



# Adelaide Sword Academy

German Rapier Neuling Study Guide  
First Edition 2020

## Table of Contents

Historical Background.....	2
The Texts:.....	3
Stance.....	4
Anatomy of the Sword.....	8
Guards.....	10
Grip.....	12
Counterguard.....	13
Footwork.....	14
Firm-Footed Footwork.....	14
Measure.....	17
Tempo.....	18
Gaining the blade.....	19
The Four Plays.....	21
Drills for self-training.....	26



# Historical Background

During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, German citizens in cities across the Holy Roman Empire were required by law to possess arms, whereupon failure to own a weapon could result in fines, imprisonment, banishment, and a loss of citizenship. Owning a weapon as a civilian was not merely a reflection of one's status, but was in fact a prerequisite for attaining all the rights and privileges and civic duties of being an enfranchised citizen (*bürger*).

This created a strong martial ethic among civilians across the Holy Roman Empire, where sword fighting as a martial art for honour, self-defense, and sport, as opposed to just a battlefield skill flourished. The Lichtenauer tradition, developed in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries in the context of knightly combat with a longsword (mounted, on foot, armoured, unarmoured), was codified and spread by fencing guilds such as the Marx Brothers (Marxbrüder), and it became the dominant tradition across the German speaking lands as a martial art practised by civilians as well as soldiers.

In this context the rapier began to appear. Developed in Spain and Italy as an evolution of the sidesword, it was perfect for the armed civilian. Even as early as 1540, we can see straight, complex-hilted swords explicitly termed “rapiers” begin to appear in German fencing treatises such as Paulus Hector Mair’s illustrated compendium. In the later half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Joachim Meyer (our primary fencing master) wrote in detail on the use of the rapier in 1568 and 1570 as the primary civilian weapon of his age. Meyer built his system through combining techniques and principles taken from a wide range of other rapier fencing systems, including Italian, French, Spanish and Neapolitan systems, and adding them to the underlying German principles of combat with a cut and thrust single-handed sword, as epitomised by the dussack.

Then, at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, everything changed when Salvatore Fabris, an Italian fencing master from Padua, near Venice, crossed the Alps and began to teach his revolutionary new style of rapier fencing in northern Europe; first in 1598 in the court of Duke Johan Frederik in Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorp (now in northern Germany along the Danish border), and then in 1601 he attained the great honour of becoming the personal fencing instructor of the King of Denmark, Christianus IV. During this time, he produced two exemplary treatises, the colour manuscript *Scientia e Prattica dell'Arme* in 1601, and the printed *De lo Schermo, overo Scienza d'Arme* in 1606. Through these works, and the acclaim he achieved as a result of his tenure as royal fencing instructor, Fabris became one of the most famous and influential masters of his time; for 150 years, the system of Fabris would dominate the German-speaking lands, and would eventually come to extinguish the native Lichtenauer tradition.

However, in the decade after Fabris published his manuscript, there was still a robust native tradition of rapier fencing, and the manner in which the two intermingled, spearheaded by Fabris’ German students such as Hans Wilhelm Schöffler von Dietz, is a very interesting field of study, and has been comparatively little explored by the larger HEMA community.

At ASA, we study the Fabrisian tradition from a distinctly German perspective, drawing not only from Fabris himself, but from several later texts by Germans that complement, expand and adjust the Italian master’s methods with their own German preferences and sensibilities.

# The Texts:

Fabris, Salvatore. *The Art of Defense*. 1606

(The master text. If a later author says something, and Fabris explicitly says “don’t do that”, listen to Fabris)

Anonymous. *The Vienna Anonymous*. 1614

(A handwritten text by a German who lived in the Czech town of Cheb, and written entirely in fluent Italian. This text is extremely valuable, as it is basically the study notes of a fencing student who has closely studied the works of both Fabris and Capoferro, another Italian rapier master, when these traditions were alive. The VA therefore contains a lot of the assumed knowledge left unsaid by the masters themselves)

Heußler (Heussler), Sebastian *New Illustrated Fencing Book*. 1615

(A printed text in German that takes the conceptual material published by Fabris, and applies it in 500 plays that take the form of “if-then” statements. A dramatic expansion of the Fabrisian system, and presented in such a way that facilitates drilling and practice, but almost completely lacking in conceptual material. Heußler is claimed to be a student of Hans Wilhelm Schöffler, and his book reproduces Schöffler’s text, as well as images from Schöffler, Fabris and Capoferro almost exactly. Whether or not this is a case of plagiarism or collaboration is unknown)

Schöffler, Hans Wilhelm. *Thorough and Proper Description of the Art of Fencing*. 1620

(Schöffler was a student of the Fabrisian tradition, but it is claimed that he was not a direct student of the master, and may have simply fenced in the salle. He produced multiple handwritten manuscripts between 1600 and 1620, before eventually printing his final text in 1620. The material contained within is largely the same as that in Heußler, but who penned the original version is unknown – neither Heußler nor Schöffler acknowledge the other in either of their texts.)

Köppe, Joachim. *New Discourse on the Knightly and World-renowned Art of Fencing*. 1619

(Köppe was not a fencing master, but rather a fencing enthusiast – his day job was as a professor of philosophy and medicine at the University of Madgeburg. His text is therefore less a collection of lessons, and more a scholarly discourse on the nature of this new style of fencing. Köppe is useful, as he not only describes this new style of rapier fencing with an academic’s objective rigour, but also compares it to the native tradition as it was still being practised in his day. He also explains key concepts unsaid by other authors, such as the German perspective of measure)

# Stance

The hallmark of the Fabris Tradition is the forward-leaning stance with the sword fully extended towards the opponent. This stands in comparison to the backward-leaning stance as preferred by other Italian masters such as Capoferro and Giganti.

The degree of forward lean varies, as seen below:

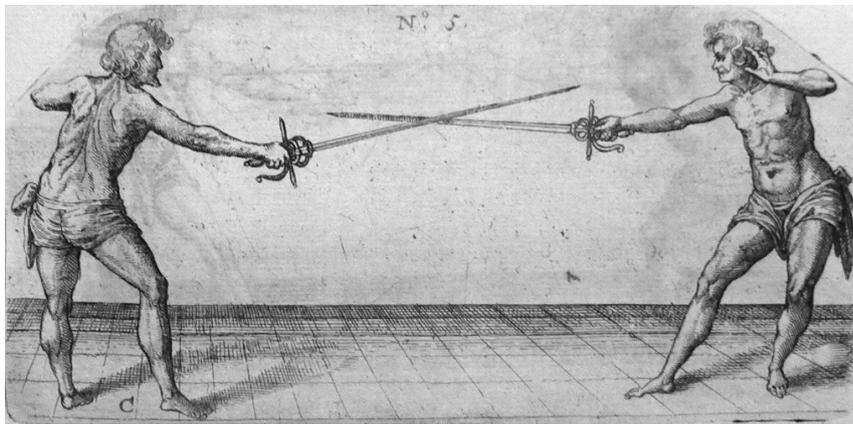


Figure 1: Slight forward pivot (Heußler)

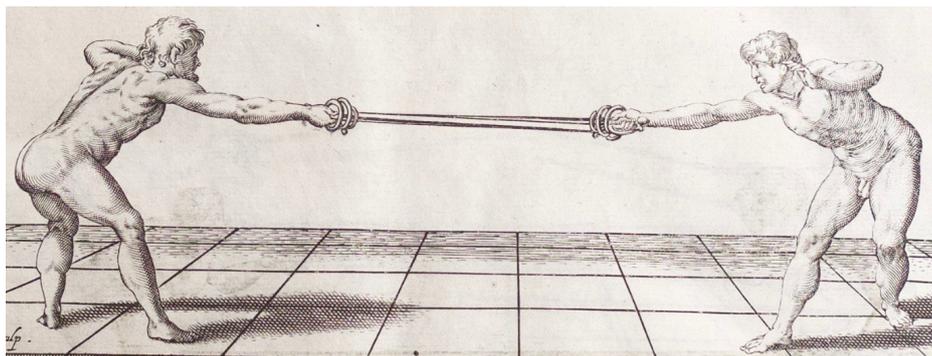


Figure 2: Deep forward pivot (Fabris)

As an aside, German fencers in general appear to have long favoured a forward-leaning stance in rapier combat, as can be seen in these images from Meyer and Mair:



Figure 3: Meyer 1568



Figure 4: Mair 1540

Holding the sword fully extended before you has the following advantages and disadvantages:

#### Pros

- Maximum extension of point
  - Keeps opponent at bay
  - Forces them to deal with your point before coming into measure – gives you a tempo
- Weak of the sword fully extended
  - Best able to gain the opponent's sword
- Strong held before your body
  - Best able to parry the opponent's sword, and defend you
- If pointed straight at the opponent's face, can hide the blade of the sword behind the point
  - Disguises your measure, and makes it hard for the opponent to gain your blade

#### Cons

- The extended weak, while best able to gain the opponent's sword, is also vulnerable to being gained itself
- Holding the sword fully outstretched for long periods of time is tiring
- If standing upright, the extended strong leaves your abdomen fully exposed to an attack from below

In response to the cons, the last most point is the justification for the forward pivot. By folding your body at the pelvis, you accomplish three things:

1. Your vital organs are now kept safe by being held much farther away from the opponent.
2. Your head has now been lowered such that it now sits behind the strong and hilt of your sword, making it much more protected
3. You present an overall much smaller target to your opponent, forcing them to work harder to find the few openings that you have left

The degree to which you pivot your body depends on your own physical ability – do not pivot so much that you lose mobility, as this extra clumsiness can leave you rooted in place and vulnerable.

Go only as low as you can while still being agile of foot, but train continuously to go lower.

This low stance, combined with the strain of holding the sword fully extended, and the skill necessary to prevent your exposed weak from being gained, do present a steep learning curve, but do not despair! The combined advantages of this stance far outweigh the disadvantages, and they serve to keep yourself much safer than you might expect, while also giving your opponent the maximum threat and forcing them to work much much harder to try and hit you.

Forming the stance:

1. Stand fully upright with your back straight, your shoulders back, your chin up, and your belly in
2. Turn your non-dominant foot somewhat off to the side (~50-90°), and your dominant foot straight at the opponent
3. Drop your weight onto your non-dominant (back) foot. You should be able to move your front foot freely without shifting your weight
4. Take a small step forward with your now non-weighted dominant (front) foot.
5. Keeping your back straight, but not upright, pivot at your hips. Stick your backside straight out over your back foot, and allow yourself to fold inwards like a pair of scissors
6. Extend your dominant arm before you, but keep a small bend in the elbow, with the elbow pointing towards the ground
7. Raise your non-dominant hand beside your face, ready to parry the opponent's sword if need be.



Figure 5: The stance from the front (Köppe)

Another way of forming the stance:

1. Stand fully upright with your back straight, your shoulders back, your chin up, and your belly in.
2. Step out with your feet so that they are shoulder width apart, with your knees slightly bent. Stand with your bodyweight on the outside edges of your feet, with your knees tracking over your toes.
3. Fold yourself at the hips like a pair of scissors, sticking your backside straight out

4. Adjust your feet so that you have your sword foot pointed straight at the opponent, and your backfoot off towards the side at a 50-90° angle. Turn your body slightly, and keep your backside pointed straight backwards, with your weight over your back foot.
5. Extend your sword arm straight ahead of you, with a slight bend in the elbow, and hold your off-hand beside your face.

#### Dos and Don'ts:

- **Do** keep your weight on the foot that does not move – the other foot should be able to move freely without any shifting of the body weight
- **Don't** arch your back up after the pivot, like a cobra about to strike
- **Don't** slouch your shoulders forward and try to curl into the low stance
  - Instead, do keep your back straight, your shoulders back, and your chin up, while pivoting and leaning forward (See Figures 1 and 2)
- **Don't** allow your backside to point off to the side while pivoting
  - Open up your hips, and rock your back hip and backside straight over your back foot, instead of just “squatting” down
- **Do** keep your knees pointing over your toes, and **don't** allow your knee to cave inwards
  - Open up your hips, and stand with your weight over the outer edge of your foot, with your knee tracking over your little toe, and your big toe pointed at your opponent.
- **Don't** lock your arm straight out, but **do** keep a small degree of flex across your entire arm

# Anatomy of the Sword

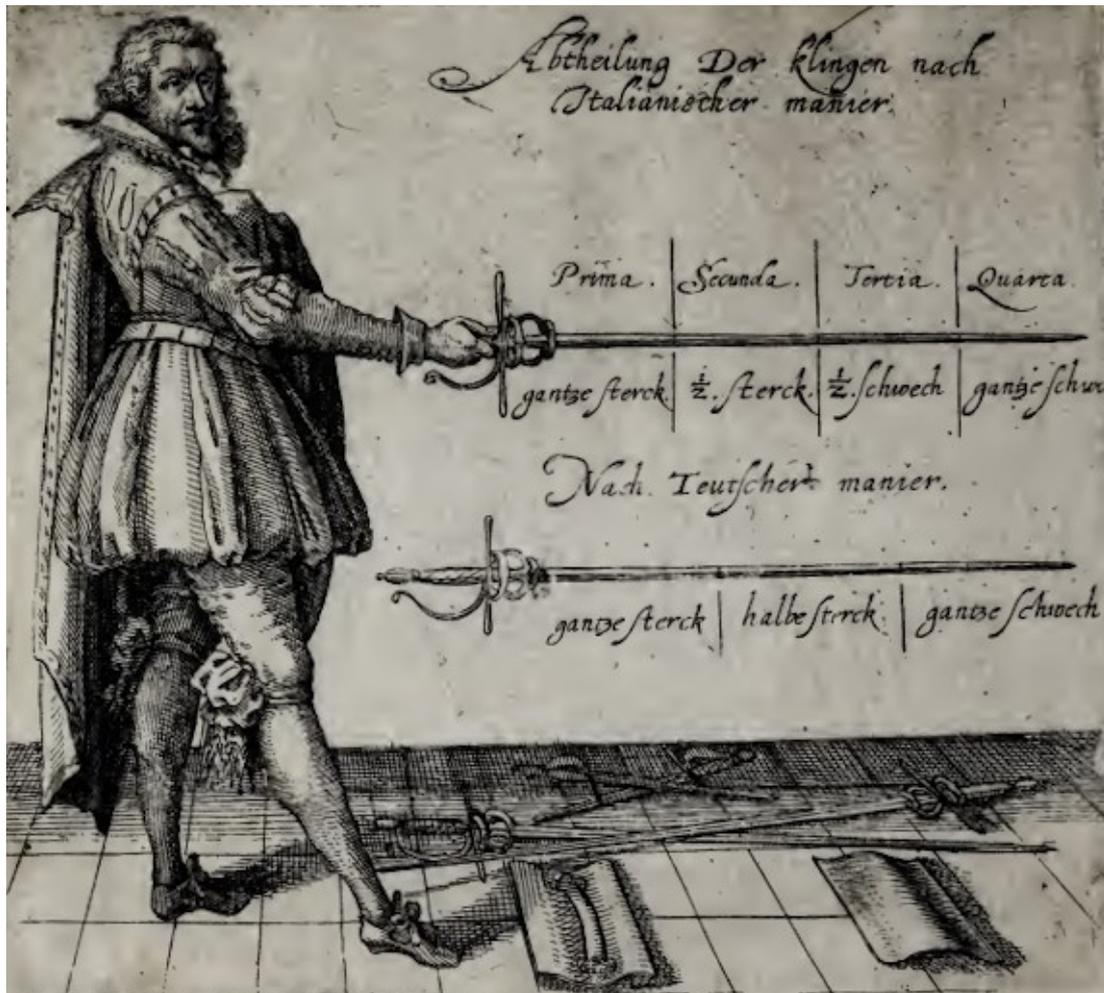


Figure 6: Division of the blade in the Italian and German manners (Heußler)

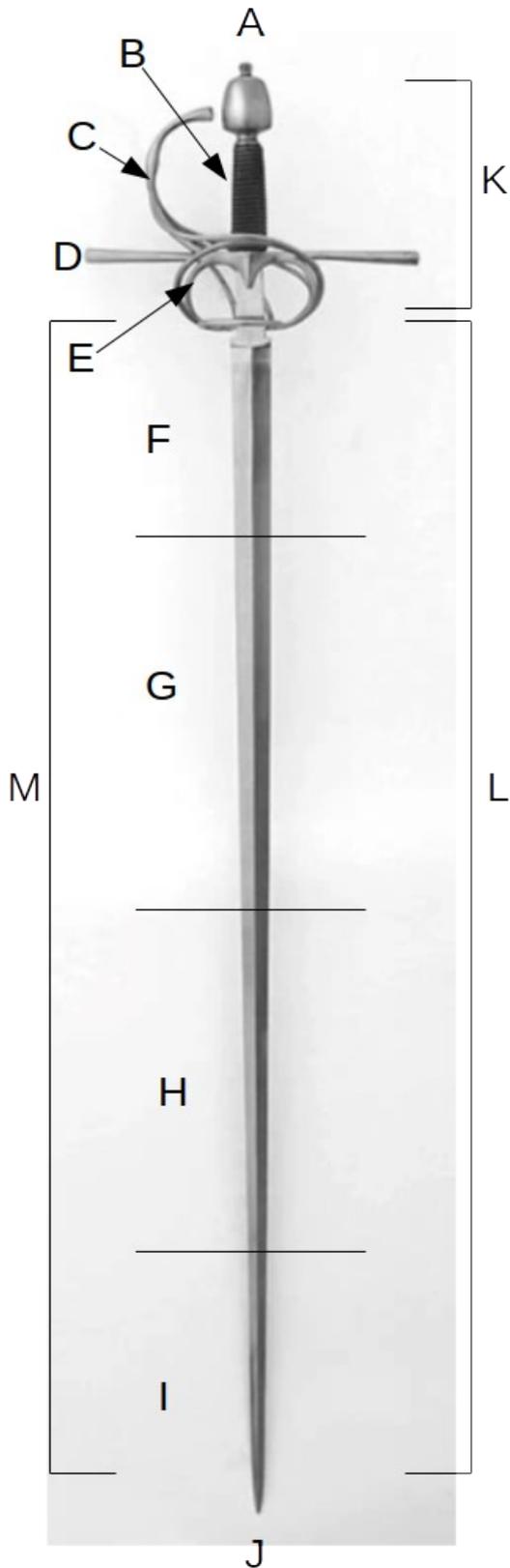
The blade is divided into 4 equal parts, with the Strong at the hilt of the sword, and the Weak at the tip:

1. Full Strong (*Ganze Stark*)
2. Half Strong (*Halb Stark*)
3. Half Weak (*Halb Schwach*)
4. Full Weak (*Ganze Schwach*)

In the older German tradition, the blade is typically divided into 3:

1. Strong/Full-Strong (*Ganze Stark*)
2. Middle/Half-Strong (*Halb Stark*)
3. Weak/Full-Weak (*Ganze Schwach*)

When engaging, typically engage a given portion of the opponent's sword with the portion one lower on yours, e.g. place your half-weak against his full weak.



A. Pommel

B. Grip

C. Knucklebow

D. Quillion / Crossbar

E. Side / Finger Rings

F. Full Strong

G. Half Strong

H. Half Weak

I. Full Weak

J. Point

K. Hilt

L. Short Edge

M. Long Edge

# Guards

There are four guards in Italian-derived rapier systems, including Fabris, deriving from the rotation of the hand.

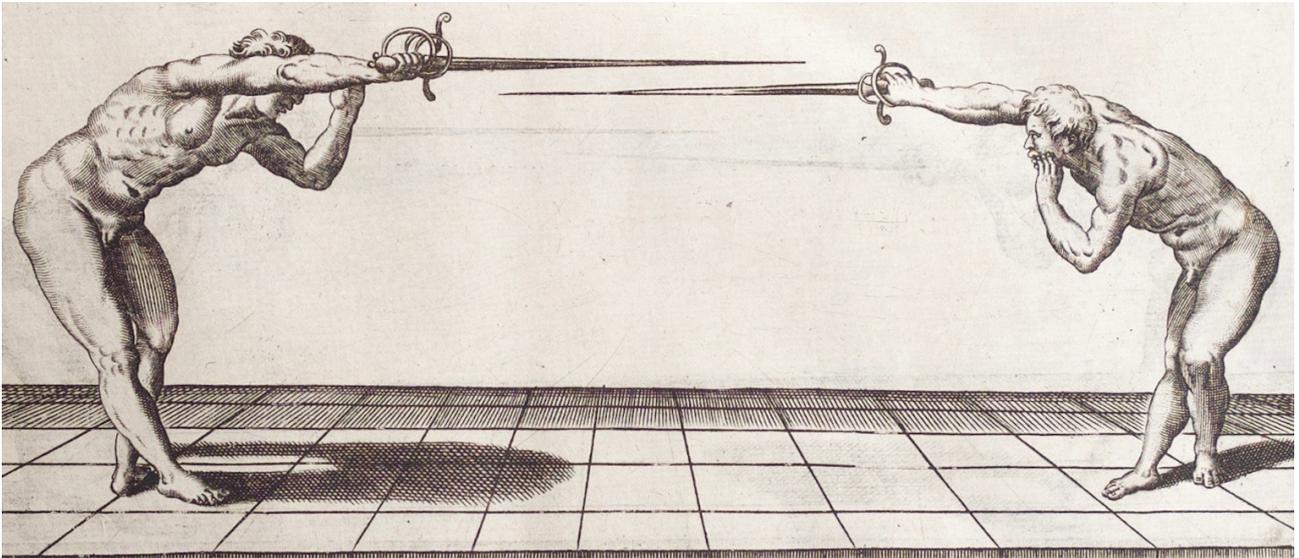


Figure 7: First Guard (Fabris)

First Guard (*Prima*)

- Palm to the outside
- Long edge pointed up, Short edge pointed down

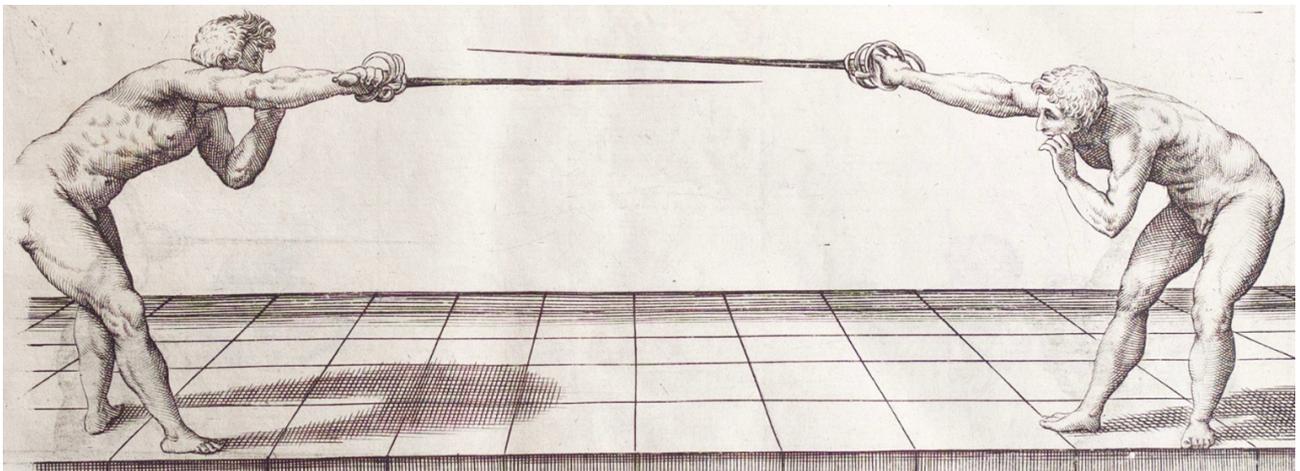


Figure 8: Second Guard (Fabris)

Second Guard (*Secunda*)

- Palm pointed down
- Long edge pointed to the outside, Short edge pointed to the inside

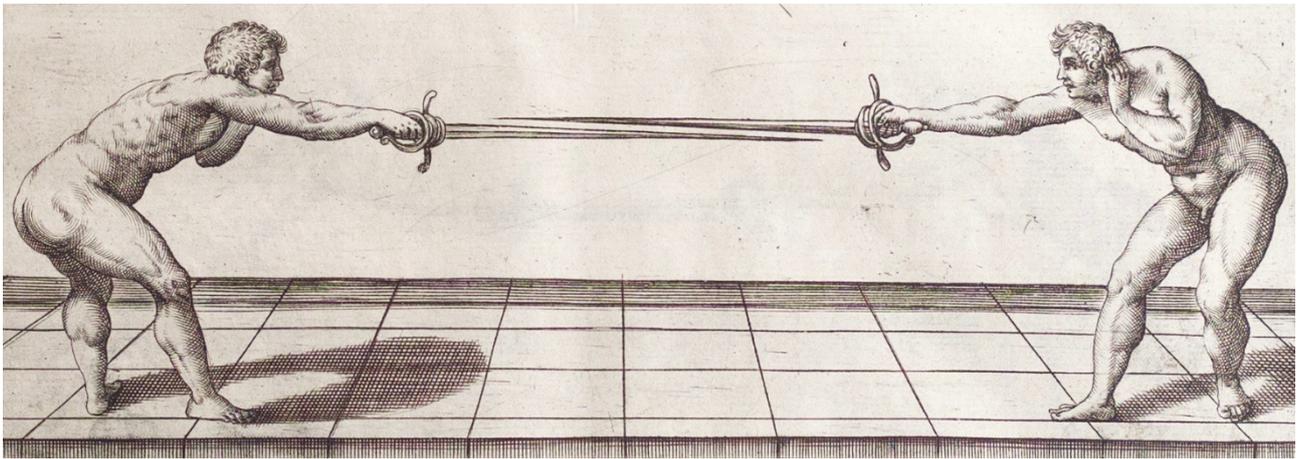


Figure 9: Third Guard (Fabris)

### Third Guard (*Tertia*)

- Palm pointed to the inside
- Long edge pointed down, Short edge pointed up

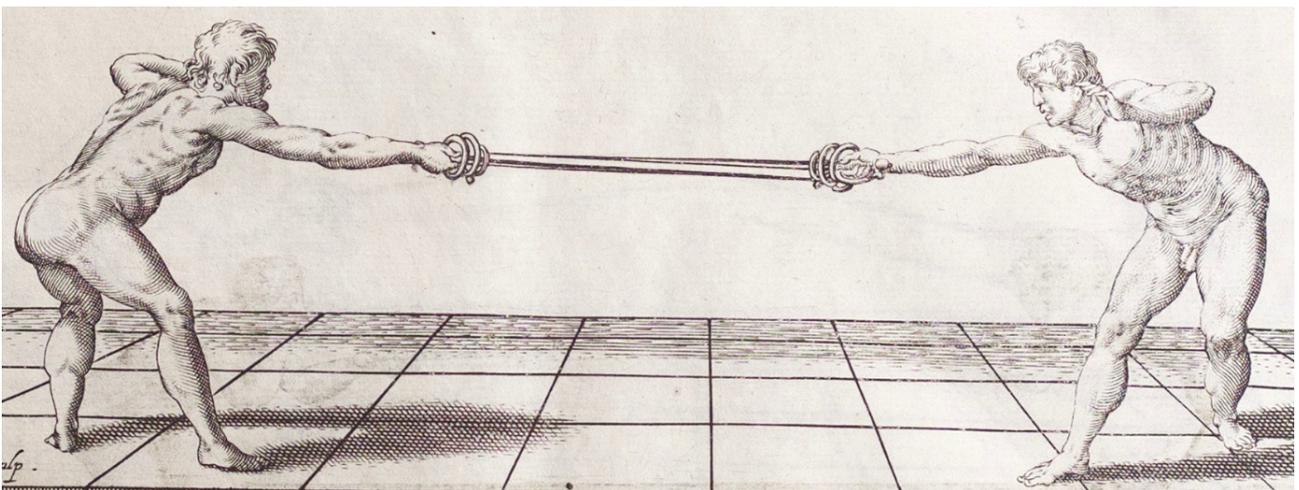


Figure 10: Fourth Guard (Fabris)

### Fourth Guard (*Quarta*)

- Palm pointed up
- Long edge pointed to the inside, Short edge pointed to the outside

# Grip

It is interesting that none of the authors actually specify how to grip the sword, and indeed, there are a few different methods shown in the various texts, both with the index finger over the quillion, and without. It appears, therefore, that historically the exact grip used by Fabrisian Germans is something of a matter of personal preference, and likely dynamically changed as they moved between different guards.

That being said, there are more wrong ways of holding the sword than correct ways, and a poor grip will hamper your fencing more than almost anything (apart from footwork), so it is worth spending some time on the proper grip.

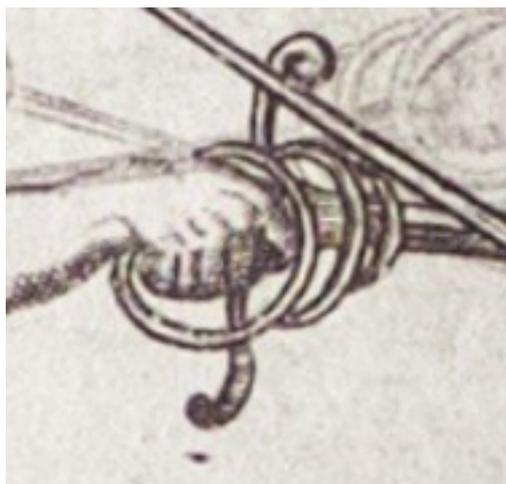
For the school recommended method of holding the sword, see this video by Guy Windsor:

<https://guywindsor.net/blog/rbc007>

For a demonstration of more dynamic rapier gripping, see this video by Reiner van Noort:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dczRri3IjSM>

The conventional method of holding a rapier is to hook your index finger over the quillion, like so:



*Figure 11: Fingered grip (Fabris)*

It is important that when you hold the sword, you do not “choke” it by gripping it too tightly in a fist. It is also important that you do not try to hold the sword like you would a hammer, and then force your wrist to form an unpleasant kink as you try to hold it fully extended.

Instead, place your palm on top of the grip, and wrap around your middle finger just behind the quillion. In this manner, the pommel should be resting just under your wrist, thereby preventing the blade of the sword from tipping forward over the pivot point of your middle finger. In this manner, the sword should just sit naturally straight as an extension of your arm, supported by only your middle finger. Then, simply wrap the rest of your fingers lightly around the grip as additional stability and support.

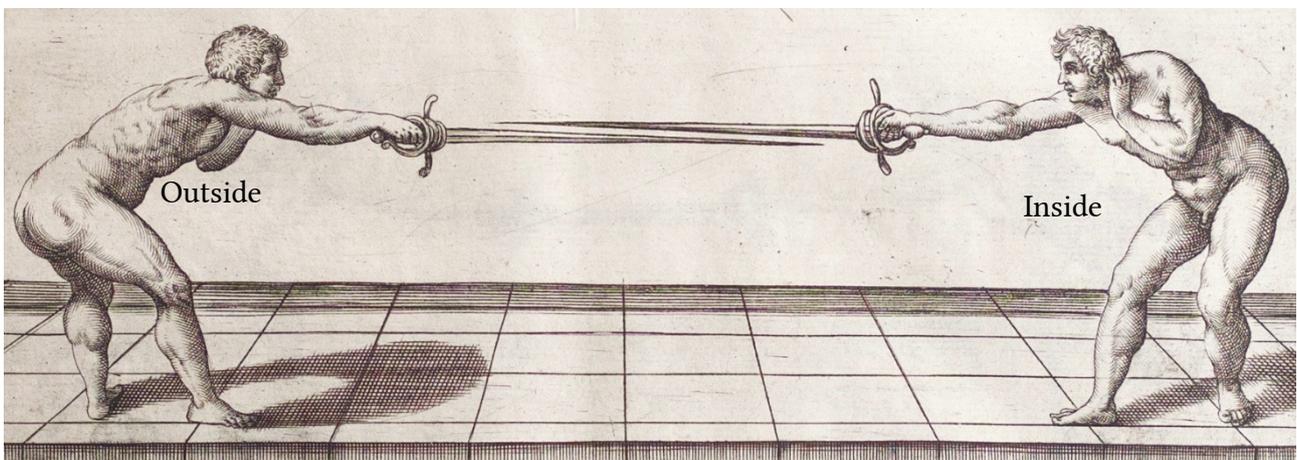
# Counterguard

It is essential that in rapier fencing that you do not think of yourself as taking a “guard” against your opponent, but rather a “counterguard”. **You must always seek to make yourself safe**, before you can hope to move into measure and wound your opponent.

**A well-formed counterguard is one where the straight line between your opponent’s point and your body is fully covered by your sword.**

This is achieved not just with the position of the sword, but also the position of the body. After all, no matter how broad your blade, or how complex your hilt, you cannot cover your entire upright body with just your sword. Therefore, not only must you put your sword in front of your body, you must also put your body behind your sword.

Observe this figure of the Third Guard from Fabris:



*Figure 12: Counterguards in Third (Fabris)*

Note how, while the hand position is the same (they are both in Third Guard), they are holding their bodies differently. For the left hand figure, the opponent’s blade is to his outside, so he squares his shoulders, turns his front foot and torso towards the outside, and positions his arm and fully extended sword along the outside line such that his whole body is now covered behind the line of his arm and sword.

For the right hand figure, the opponent’s sword is on his inside, so he steps across with his front foot towards the inside, pushes his left shoulder back thereby angling his entire torso, and makes himself as narrow as he can on his inside. He then brings his arm and sword across to the inside, so that now his angled body is fully covered by the line of the sword.

This is another demonstration of the power of the forward-pivoted stance – with the lower targets removed from danger by the pivot, and the opening inside or outside removed by the turning of the body into the proper counterguard, there are now very few openings left for your opponent to take, making you incredibly secure, and allowing you to safely find the opponent’s sword and advance into measure.

# Footwork

Footwork is the literal foundation upon which sword fighting rests – if you discover an issue with your fencing, it can usually be fixed through proper footwork

The Fabrisian-German tradition had three types of footwork, used in different contexts: *Per Piede Firma*, or per the “Firm-foot”, *Per Passada*, or per Passing, and *Per Caminada*, or per Proceeding.

Firm-footed footwork is the most basic and fundamental footwork, and it is the most conventional; the body weight is kept over the back foot, and the energy stored in it is used as a spring to power an extended lunge. When advancing or retreating with a firm foot, it is important that you keep your weight on your backfoot, and do not allow it to drift forward, even as you step.

Passing Footwork consists of many smaller steps with both feet, and is more dynamic, with weight shifting from foot to foot. This is the default footwork of the earlier systems of Dussack, Longsword and Sidesword/Rappier.

Proceeding footwork is the hallmark and highest skill of the Fabrisian-German Rapier tradition, and involves walking straight at your opponent with no interruptions, and defeating them in a single pass regardless of guard or technique that they employ. This skill is highly advanced, but it is far from impossible, and once you have the basics of measure, tempo and fühlen down, you can begin exploring the first rule of Proceeding with Resolution. That will be presented at another time, however.

## Firm-Footed Footwork

### Advancing

1. Stand with your weight on your back foot.
2. Extend your unweighted front foot by about a step
3. Keeping your weight on your back foot, bring it forwards the same distance as your step with the front foot

### Retreating

1. Stand with your weight on your back foot.
2. Without moving your weight forward at all, shift your weight back foot by about a step. Ensure that you step on the balls of your feet.
3. Keeping your weight on your back foot, bring your unweighted front foot back by the same distance as your step with the back foot

### Lunging

Here you can see a description of the full extension of the lunge out of Heußler (which in turn was plagiarised out of Capferro...). The starting positions here apply to a more shallow forward pivot in the Counterguard.



Figure 13: Full Extension of Lunge

Key to Description of full lunge:

- A) Off Shoulder in Counterguard
- B) Off Knee in Counterguard
- C) Off Foot in Counterguard
- D) The Total Distance between Feet at full extension of Lunge
- E) Sword Foot in Counterguard
- F) The entire upper leg in Counterguard
- G) Sword Hand in Counterguard
- H) Sword Arm at full extension of Lunge
- I) Sword Knee at full extension of Lunge (almost an extra foot)
- J) n/a
- K) Sword Foot at full extension of Lunge (little more than an extra foot)
- L) Off Foot at full extension of Lunge
- M) Off Knee at full extension of Lunge (less than half a step)

And here are the stance and lunge positions as shown in Fabris

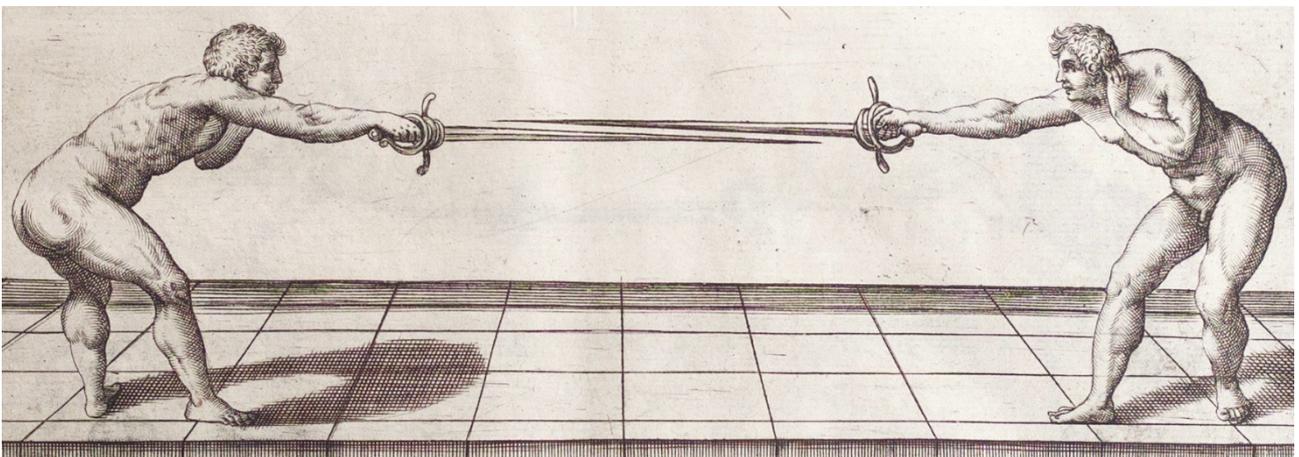


Figure 14: Counterguard (Fabris)

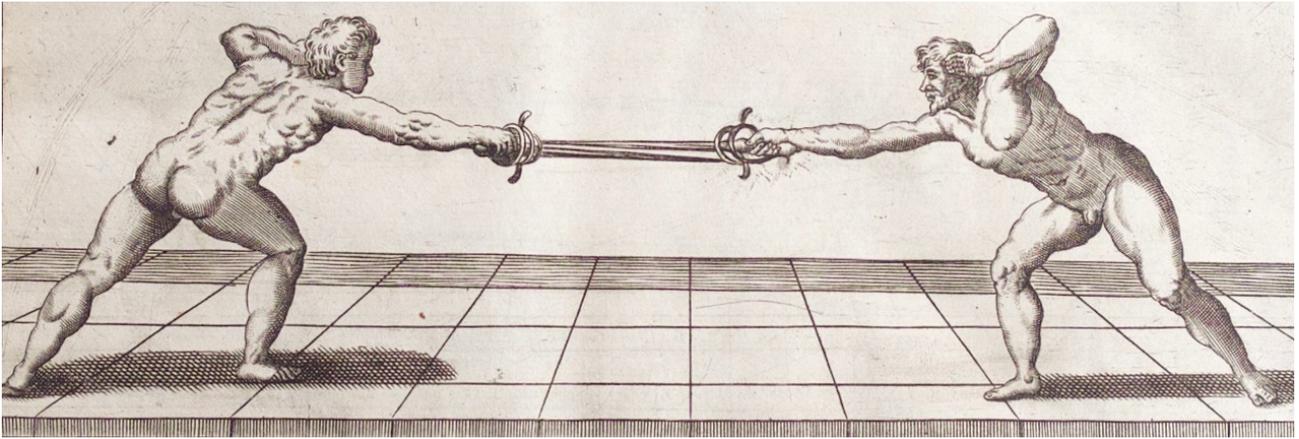


Figure 15: Lunge Position (Fabris)

To execute a lunge:

1. Begin in the counterguard
2. Reach out with your sword hand towards the target, straightening out your slightly bent arm
3. When your arm is fully straightened, reach out with your sword shoulder, turning your non-dominant shoulder back, so that your torso is now side-on to the target
4. Allow your body weight to shift forward beyond your front foot, and step with it
  1. With this step, push off with your back foot for extra power,
  2. And throw your non-dominant arm back so that it is in line with your shoulders and sword
5. Ensure that at the full extension of your lunge, that your head and body are safe behind the hilt and strong of your sword

Recovering

After your lunge, you must ensure that you recover quickly, smoothly and above all safely, so that you can readily defend yourself against an afterblow or counter by your opponent.

1. Begin in the fully extended lunge position
2. Without moving your head, body or sword, bend your back knee so that your weight begins to move back over your back foot
3. Once your weight has moved fully off your front foot onto your back foot and you can move it freely, lightly step your front foot behind your back foot, and then pass backwards with your backfoot.
4. After passing backwards, reset your weight again on your back foot, turn in your shoulder, and then slightly bend your arm
5. In this manner, you take two steps backwards after your lunge, and return to your original guard position

The progression:

Lunge: Hand → Body → Foot

Recovery: Feet → Body → Hand

Two Key Points:

1) You must always start the motion with your hand/sword, never with your body/feet. To move with your sword first is “True Time”, and ensures that you are safe and secure, and that you can easily take the Tempo. To move your body/foot first is “False Time”, and is inherently slower, and leaves you very vulnerable – Unless you know what you are doing, you must always move in True Time, especially in Firm-Footed and Passing footwork.

2) The lunge and recovery is powered by the motion of the back shoulder – you can imagine that you have a little handle that your grasp in your off-hand. Slam that handle backwards in order to push yourself forward into your lunge, and slam that handle forwards to pull yourself into your recovery.

## Measure

Measure is the distance between two opponents wherein **at least one** can be hit. This is an important point – if a very tall person is facing a very short person, then the tall person will be able to hit the short person without danger of being hit themselves. The same applies to if one fencer has a very long weapon, and the other a short one.

Therefore, **when you are considering the measure of the fight, it is essential that you consider what your opponent’s measure is, before your own.**

The division of measure was a subject of great debate amongst the German rapier masters, as it appears that there was a clash between the native sense of measure, and the new system brought over by the Italians. The Italians distinguished between two measures, the Wide Measure (*Misura Larga*), and the Narrow Measure (*Misura Stretta*). The Wide Measure is that in which you can hit your opponent with a single step, as in with a lunge or a pass. The Narrow Measure is that in which you can hit your opponent with just an extension of the arm and body, without stepping at all.

The Germans, however, in their native fencing traditions, preferred to divide measure into where you engage upon your opponent’s blade. Joachim Meyer described the onset, or to-fencing (*zufechten*), where the opponents are at a wide enough measure where they are engaging weak upon weak, the war (*krieg*), where the fencers engage middle upon middle, and close fighting where the opponent’s come into strong on strong and grappling distance. Measure in this sense is more tied to how you work upon the opponent's sword as you enter and leave the engagement.

To that end, there was great disagreement between German Rapier masters as to how to square these two different point of view. Some simply adopted the Italian system wholesale, such as the author of the Vienna Anonymous, while others, such as Schöffler and Heußler, apparently opted

for a more Germanic approach of focusing more upon the blade engagement than mere distance of the foot.

Köppe gives a blend of the two systems, where the Latin terms *Mensura Larga* and *Mensura Stricta* are used to define a measure where you engage upon their full weak with your half weak (*Larga*), and where you engage their half weak with your half strong (*Stricta*). This is the system used in the school.

**Mensura Larga:** The measure where you can bind your **half-weak** upon their **full-weak**.

**Mensura Stricta:** The measure where you can bind your **half-strong** upon their **half-weak**.

## Tempo

**A Tempo is any motion by a fencer while in measure.**

Tempo is a term brought into the German tradition from Italian, and refers any motion of the sword, hand, or foot that either fencer makes while in measure – motions outside of the measure are not considered Tempos (*tempi*).

According to Fabris, it is called Tempo, or time, because the time taken to make a given motion cannot be used to simultaneously make another. Therefore, if your opponent makes a motion in measure, and you move to attack or press the advantage at the same time, you will succeed because your opponent cannot make two motions within the same instance of time.

In Rapier, careful observation of tempo is essential, as any tempo by your opponent is a perfect opportunity to act in the same time, and either attack, or move to gain an advantage. But, by the same notion, you must be extremely careful and judicious about your own movements while in measure, lest you move carelessly and give your opponent a tempo in which to wound you.

Key point: The tempo of the hand is always faster than the tempo of the foot. Therefore, pay careful attention to the motion of your opponent's feet, and seek to move your sword as they take a step. If you do this, you will be much much more likely to be successful than if they move with just their hand alone.

## Gaining the blade

Gaining the blade (also called finding the blade, or *stringiren*) is where you place your blade in a position of dominance over the opponent's, such that they cannot attack you. This is not to be confused with the concept of the counterguard – In a well formed counterguard, the line between the opponent's point and your body is closed by the position of your body and your sword, while you have gained the opponent's blade when your sword is sufficiently mechanically stronger than your opponent's that they cannot push you aside.

Gaining the blade is a critical element of forming a strong counterguard in measure, and is the first part of victory.

In order to gain the blade, you must place a stronger part of your blade against a weaker part of theirs. Observe the following figure from Heußler:

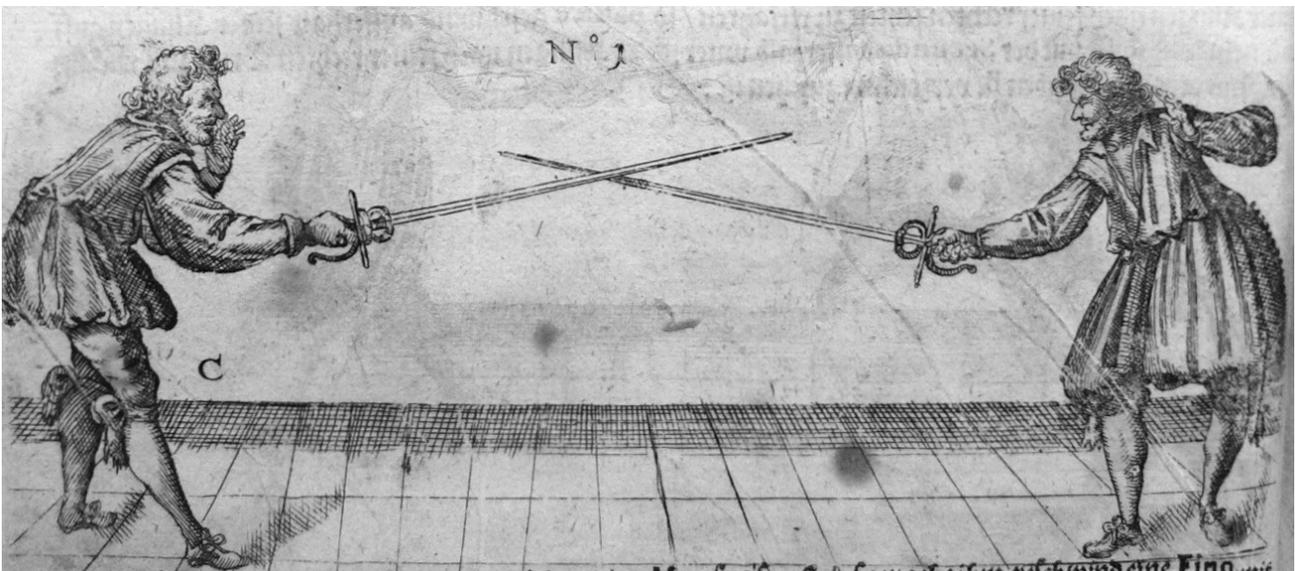


Figure 16: Gaining the blade (Heußler)

The figure on the left, marked by the letter C, has gained his opponent's sword because he has placed his half-weak against the opponent's full weak. As a result, if the opponent tries to push our fencer's sword away, he will not be able to because the principles of leverage work against him.

Another way of achieving mechanical advantage is through the use of blade angle. The blade can be angled up or down, and inside or outside. If you raise the point of your sword above the level of your opponent's point, you will be mechanically stronger. However, be wary: As you raise your point, you also raise your weak, and this makes it more exposed and vulnerable to attack with a straight blade.

In short: **Angled beats Straight, and Straight beats Angled.**

Additionally, as you raise your point, ensure that you do not raise it above the outline of your opponent, thereby removing the threat to them, and allowing them to push in safely. Also, make sure that you do not leave your lower body exposed as you raise the point.

Two important points about mechanical strength and gaining the blade:

1. **The sword is strongest on the side to which it points.**
2. **The long edge covers, but the short edge does not.**

What this means is, if you gain the opponent's sword with your short edge by making an angle with the sword, you will be able to resist them pushing against you much more than if you were gaining with the long edge, but you will be less protected from their attacks on that side. Conversely, if you gain with the angled long edge, you will be much more protected along the line of your sword, especially at your full-strong, but if your opponent manages to bind upon your weak, they will be able to push it aside much more easily. You must therefore be very deft in how you turn, angle and straighten your sword to ensure that you maintain your own mechanical advantage over your opponent, and deny them mechanical advantage of their own.

**Never muscle or force the sword – true strength in fencing comes from the principles of physics and blade leverage.**

Finally, while you may find a greater security in gaining the blade by touching or pressing lightly against the opponent's blade, there is the downside of telegraphing to your opponent that you have in fact gained their blade, giving them the opportunity to escape. If you practice gaining the blade without touching it, your opponent will find it very difficult to see that you are actually in a position of advantage, which is of tremendous benefit to your fencing.

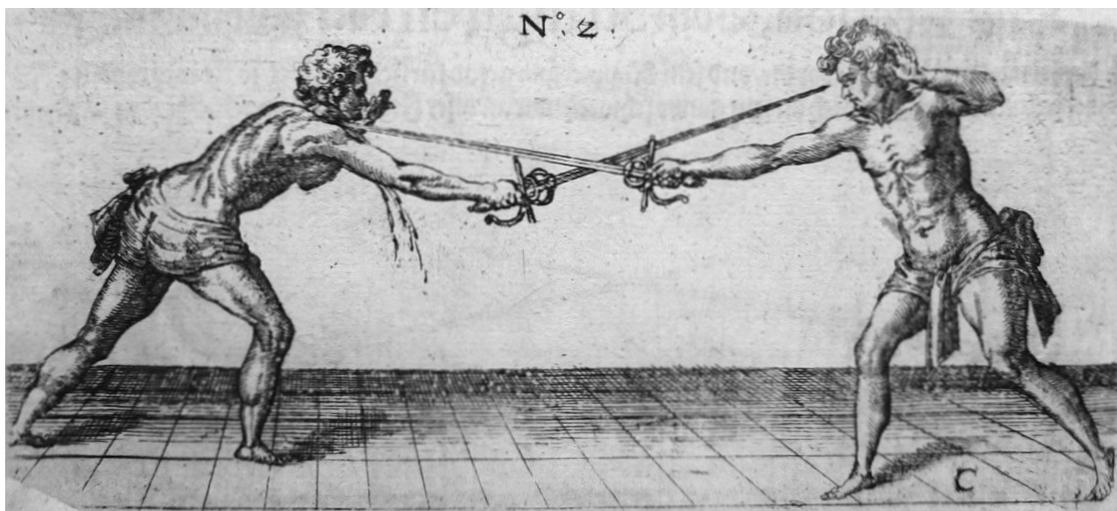
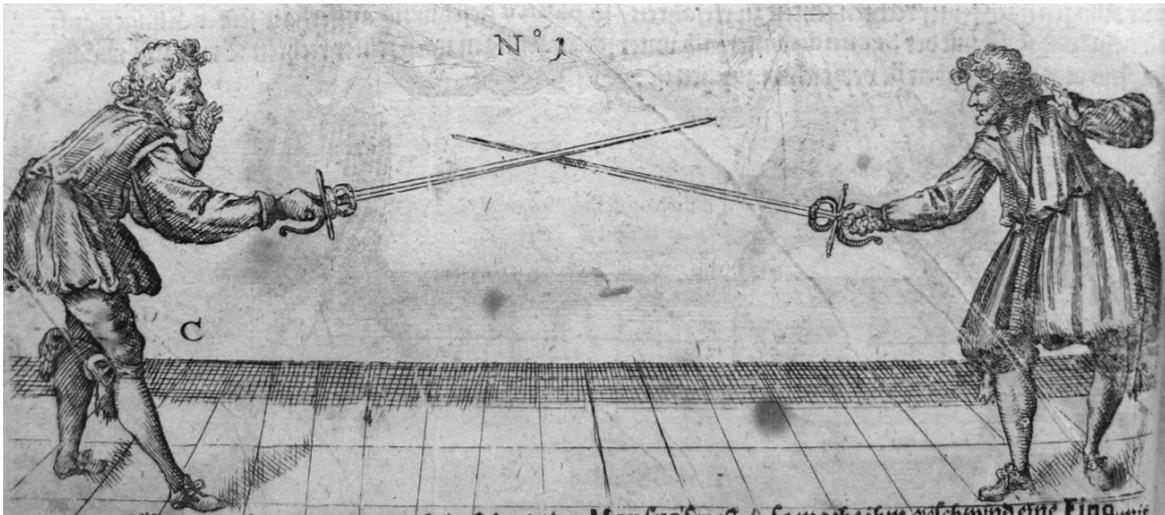
# The Four Plays

These four plays from Schöffler and Heußler contain the essential foundation of German Rapier fencing, upon which the entire rest of the system depends upon.

They consist of engaging the opponent from the inside and outside, from the *Mensura Larga*, and the *Mensura Stricta*.

Note, the directions given here apply to two fencers of the same handedness.

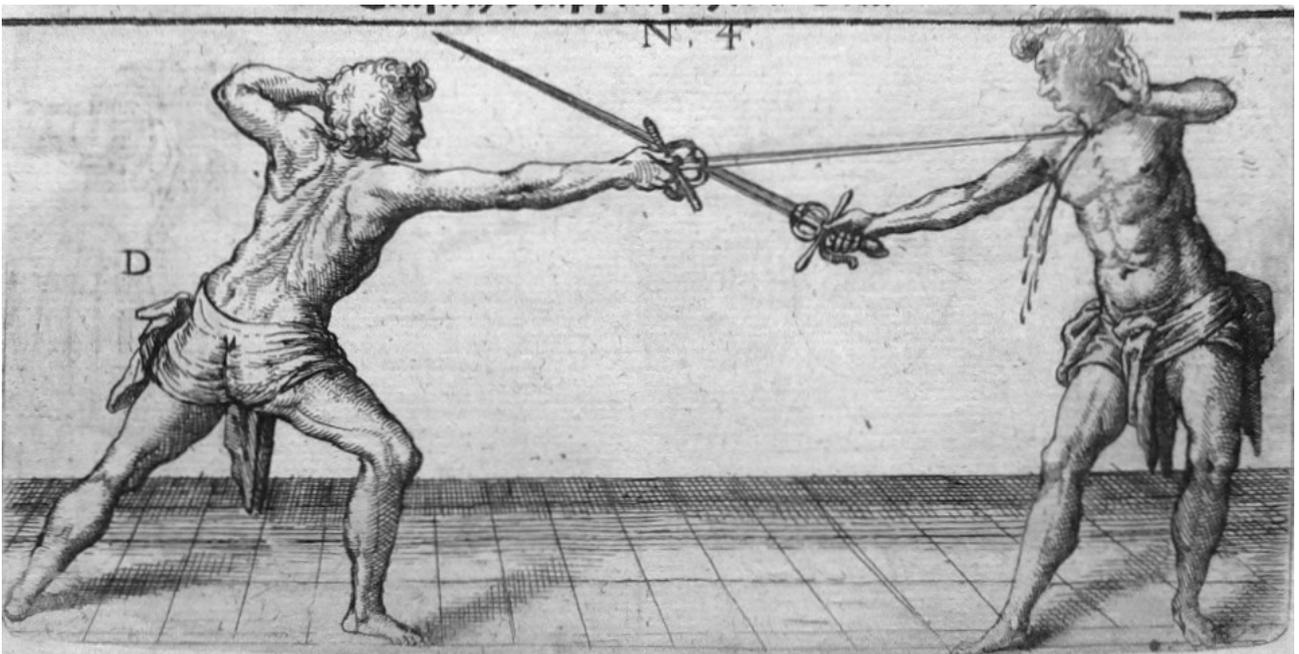
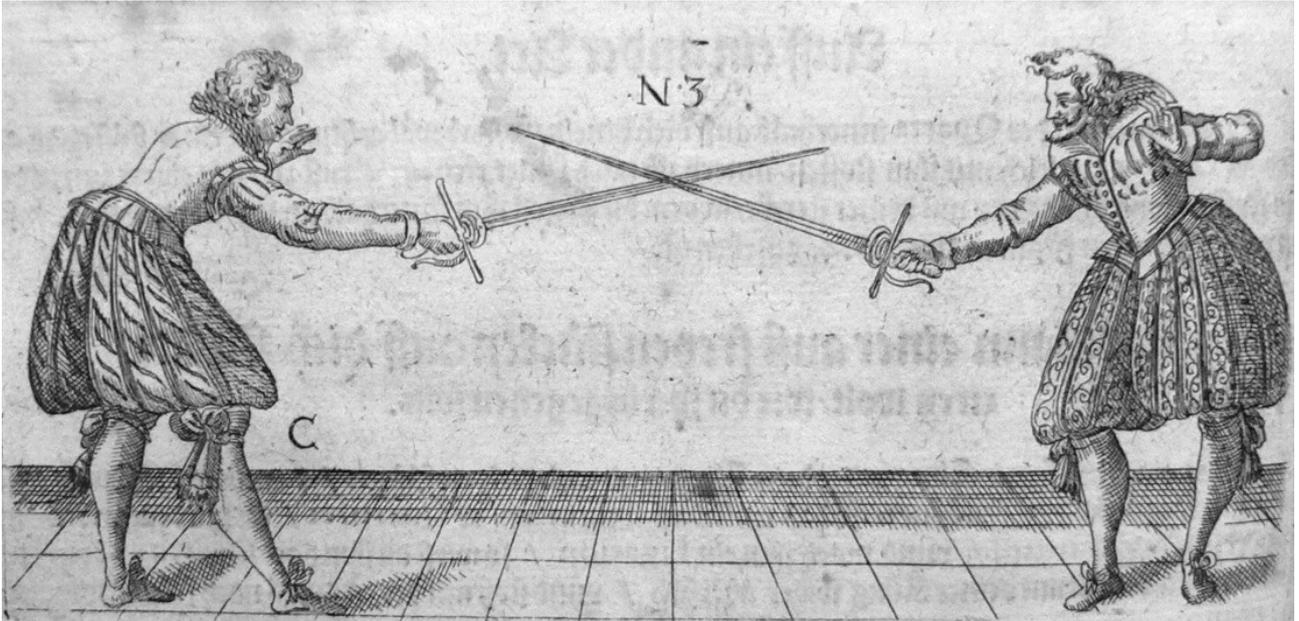
Play 1. Inside Larga



The opponent stands before you with an extended blade either pointed straight at you, or pointed slightly towards their outside. Form a counterguard to the inside, and engage their sword on the inside in Third with your half-weak against their full weak. [N°.1]

When they disengage towards your outside, lunge in the same Tempo, and thrust to their dominant shoulder outside in Third. [N°.2]

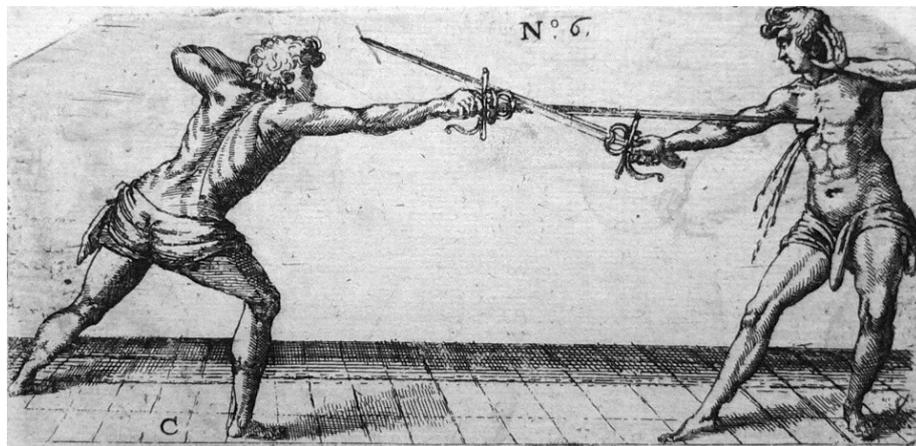
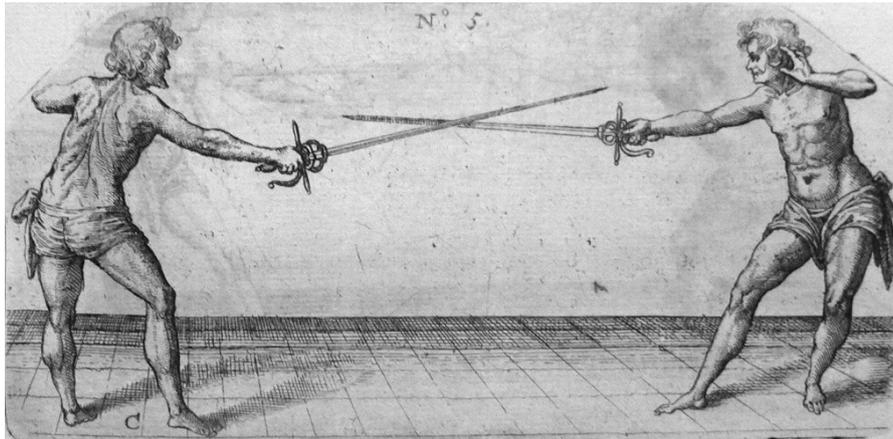
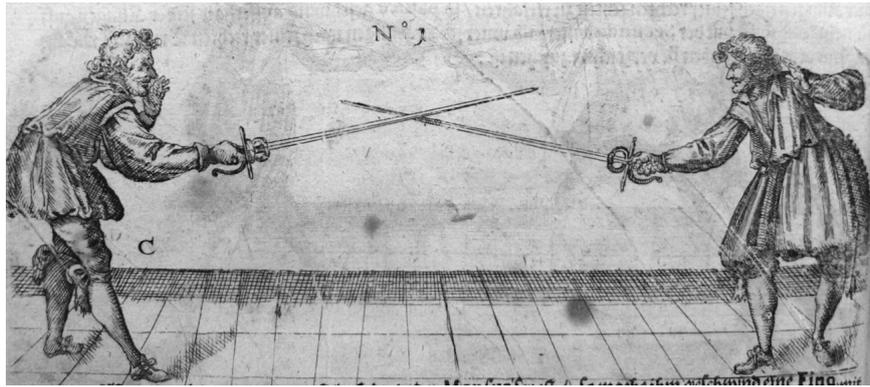
Play 2. Outside Larga



The opponent stands before you with an extended blade pointed slightly towards their inside. Form a counterguard to the outside, and engage their sword on the outside in Third with your half-weak against their full weak. [N°.3]

When they disengage towards your inside, lunge in the same Tempo, and thrust to their dominant shoulder inside in Fourth. [N°.4]

### Play 3. Inside Stricta

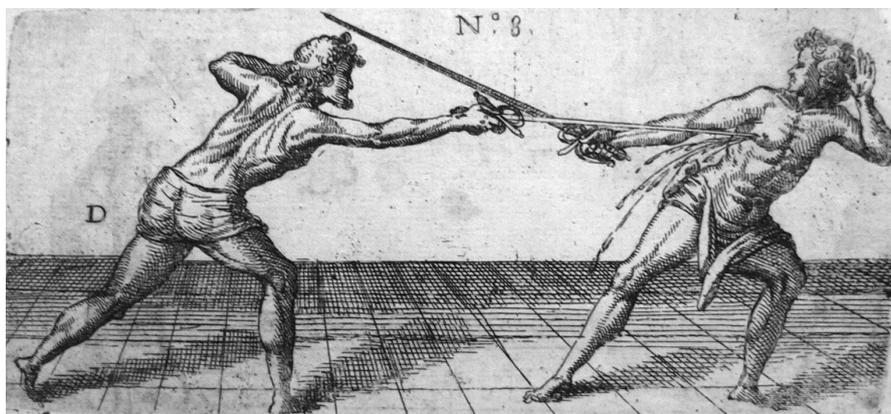
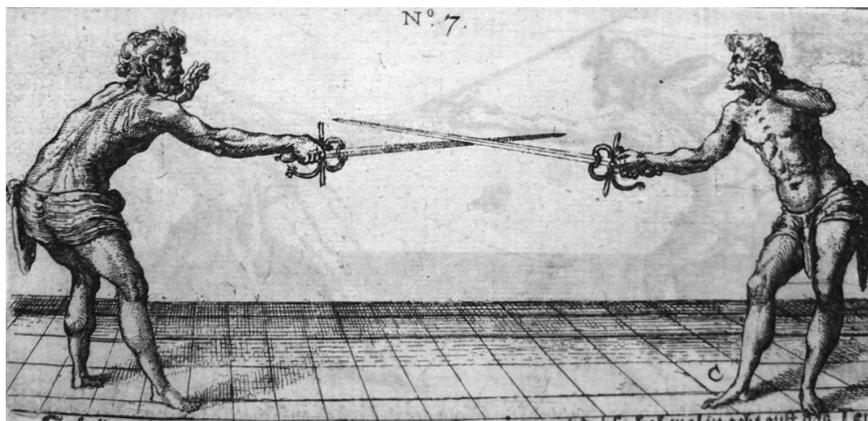
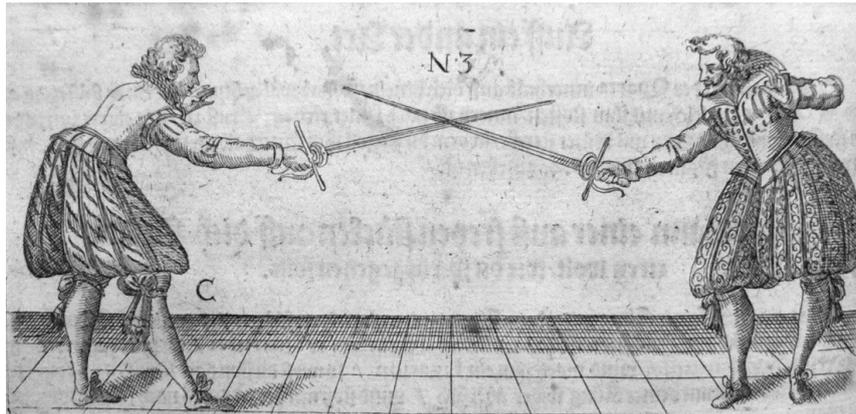


The opponent stands before you with an extended blade either pointed straight at you, or pointed slightly towards their outside. Form a counterguard to the inside, and engage their sword on the inside in Third with your half-weak against their full weak. [N°.1]

When they disengage towards your outside, do a counter-disengage in the same Tempo, so that you come back onto the inside engagement. As you counter-disengage, advance slightly in towards the opponent, and reengage upon their blade with your half-strong against their half weak. [N°.5]

When they disengage again towards your outside, lunge in the same Tempo, and thrust to their dominant shoulder outside in Third. [N°.6]

## Play 4. Outside Stricta

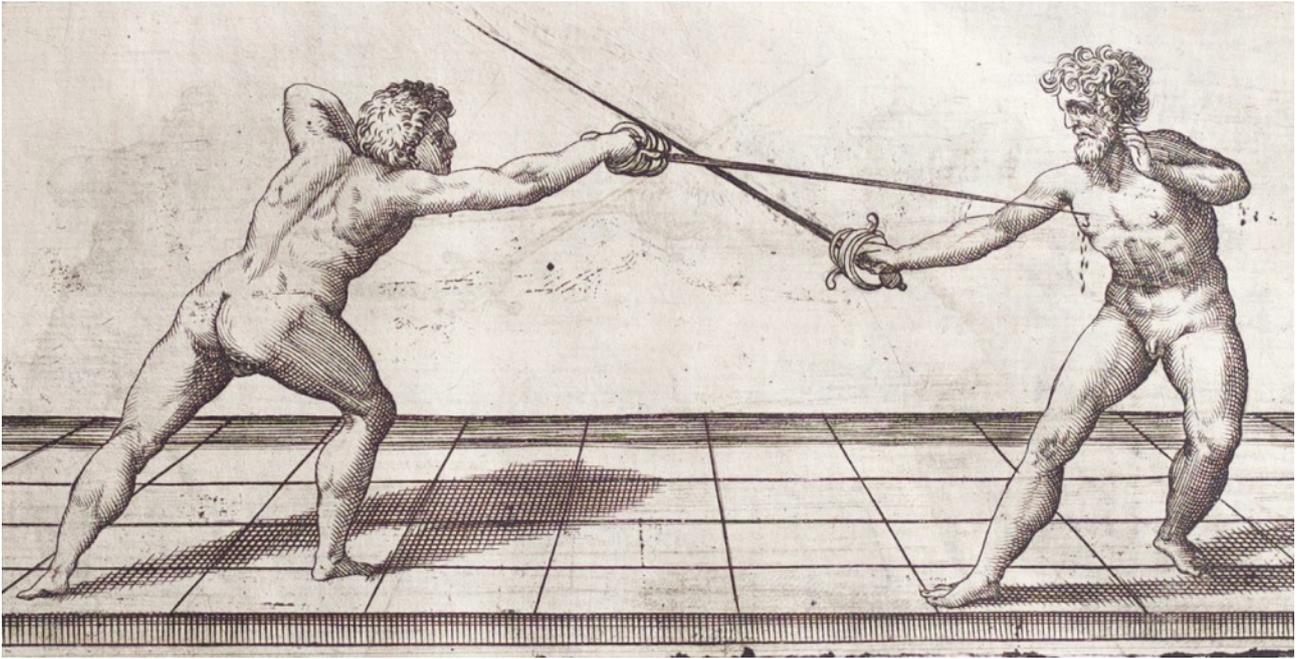


The opponent stands before you with an extended blade either pointed straight at you, or pointed slightly towards their inside. Form a counter-guard to the outside, and engage their sword on the outside in Third with your half-weak against their full weak. [N°.3]

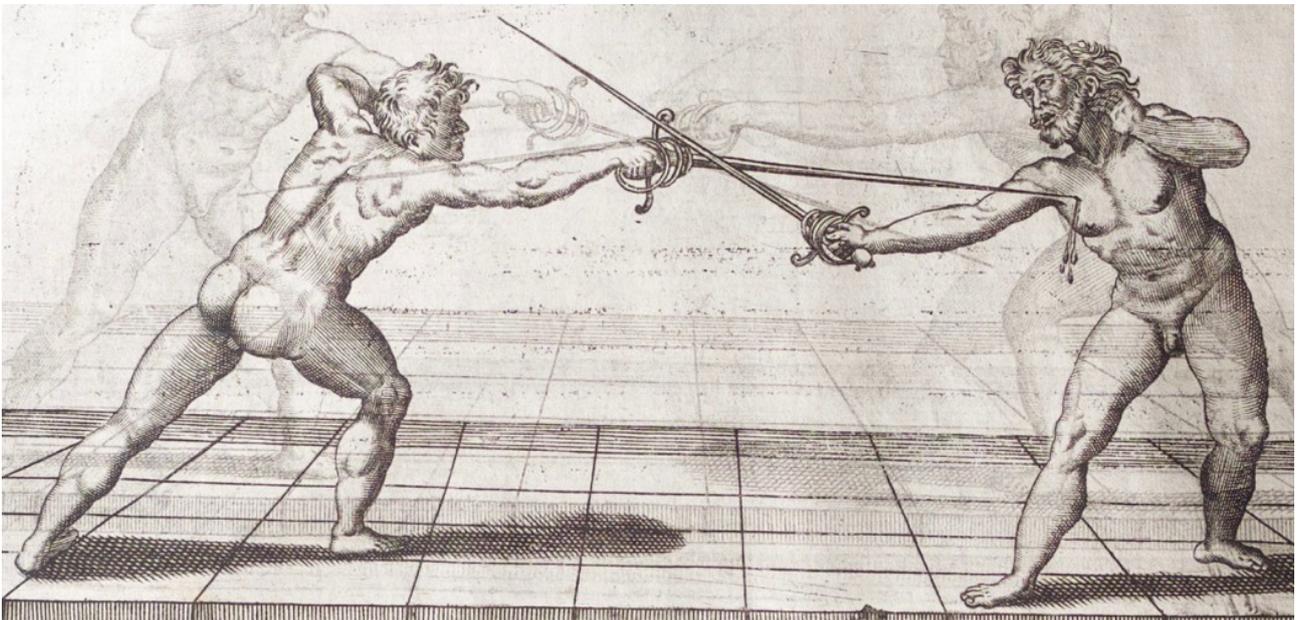
When they disengage towards your inside, do a counter-disengage in the same Tempo, so that you come back onto the outside engagement. As you counter-disengage, advance slightly in towards the opponent, and reengage upon their blade with your half-strong against their half weak. [N°.7]

When they disengage again towards your inside, lunge in the same Tempo, and thrust to their dominant shoulder inside in Fourth. [N°.8]

And here are the relevant plates from Fabris:



*Figure 17: Inside Thrust in Fourth (Fabris)*



*Figure 18: Outside Thrust in Third (Fabris)*

# Drills for self-training

## Warmup – 10-20 each

- Arm swings: Diagonal swings Down and Up, Turning to Side, Turning behind
- Hip openers: Knee up & out, Extension = Curtsey
- Pliés and squats: heels on floor, go down straight
- Roll wrists
- Ankle raises: up on toes and down
- Shoulder rolls
- Arm circles: Small into Large, then in different directions
- Side bends
- Touch toes: raise other hand vertically
- Lunges: - both feet leading
- Skipping rope

## Cutting exercises

While thrust-centric, the rapier is absolutely capable of cuts, and the Germans liked using medium-sized rapiers that could still give a stout cut. Practicing cuts, especially from the body, is also an excellent way of training body turns

- Cross cuts from the wrist
- Cross cuts from the elbow
- Cross cuts from the shoulder – turn the whole body
- Cutting into longpoint

## Footwork

- Firm-footed footwork
  - Advancing
  - Retreating
  - Lunging
  - Recovering
- Passing footwork
  - Moving forwards
  - Moving backwards
  - Moving to the side

- Lunging
- Passing
- Recovering forwards/backwards
- Proceeding footwork
  - Walking straight forwards with resolution (need to sell it!)
  - Lunging/Passing
  - Recovery

## **Handwork**

- Forming and transitioning between guards: First, Second, Third, Fourth
  - Angled, Straight, Inner Circle, Outer Circle
  - Counterguards: Inside and Outside
- Disengaging (*Caviren*)
  - All four guards
  - Disengage into thrust

## **Distance**

- Wall drill
  - Tape two small targets to a wall, corresponding to your opponent's two shoulders (about chest height, about shoulder width apart)
  - Practice thrusting at both targets
    - Starting in all four guards, thrusting with all four thrusts
    - Start in one guard, thrust in another
  - Train measure – practice gradually increasing the length and speed of your lunge
  - Train footwork – practice approaching the target from out of measure with firm-footed, passing, and proceeding footwork