of way when your opponent attacks. Parry their blade or make them fall short.

**Fall short.** A way to defend and gain the right of way by retreating when your opponent attacks so as to make their attack miss your target by not being close enough.

**Lines (High lines, low lines) and hand positions.** The system of describing where your hand is in space. Broken down to four main numbers, 4,6,7,8. These also correspond to the four parries.

**Right of way.** This rule, or set of rules, states that: if person A starts an attack, B must gain the right of way (ROW) in order to score. To gain the ROW, person B must defend by parrying or by making the attack fall short. Person B then possesses the ROW. ROW continues to change possession with each subsequent parry/fall short. In the event that two fencers touch at the same time, we only count the touch of the fencer who is in possession of the right of way. Important: in the event that only one fencer touches, that touch is counted and right of way is not relevant.

**Simultaneous attack.** When two fencers attack each other at the exact same time. No touch is awarded and the fencers are reset.

**Disengage.** Moving the tip of your weapon around the opponent's lower blade/bell guard/hand (to avoid their attempted parry or parries) and scoring a touch. Blade must be moving forward toward the target continuously.

**Coupé.** Same as a disengage, in that it avoids the opponent's attempted parry, but the coupé goes around the opponent's tip instead of around their bellguard.

**Remise.** Attacking your opponent immediately after your first attack has failed (been parried or has been made to fall short). The remise does not have the right of way.