



Adelaide Sword Academy

Training Guide

Comprising ASA's safety and training guidelines:

- *Guiding principles*
- *Code of Conduct and discipline process*
- *Drilling and Training*
- *Freeplay Principles and Levels*
- *Freeplay Rules*
- *Equipment for Drilling and Freeplay*



Owning it ...

Our approach to safety is about **physical control**, **perceptual awareness**, and **communication** – qualities our training seeks to develop. No amount of gear can save you from stupidity, blindness, poor communication, or simple *lack of control*.

In other words ...

Your safety is whose responsibility?

Mine.

Your partner's safety is whose responsibility?

Mine.

It's comes down to **you and me** – our skills, our attitude, and especially our ability to take responsibility for our actions.

Chivalry

We also aim to practise fencing in a chivalrous manner, in keeping with the knightly spirit of the tradition.

Let's remember the words of Hanko Doebringer:

*"Practice your art by necessity, honestly and never in foolish vanity.
Then you will always remain a good and true man, a true swordsman.
For thus is the art of the sword thought out,
that you should practice truly in a spirit of chivalry.*

In short, be an awesome person.

Student to Master/Instructor

As instructors, we don't want to expect too much from you apart from taking safety and your own training seriously. So I've borrowed this simple guide from a historical master to make our relationship (student and master) clear. They're pretty self-explanatory.

"All I ask from my students are three things: **respect, faith, and remuneration**. Respect because I am their teacher; faith because it is something a student owes his master; and just remuneration because it is something without which the arts would wither."

In return I (and all of our instructors) will endeavour to be worthy of this respect and faith in every way possible; in providing quality lessons and guidance, a safe

training environment, and taking you and your individual needs seriously. We want you to know that you're a valued member of our school.

Do I belong here?

Many new students feel out of place in a new environment, and wonder if they belong there for a bunch of reasons. Here's our super quick quiz to see if you belong.

1. Do you like swords?
2. Are you willing to work at getting BETTER at fencing?

If you answered Yes to those questions, then that's it. You belong.

Code of Conduct

1. Loyalty

We will show fellowship, concern and regard for all of our fellow members, and to the school itself. We will encourage each other.

2. Courtesy

In our dealings with each other and those outside the school we will act and speak with courtesy and respect.

Example violations: Verbal abuse or belittling of any sort. Slander or gossip. Taking advantage of others.

3. Prowess

We strive for excellence to the best of our abilities.

Example violations: Gamesmanship, poor preparation. Lack of focus in training.

4. Integrity

We will be trustworthy, keep our word, and be safe to those around us.

Example violations: Intoxication. Lack of weapon care. Bullying or harassment.

5. Discipline

We will work hard, accept the authority of those in charge in the training hall, and at school events.

Violations: Disobeying direct requests from an instructor. Acting against agreed school regulations or guidelines.

Breaches

If there is an issue at training or otherwise:

- Take it to the Head of School, ASAP.
- Do it privately. What you say will be kept private.
- Alternately, talk to a senior fencer, who will be your advocate.

We'll attempt to mediate the situation to the satisfaction of all parties.

Penalties

Minor penalties may be set by an Instructor within training, up to and including expulsion from that session. They are at the fencer in charge's discretion.

Major penalties may include expulsion from the school. Options for rehabilitation will be considered in each situation. They will be considered together with the all the senior fencers.

You have a right to an advocate in any disciplinary setting.

Prizes

There will be prizes and recognition given for outstanding behaviour in any of the above areas. We value awesome people!

Training and Drilling

Partner Training Principles:

- 1. Safety first**
- 2. Communicate effectively**
- 3. Control of Tempo and Force**
- 4. Don't be "that Guy" – be awesome**

Safety First

Swordplay is unsafe. As Liechtenaur says "I tell you truthfully, no one can defend himself without danger." There is nothing safe about fighting with metre-long bladed instruments, and that's even before we start talking about pole weapons or wrestling. But that doesn't mean that the way we practise the art needs to be unsafe, if we use proper care and appropriate protective equipment for the task.

Regardless of the weapon or simulator in your hand you must treat it as potentially dangerous. This is true even when it's a padded boffer. Plastic swords can be bad for safety, just because we stop respecting them as potentially dangerous. We must respect the sword at all times. Doing so helps keep us safe, and also keeps us focused on the Art of Swordplay, as opposed to the Game of Wacky Wacking. From beginning to end the Art is about appreciating the danger involved, and working mindfully to minimise that risk.

Remember the two adages this guide started with: you are responsible for your own safety, and that of your partners.

Awareness

Pay attention to what you're doing. It goes without saying, but everyone is guilty of this at one time or another. The mind switches off and you're just going through the motions. Research suggests that you just started wasting your time. So pay attention!

It also needs to be said, that if you're not paying attention, you're a danger to those around you in the training hall. We can't be so focused on what we are doing that we ignore what's going on nearby. But by training with mindfulness we develop the perceptive abilities of a good fencer.

Care (for Others)

Getting hit by repetitively in a drill is hard, both physically and mentally. Given that *appreciate and respect* the sacrifice your partner is making. They are your training partner, and ideally your *friend*. Look after them.

Remember that different people have inherently different physiological responses and abilities to cope with pain and the shock of being attacked. Don't expect them to have the same responses as you. As a scholar of fencing you need to need to learn to cope positively with your own responses, and respect others. Never, ever take advantage of someone in a drill, or you'll be out on your ear.

Getting hit in drills is not easy, especially when the intensity and intention of actions increases. But be encouraged. Every single person I know has more courage inside them, and more ability to cope than they know. We need concrete opportunities practise that courage, or else we do fall apart under pressure.

Communication:

Communicate with each other, but keep it short, sweet, and respectful – as between peers. I hate the acronym, but the Keep It Simple Stupid approach really is important. If it's not simple, you really shouldn't be discussing it right now. Keep it for break times, or talking together afterwards. If it's interfering with training - get the instructor! That's what they're there for.

Do also remember to **thank** your partner after each time you've drilled, (or fenced) with them.

Communication within training includes with making eye contact (if possible), checking that you are both ready, establishing who is patient and agent and what the drilling level is, and tapping out or calling hold if in pain or at risk of injury. Especially communicate when something hurts!

Ability to Stop

On that topic, the training needs to be in our control. It is completely OK at any time for you to ask someone to 'dial down'. It's also OK to stop if you're overwhelmed. And we must give good feedback to our partners if they are hurting us - they *need to know*. And if they don't/won't/can't dial down, the instructor *needs to know*.

Roles

When we are drilling together, one person is the Coach and the other is the Student. The Student is learning to apply the technique described in class by the Instructor. They need to be focused and mindful of the timing and distance required, the mechanics of the technique itself, and ensure they don't strike their partner too hard. The Coach is providing the **correct stimulus and feedback** for the student to learn the target technique. They should employ controlled resistance (see below).

Controlled Resistance:

Techniques vary upon the level of resistance necessary to make them work and their speed of execution. Moreover, different types of drilling will develop different skills - see 'drilling levels' below. As a training partner the resistance we provide needs to be controlled and reliable.

When you are having a technique done on you, you should provide *some resistance* - but you should never 'fight back'. You're practising, not fighting. The level of resistance should be sufficient that the technique is meaningful, not staged. We must not be so resistant or combative to mess up the drill, or so compliant that we do the technique for the person.

Similarly, don't rely on force to make a technique work. Remember that this is an Art; "If it were not [an] Art, the strong would always win."

Use a pre-determined level of resistance for each technique, and **do not improvise**. As a coach, *commit* to your blows. This will help the student practise their techniques effectively. The coach should not 'fight back', except using pre-determined measures. Get the technique *clean* first. And if something's not working 'dial down' to a lower drilling level. If it's still not working, get the instructor.

When we progress to Resistant drilling, we may indeed change our responses, but within a pre-determined framework. That level is well above Novice fencers, and can genuine mess up your training, and that of others training with you, if you engage in it too early. Similarly, the force in controlled drilling must be carefully moderated to challenge, but not over-power our partners.

Drilling levels

Drilling level	Speed	Force	Focus
Slow	50-60% or less	Light (“tapping” contact only)	Form, co-ordination. “Choreography”.
Light	90%	Light: NO POWER!!!	Precision and dynamic Timing.
Controlled	Full speed	Moderate to Strong (but moderated to the abilities of your partner)	Structure and Fuhlen: pressure and leverage.
Alive	Full speed	Moderate	Indes. Dealing with a resistant/unpredictable opponent

Making the most of your personal practise:

1. **Mindful practise:**
 - **be Present**
 - **have a Focus.**
2. **Have fun!**
3. **Persist!**

Mindful practise

Mindfulness is a huge and fascinating area of study, that can be of enormous benefit in the practise of historical fencing. We are going to touch on just a couple of principles here. If you're interested in the area, a great place to start is Guy Windsor's work “The Swordsmans Quick Guide”, which is available on Kindle and a number of other formats.

Be present

Be present: Keep pushing the irrelevant away, bringing yourself back to here and now. keep listening & responding.

Have a focus

Work on something specific, and tangible. What do you want to improve? If you're struggling to define a focus, here are some suggestions: footwork, distance, timing, structure, flow, position, decision making.

Have fun!

Let yourself make mistakes without judgement. Most of us were "penguins" when we started, embrace it! No one is actually going to have to do this "for real", at heart historical fencing is being done for the joy and process of discovery.

And Persist!

Keep throwing stuff at the walls until something sticks. Don't every let go of your hope that you can do this.

Freeplay

Principles of Free play:

CHIVALRY:

Chivalry is our focal attitude and guide for free-play. Chivalry means being ready to take a hit, being ready to fight vigorously, and taking care of others in delivering blows. Chivalry respects the other as an opponent, courteously takes shots, and does not take advantage of the rules of engagement – implicit or explicit. We expand on what chivalry means to us further in our **Code of Conduct**.

Rule of thumb #1: Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you.

CONTROLLED INTENT:

Strike with intent, but control that intent. Ringeck urges us to "fence powerfully with the whole body", but this must be balanced with controlling ourselves for safety. Ultimately, physical control will make you a better fencer.

Rule of thumb #2: We accept bruises, but not injuries!

REALISM:

Our aim is realistic sword fencing, not 'playing tag with swords'. Move, act and strike with appropriate, realistic force and motion. Use precise targeting and be mindful of edge placement and control. Respect the threat of the sword as real. Remember this is an inherently dangerous activity.

Rule of thumb #3: Drill and fence 'As if' we were using sharps.

Remember, Fencing is a sort of language

Speak clearly, listen carefully, respond appropriately, and only use as much force as is necessary to communicate clearly.
The sharpest wit wins.

Freeplay levels

Freeplay level	Speed	Weight (in bind)	Contact (body)
Slow	½ or 50%	Light (tapping)	Touch
Light	¾ or 75%	Controlled	Light (tap)
Normal	Full speed	Committed (pushing)	Controlled
Open	Full speed	Full strength (hard)	Controlled



Freeplay Rules

Senior Fencer

These people, in order, are responsible for overseeing safety within the training hall:

1. Head of School
2. Any student designated the current Instructor by the Head of School
3. The Ranking or Senior Fencer

It is their responsibility to ensure safe training methods and behaviour, and safe free play. Their orders must be obeyed immediately, for everyone's safety.

Personal responsibility

Each and every fencer is responsible, both for their own actions and giving positive feedback to their partners.

Fitness to train and fence

No drugs or alcohol before or during training or fencing. As a general rule, if you are unfit to drive, you are unfit to fence.

Injuries

There will be NO FREEPLAY with an injury. This applies doubly to ALL wrestling and dagger work. Slow work is acceptable. If you're struggling with a long term injury then you need a plan, discussed with your instructor, for how you are going to engage in freeplay and remain safe.

Acknowledging your opponent

Each bout should begin with a salute or acknowledgement by both combatants. Fencers must acknowledge each other with respect at the end of combat by shaking hands or some other friendly gesture.

Do NOT begin until your opponent has acknowledged you!

Always acknowledge your opponent and thank them after freeplay. Don't just stop and go fight someone else.

If the bout stops for any reason, fencers must acknowledge each other again before recommencing play.

Halt at 'Hold'

The call of 'hold' IMMEDIATELY ends free play or drilling, and all fencers must freeze when it is called.

Anyone may call hold at any time during training or free play. Every fencer is obliged to call 'hold' if at any time they are genuinely concerned for injury – theirs or others. If you are concerned about your control in free play or for any reason (for example, loss of focus, fatigue or anger) you must STOP or 'dial it down' to a lower level of intensity (see 1.3 and 2.2 above). Similarly, if you feel your opponent has lost focus, or control, or just started 'flailing' in either training or free play, you MUST call hold and ask if they are OK.

Yielding

Raised hands, tapping out, or kneeling are alternate indications that you are unable to continue, or cede the bout to your opponent. You should never strike and opponent making these gestures.

'Dialing down'

Any fencer may ask, at any time, to dial down speed, intensity, or force of training or fencing. They may also cease a bout at any time.

Target zones

We play with the full body is a target. Care should always be taken in delivering blows, especially with hands and joints. Just because something is a target, does not mean it should be struck hard.

"Good" blows

A blow is good is if it delivered cleanly, with appropriate body mechanics. If the striker is off balance, or does not use the edge effectively, the blow will not be counted.

A strike with the edge should travel at least a short arc, and cut a clean line through the area struck. A slice should move the edge along the target, and be supported with adequate structure to deliver force. A thrust should touch the target.

Keep in mind that a clean blow with a sword does not have to be "hard" to cause dismemberment, just swung accurately with speed. Thrusts take very little force to penetrate the human body.

If in doubt, the blow is good!

Calling shots

Whenever you are touched by another person's weapon, you should give **immediate verbal feedback**. Do not assume that your partner knows whether they struck you cleanly or not as multiple factors are in play.

If you are struck cleanly you should refer to the body part: "Head", "Arm", "Body", "Neck", "Leg", "Hand", etc. If wrestling to advantage, call "good", "hold", or tap to cede that advantage.

If you are touched by the weapon, but the blow is not clean, you should call one of the following:

“Flat”: the blow was not with the edge of the sword.

“Impeded”: the blow came off your weapon or shield before striking, absorbing its force. If the blow still struck with force through or off weapon/shield, you should consider it clean.

“Clothing”: The blow hit clothing, not body.

“Light”: the blow was an incidental contact only, either tapping or bouncing.

Also remember that often your partner could hit harder, but is controlling themselves for your benefit. **If in doubt, call the blow as good.**

Fencing Rule Sets

ASA will use a variety of rule sets in order to encourage flexibility and effectiveness in fencing.

Nachschlag (optional rule)

Any time a fencer is struck, *except for a clear blow to the head*, they may make a nachschlag (after stroke), providing they do not make more than one step.

EQUIPMENT

Equipment

Equipment must be suitable for the level of contact of training and freeplay. Weapons and gear must be maintained. This is an ongoing process, as we continue to evaluate risk and the effectiveness of various protection.

Minimum gear for drilling

- Slow = None
- Light = regular gloves, fencing mask if striking the head.
- Normal = protective gloves, mask, box, some protection on any area to be struck.
- Resistant = as above, mandatory torso and joint protection.

Minimum Gear for Freeplay

- Slow = Gloves, fencing mask if striking heads, box/breast protection.
- Light = PLUS protective gloves, gorget, mask.
- Synthetic freeplay = PLUS torso protection, elbow protection.
- Steel weapons = PLUS proper gambeson or equivalent. Steel, hardened leather or splinted gauntlets with solid thumb protection and good coverage. Hard elbow protection. Recommended – additional body and joint protection.

Train hard! Have fun!

