

The OUFC Guide To Fencing

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Introduction To Kit:

Plastron:

The plastron is worn under the jacket and over the sword arm only, it is designed to stop a broken blade should it pierce the jacket.



Jacket:

The jacket provides general protection to the upper body. It comes in two styles, back zip which is ambidextrous and side zip which is handedness specific.



Chest Protector:

A chest protector is worn under the plastron, it is a hard piece of plastic designed to reduce the force resulting from a hit. Wearing a chest protector is mandatory for female fencers and optional for male fencers.



Glove:

The glove protects the sword hand from being hit, it is worn with the cuff over the sleeve of the jacket to prevent a blade from being able to enter the sleeve.



Mask:

The mask is vitally important, it protects the face and the sides of the head, it comes in a variety of different sizes.



Foil:

The foil is a thrusting weapon and as such points can only be scored by hitting with the tip of the weapon, handles come in a variety of styles and are generally handedness specific, it should have a rubber button on the end to reduce force of impact.



(Pistol grip foil and french grip foil)

Lamé:

The lamé is worn over the jacket and is only used for electric fencing, it allows the electronic scoring equipment to determine whether a hit is made on or off target.



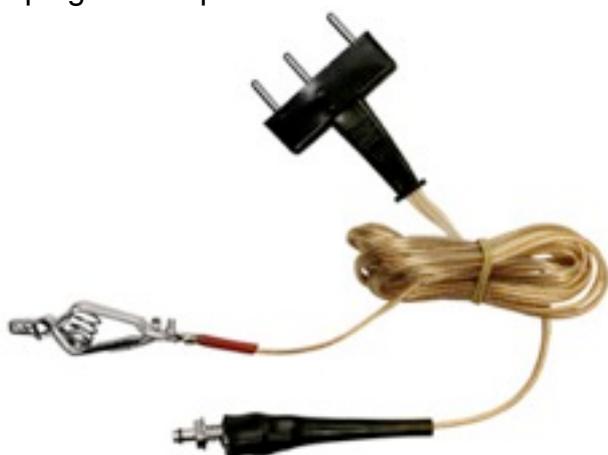
Electric Foil:

The electric foil is much the same as a normal foil, but it has a wire in the blade, a socket by the handle and a push button at the tip.



Bodywire:

The bodywire goes inside the jacket, it connects to the lamé by the crocodile clip, to the electric foil by the bayonet plug and to the electronic scoring apparatus by the three pin plug at the spool.



Breeches:

Breeches are required for any adults who are fencing with electric equipment, they protect the legs and are normally worn in conjunction with long socks.



Electric Scoring Apparatus:

The scoring apparatus consists of an electric recorder/box, two spools and two ground leads, which connect the box to the spools.

- **Spool:** The spool is where the fencer plugs themselves in, the body wire can only be plugged in one way round and it is then secured by a clip, the entire socket is then clipped onto a ring at the back of the fencer's lamé.



- **Electric Recorder/Box:** The box allows the referee/president to ascertain who has hit where. The white lights indicates an off-target hit and the coloured lights indicate an on target hit for the fencer on the respective side. There is a time delay in the system which blocks out all other lights for a short period after a hit is recorded.



Background Information

Right Of Way/Priority:

When fencing foil points are not scored simply by hitting the opponent first. Instead a set of rules is used to determine who, if anyone, has scored after hits are made. While this may sound silly and unlike actual sword fencing, there is method to the madness. Modern foil evolved from the training weapon that all students learning to duel would start with. As such rules had to be put in place to simulate actual combat conditions. With a training weapon the incentive for the student to defend themselves has been significantly reduced, as the sword is no longer sharp. Therefore rules were developed to encourage the students to defend themselves from attacks. Also, in foil a specific area must be hit in order to score points. This target area is the main trunk of the body, for reference refer to the picture of the lamé in the introduction to kit section.

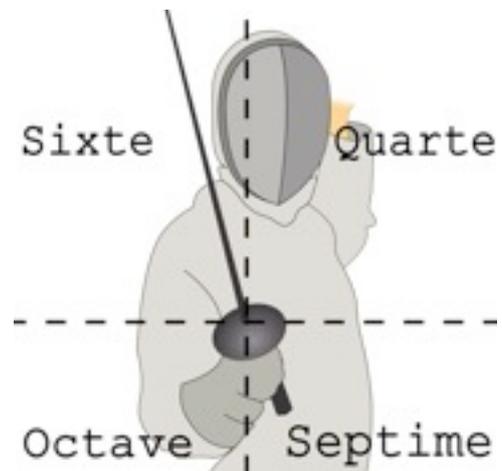
In foil the person who starts an attack, by extending their sword arm while threatening the valid target area with the point of the weapon, has what is known as the right of way or priority. This means that if the other person counter attacks, resulting in both fencers hitting each other the person who started the attack first is the one whose hit takes priority. Then if it was an on target hit, they score a point or if instead it was an off target hit, the fight is halted and then resumes with no points having been awarded to either fencer. If the fencer with the right of way misses and the fencer who counter attacked hits, then, as the only person who managed to hit, the counter attacker would be the one to score, so long as the hit is on target. If both fencers start an attack at the same time and both hit each other, on or off target, neither is awarded a point.

Right of way can be gained in a variety of ways. To start with it is the fencer who makes an attack that has right of way. They lose the right of way if: their attack is correctly parried (defended against) by their opponent; their attack finishes by landing short; or they “break time” (the sword arm stops progressing or bends). If both fencers start attacks at the same time but one has managed to find the other’s blade with their own first, the one who found the blade has the right of way and assuming they do not lose it in one of the ways mentioned above will score if they make a valid hit. Finally if before the opponent starts attacking a fencer extends their arm fully with the point of their weapon threatening the target area, they have established what is known as point in line and have the right of way. The fencer loses the right of way from point in line if the opponent manages to find their blade or if the fencer bends their elbow, thus breaking the line.

Having a rudimentary grasp of the right of way system is essential to being able to fence foil competently, it may seem confusing at first but it will get easier as first hand experience is gained.

Lines:

The target area is divided into four sections, called lines, this allows for a description of where an attack is aiming or where a parry is defending. The upper quarter on the sword arm side is sixte, the other upper quarter is quarte, directly below sixte is octave and then the final quarter is septime. Additionally sixte and quarte can be collectively referred to as the high line and octave and septime collectively referred to as the low line.



Footwork

On Guard Position:

The feet should be roughly shoulder's width apart and at right angles. Weight should be evenly distributed between both feet. The heel of the back foot should be in line with the heel of the front foot. The knees should be bent and should point in the same direction as the feet. Torso should be upright – no slouching. The weapon hand should held above the front foot and the arm should be roughly parallel to the ground. The elbow should be about one hand's span from the body and bent at roughly 45 degrees. When holding a sword there should be a straight line between the elbow and the point. The weapon in the on-guard position should protects the fencer's target area on that side – so that the opponent cannot slip through from the outside. The non-weapon hand should be held away from the target area but it should not be tucked away behind the back.



Common mistakes in the on guard position include:

- Body bent forward or backward
- Heels not in line
- Feet not at right angles (back foot angled forwards slightly is acceptable)
- Feet too close together or too far apart
- Shoulders tense (makes weapon actions such as attacks and parries difficult)
- Elbow and arm not over the leg
- Knees not bent
- Position of weapon hand drifts towards the centre of the body

Advancing and Retreating:

When taking a step forwards the front foot moves first, the order of movement is:

- 1) Lift toes of front foot
- 2) Front foot lifts just off the ground and moves forwards
- 3) Heel of front foot lands
- 4) Lift heels of back foot
- 5) Back foot lifts just off the ground and moves forwards same distance as front foot
- 6) Toes of back foot land
- 7) Heel of back foot lands along with the toes of the front foot

Note that the movement is completed with an almost simultaneous landing of back and front feet.

When taking a step backwards the process is reversed:

- 1) Heel of back foot lifts off the ground
- 2) Back foot lifts just off the ground and moves backwards
- 3) Toes of back foot land
- 4) Toes of front foot lift
- 5) Front foot lifts just off the ground and moves backwards same distance as back foot
- 6) Heel of front foot lands
- 7) Toes of front foot land along with heel of the back foot

Note that the movement is completed with an almost simultaneous landing of back and front feet

Common mistakes in footwork:

- Straightening the leg when lifting toes (body will lean in opposite direction)
- Lifting foot too high when stepping (slower and potentially bad for balance)
- Feet end up not in the on guard position (too close or too far apart, or not at right angles, or heels not correctly aligned, see on guard position above)
- Bouncing (torso rises and falls as the step is taken, this is bad for balance)
- Straightening of the knees as step is taken or after it is completed

While the above sounds complicated, it should result in smooth steps. When doing footwork exercises, technique rather than speed is the critical factor; the aim is to develop fluid steps that are correctly executed as speed will come with practice and good technique. Consistently achieving correct technique in both the on guard position and while stepping should be the end result.

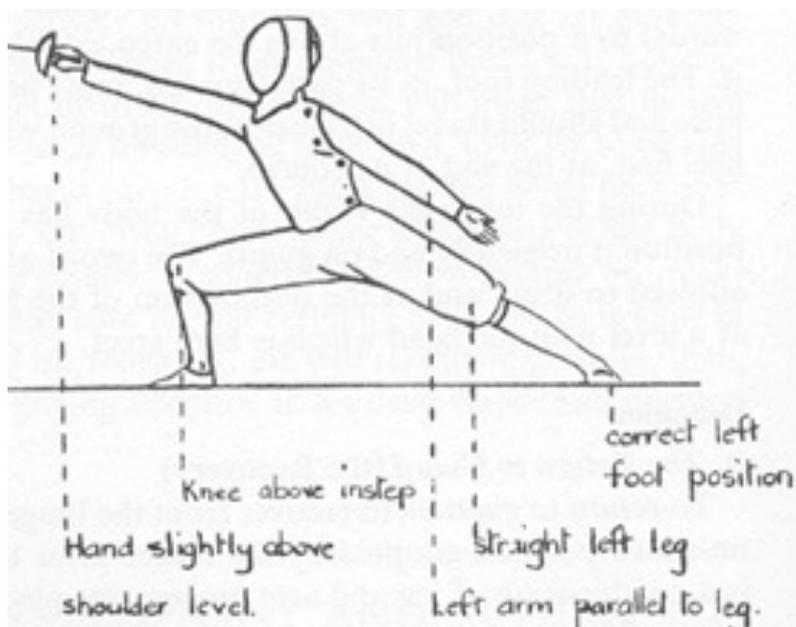
Variety Of Pace In Footwork:

Distance is very important to fencers as, if used correctly, it allows the fencer to be able to hit their opponents without being hit themselves. Distance is purely controlled by footwork and as such footwork is highly important to fencers, in reality about 80% of fencing should be footwork rather than blade work. Having variety in the pace of the footwork helps a fencer to control the fight by allowing them to pressure their opponent with fast footwork, lull them into a false sense of security by slowing down their footwork and to retreat quickly should an attack fail.

Lunge And Recovery:

The lunge is the classic attacking action. It allows fencers to accelerate and cover the distance to the target faster than with steps. The action can be broken down as follows:

- 1) Straighten the arm without throwing the shoulder forwards (which will happen if the shoulder is tense), the action should come from the elbow. The hand should end up just above the shoulder.
- 2) As the arm straightens, the front foot should be lifted, toes first, off the ground. The back leg then straightens as the front leg “kicks” forwards, the “kicking” motion does not come from the hips.
- 3) The main driving force for the lunge comes from the back leg, which straightens as the front leg “kicks” forward.
- 4) Simultaneously to the straightening of the back leg the non-weapon arm should straighten, with the hand palm up, ending up parallel to the back leg - this helps to balance the action.



While the above may sound somewhat disjointed, the final action should be smooth and flowing

Common mistakes in the lunge:

- Back foot rolls over at the end of the lunge. It should be flat on the ground – this avoids damage being caused to the ankle due to pressure
- Back leg not completely straightened at the end of the lunge
- Weapon arm bent while lunging
- Back arm is not straight at the end of the lunge
- Head and body flung forwards over the knee – this means slightly greater distance, but far less control; the fencer's centre of mass is also no longer more or less centred between both feet, making the recovery more difficult.
- Arm doesn't start moving before the feet (attack more likely to miss, moving point + moving body + moving target = many things for the brain to process at once.)
- Letting the knee of the front leg drift across the body so that it is not in line with back heel, this destabilises the lunge and makes recovery more difficult

The recovery from the lunge is as follows:

- 1) The front toe lifts and the back leg bends, pulling the rest of the body back to the on guard position (the front foot is not dragged along the ground)
- 2) Non weapon hand is raised.
- 3) Front heel lands and weapon hand is returned to the on guard position.

At the end of the lunge, the fencer should have returned to the on guard position. When doing lunges, it is useful to check that the correct on guard position is resumed after recovery. When practicing lunging fencers should try to learn their lunging distance - the distance at which they could hit someone with a lunge. This will allow the fencer to know at what point they can lunge and hit their opponent during a fight.

Hitting With Steps And Lunges:

When hitting the hand should always start moving before the feet, this ensures that an attack has been started and therefore that the fencer has right of way before any commitment to movement has been made. This also allows the fencer time to react to any blade actions the opponent makes before movement and change of distance begins.

Step Lunge:

The step lunge is an amalgamation of a step and a lunge, the difference between the two individual actions is in the timing of the extension of the hand. In a step lunge the hand starts extending before the step starts and continues to extend as the step is completed, reaching full extension as the step ends and just before the lunge is carried out. In theory this can be lengthened so that the arm extension continues over an infinite number of step before the lunge is performed. The step lunge can either accelerate in speed over the steps, peaking at the lunge, or be explosive, with a slow step followed by a rapid lunge - both of these have their own tactical advantages.

Balestra:

The balestra is a short sharp jump forwards, used to provide a change in speed and rhythm to a fencer's footwork. It is performed by lifting first lifting the toes of the front foot as in a normal step forwards. The back leg is then used to perform a small jump/hop forwards with both feet landing at the same time in the on guard position. The balestra should produce a percussive sound as both feet land. The most common usage of the balestra is to replace the step in a step lunge, resulting in an action with a more rapid acceleration into the lunge.

Appel:

The appel is an action made with either the front or back foot. The foot is raised slightly while in the on guard position and then hit against the floor using the balls of the feet to create a similar percussive sound to that of the balestra. The appel is most commonly used to try and provoke a reaction from the opponent due to its similarity in sound to the balestra.

Reprise:

The reprise is an action made in order to carry out another attack immediately after a lunge has failed to land. It is performed by, while in the lunge position, bending the knee of the back leg to place the back foot closer to the front, essentially recovering forwards, before lunging again. The back foot should only move forwards a short distance as the reprise should be fast, a large movement of the foot makes the reprise inherently slower, giving the opponent time to react.

Crossover Steps:

A crossover step is a step made by reversing the normal order in which the feet move on a step, i.e. in a forwards crossover the back foot moves first and in a backwards crossover the front foot moves first. In either direction the front foot is always closer to the heel of the back foot than it is to the toes. Crossovers are by nature large steps and therefore used to "break ground", in other words to retreat quickly from an opponent or to chase an opponent who is a reasonable distance away. Crossovers should not be done within hitting distance of the opponent as while executing the crossover the fencer cannot easily change direction and is momentarily unbalanced.

Fleche:

The fleche is the fastest attacking action in fencing and is designed to be explosive. To fleche the fencer must do what they generally try to avoid while fencing, make themselves unbalanced. As with all attacking actions the first thing to move should be the hand. As the hand starts to reach full extension the fencer leans over their front foot, causing themselves to become more and more unbalanced as they do so. At the point where they feel as if they are about to fall over the fencer then simultaneously straightens their front leg and swings the knee of their back leg up towards their chest. Both of these actions propel the fencer forwards - the front leg by pushing off from the ground and the back leg by the nature of its momentum. As the fencer lands from the fleche they should then run past their opponent's unarmed side so as to avoid being hit should their attack have failed in some way. The fleche can be very effective if used sparingly and executed well, as this gives it the element of surprise which is further enhanced by the action's speed when done properly.



Blade Skills

Holding The Blade:

The foil is manipulated primarily with the thumb and the forefinger with the other fingers used just to help support the weight of the foil. With a pistol grip there is only really one way round that the grip can be sensibly orientated. With a french grip there is a slight curve to the grip, this should fit into the contours of the palm as the grip is held. The foil is then held so that a straight line extends from the elbow to the tip of the weapon. The blade of the foil should have a slight downwards curve when held correctly.



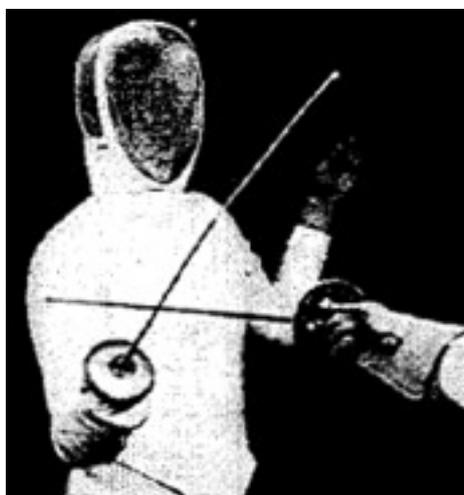
Parry Quarte (From On Guard) And Riposte:

From the on guard position the parry of quarte is made by moving the hand laterally across the body keeping the thumb on the top and without moving the hand excessively far, to parry the hand need only move as far as is necessary to protect the target area. The action comes mostly from the wrist and fingers, the aim is to deflect an attack due to the positioning of the blade, not to just smack it away with brute force. The parry should be made forte (the bottom third of the blade) to foible (the top third of the blade). This puts the strongest part of the fencer's blade against the weakest part of the opponent's blade. The riposte is then made by relaxing the hand slightly and extending the arm to make a hit. When making the riposte the feet should not need to move as the opponent should be within hitting distance since they have lunged in order to try and hit. However, if the opponent has already recovered by the time the riposte is started there is no reason that once the fencer's hand has fully extended they may not proceed to lunge to reach the opponent.



Parry Sixte (From On Guard):

From the on guard position the parry of sixte is a circular (or counter) parry. It starts with the hand in the on guard position then, using the fingers, a circle is transcribed with the point of the foil. The circle goes clockwise for right handed fencers and counter-clockwise for left handed fencers. As with all parries, it should be made forte to foible and should not go wider than the body. With the sixte parry in particular it is important to ensure that the action has been properly completed before extending the arm to make the riposte. If the blade has not been properly deflected before the extension starts it is likely that the attackers blade will hit the defender in the arm.



Engagements:

Engagements are a form of preparation. Preparations do not give the fencer the right of way but do put them in a better position from which to attack. Engagements can be used to trigger a reaction from the opponent or to give the fencer some control over their opponent's blade. Engagements are done foible to foible and can be done in any line. To perform an engagement the fencer simply moves their blade so that it comes into contact with the opponent's blade, from here they can pressure the opponent's blade to try and get a reaction or they can launch an attack. The motion is made primarily with the fingers.

Beats:

Beats are also preparations and are more commonly used than engagements. Beats are also done foible to foible. The difference between a beat and an engagement is that the engagement is done by simply applying light pressure to the opponent's blade whereas the beat is a more forceful action. The most basic aim of the beat is to knock the opponent's blade to one side creating an opening into which an attack could be launched. The motion is made with the fingers as much as possible and is a sharp short action. If the action is too large then any advantage gained is lost because by the time the fencer has readjusted position of their own blade in order to attack the opponent has also had time to readjust their blade position. Large beats are also easier for the opponent to see, allowing them to disengage and launch an attack of their own.

Disengagements:

Disengagements are used to avoid blade contact and when doing a disengage the blade either transcribes either half a circle or a whole circle depending on whether the blade action that it is deceiving is circular or lateral. Like most blade actions the motion is done primarily with the fingers as this is what gives the fencer the greatest amount of control over the blade. This allows the action to be carried out neatly and helps keep the motion small and accurate.

Counter-Riposte:

A counter-riposte occurs when a fencer parries their opponent's riposte after their own attack has been successfully parried. They may either occur because the opponent has not been fast enough in riposting or as a premeditated action. As a premeditated action an initial attack is made knowing that the opponent will attempt to parry and riposte. The fencer allows this to happen, being ready to parry the riposte and score with a riposte of their own. In a counter-riposte, the parry of the opponent's riposte is done while still on the lunge.

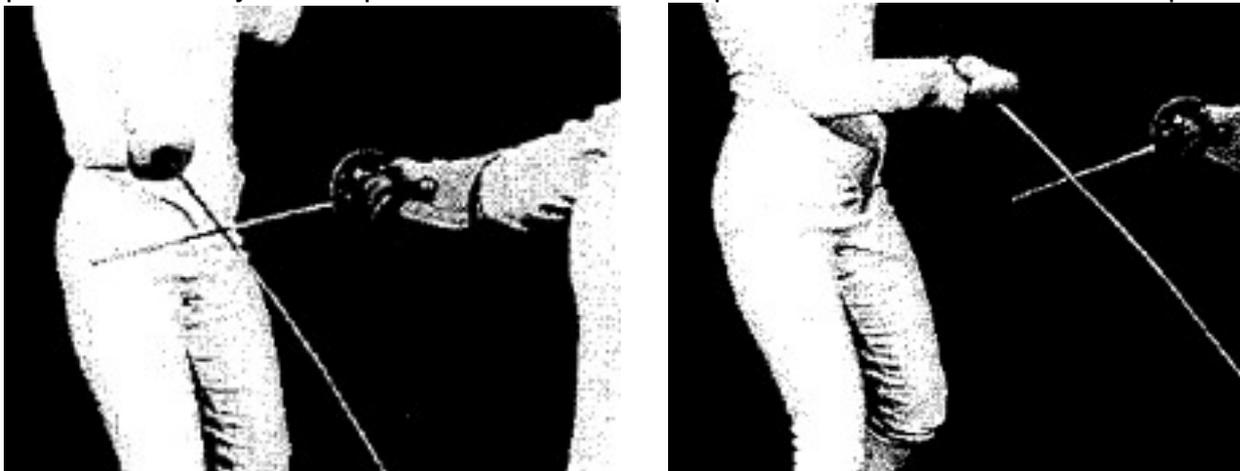
Low Line Attacks:

A low line attack is an attack made to the lower half of the torso. Underneath the sword arm is the most common target area for a low line attack, as this is the closest to the fencer. Low line attacks have the advantage of being poorly parried by quarte and sixte parries as these are both high line parries and in order to cover the lower half of the body their scope of movement must become significantly larger - making them easier to deceive.



Low Line Parries Of Octave And Septime (From On Guard):

As quarte and sixte are ineffective at parrying low line attacks a different set of parries should be used. From the on guard position the parry of octave is a semi-circular parry traveling from the on guard position to a position directly below, with the fencer's blade collecting the opponent's blade, forte to foible, as it does so. As a result the opponent's blade should then end up on the side of the blade opposite to that of the fencer's torso. From on guard the parry of septime is taken by transcribing a semicircle in the opposite direction but then continuing the action across the body so that the blade ends up in the position vertically below quarte. For both of these parries the thumb remains on top.



(The parry of octave and the parry of septime)

Compound Actions:

A compound action is any action made in fencing which contains one or more feints. The feint is a false attack, a blade action designed to appear as if it is intended to score a hit, but is instead intended to provoke a response from the opponent. The simplest compound action is the feint-disengage, which as the name suggests consists of a feint, followed by a disengage of the opponent's parry and then a lunge to score a hit. Other compound actions include the 1,2, double and high-low. Compound actions should accelerate as they are performed, this allows the fencer to see how the opponent reacts as they start and then to finish at a speed at which the opponent will have more difficulty dealing with.

Successive Parries:

Successive parries are the response to a compound action. As the name suggests, they involve the fencer taking two parries one after the other. The successive parry is most effective when carried out as a premeditated action. This is achieved by taking the first parry earlier and more slowly than the fencer otherwise would, this allows more time for the fencer to make a second, faster, parry. The change in speed of the parries helps prevent the opponent from disengaging both of them, as they must then deal with a change in rhythm as well as performing the disengage in the correct direction.

Counter-attack:

A counter attack is any attack made into an opponent's attack, it therefore does not have priority and will not score should the opponent's hit land. Counters can be done with evasion, either by ducking, twisting or using footwork to avoid the opponent's attack after the counter lands. If done correctly this ensures only the counter lands and thus scores. Alternatively the fencer who is countering may try and use their blade to block the opponent from hitting them as they counter (a counter with opposition) or may try and parry the opponent's attack after their own counter has landed.

Renewals Of Attack/Replacements:

A renewal of attack is made after an initial attack is unsuccessful. There are three different types of renewal: the reprise, remise and redoublement. As they follow a failed attack the fencer who is doing the renewal does not have right of way. They can however be very successful against opponents who take many parries but rarely actually riposte.

- Reprise:** A second attack made after the first one fails by carrying out a reprise as is detailed in the footwork section

- Remise:** A second attack made in the same line as the initial attack without withdrawing the arm or recovering from the lunge

- Redoublement:** A second attack made in a different line to the initial attack, without recovering from the lunge

Point In Line:

The action of extending the sword arm fully with the point of the foil threatening the opponent in the high line (either quarte or sixte) - if it is established before the opponent starts an attack it has priority. In order for the opponent to regain right of way they must either find the fencer's blade with their own or the fencer must break the line by bending the elbow or allow the point of their foil to travel to a position in which it no longer threatens the opponent's high line. The point in line is primarily a defensive action as it stops the opponent from attacking. In order to score with a point in line the fencer must then hit their opponent whilst avoiding their blade. The point in line may also be used, similarly to the beat or feint, in order to draw a reaction from the opponent.

Prise de Fer:

An action in which the opponent's blade is engaged and then controlled by retaking it in another or the same line without losing contact with the blade. There are three different types of Prise de Fer: the envelopment, the croisé and the bind. They are most commonly used against a point in line as for a Prise de Fer to work well it requires the opponent's arm to be fully extended.

- Envelopment:** The opponent's blade is retaken in the same line as it was initially taken, for example the opponent's blade is engaged in sixte and then retaken in sixte with a counter sixte parry

- Croisé:** The opponent's blade is retaken in a line either directly above or below the line in which it was initially taken, for example the opponent's blade is engaged in sixte and then moved to octave

- Bind:** The opponent's blade is retaken in a line diagonally opposite to the line in which it was initially taken, for example the opponent's blade is engaged in quarte and then moved to octave