USA Fencing
Refereeing Handbook

Version 1.2 (April 2012)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA. You may freely distribute this work for any non-commercial purpose.

Contents

Introduction 3

What's New in Version 1.2? 3

How to Learn to Referee 4

Preparing to Referee: Attire 5

Preparing to Referee: Equipment 6

The FOC 7

Running a Pool 9

Running DEs 13

Repechage 16

Directing the Bout: Equipment Check 19

Directing the Bout: Starting the Action 21

Directing the Bout: Where to Stand 22

Directing the Bout: What to Watch 24

Directing the Bout: When to Call Halt 25

Directing the Bout: Reconstructing the Phrase 27

Directing the Bout: Keeping Time and Score 30

Directing the Bout: Identifying Equipment Problems 31

Directing the Bout: Non-Combativity 34

- Individual Events 34
- Team events 34

Directing the Bout: Video Replay 36

Between Refereeing Assignments 37

Right-of-Way in a Nutshell 38

Foil: "The Attack in Foil" by Bill Oliver 39

Foil: "Does the landing of the front foot end the attack in foil?" By Bill Oliver 43

Foil: The Beat vs. The Parry 45

Epee 46

Frequently Asked Questions 47

Introduction

The previous Referee Handbook was rather brief, and a substantial portion of it included the Referee's Code of Ethics (now a separate document). This document is intended to be a more comprehensive treatise on refereeing for USA Fencing.

This guide is largely written with National tournaments in mind, but I've tried to make as much of it as possible applicable to local and regional refereeing as well.

I owe thanks to a great many people for their assistance with this document, most notably: Bill Oliver for allowing use of several of his fencing articles; the FOC as a whole for their support; members of the Fencing.Net forum community for providing outstanding feedback and corrections to the draft version presented for peer review in 2008.

Ian Serotkin, editor
October 2010

What's New in Version 1.2?

- New Video Replay Section
- Changed the Penalty FAQ section into a general FAQ and added a new question.
- Cleaned up the diagrams in the "Where to Stand" section.
- Added new sections for 2011-12 season rule changes:
    - Non-Combativity
    - Leaving the side of the strip (FAQ)

How to Learn to Referee

1. Read the rulebook. Twice. Then read this.
2. Watch good referees. Don't watch bad ones. If you go to http://foc.askfred.org, you can see every certified referee in the country and what their rating is. The closer to 1 their rating is, the more you should trust them (there are exceptions to this, as always). Referees with a rating of 3 or better are virtually guaranteed to have refereed at the highest levels of national competition.
3. Attend FOC-certified referee seminars and study the Referee Study Guide (http://www.fencingofficials.org).
4. Referee as much as you possibly can. You can't get better without practicing, and that's just as true in refereeing as it is in fencing.

Preparing to Referee: Attire

The USFA has standard attire that is required for referees at all National events. For men:

- Shirt & tie
- Gray slacks
- Navy blue blazer (sport coat)

For women:

- Blouse
- Gray skirt or slacks
- Navy blue blazer

While the FOC requests that referees wear "appropriate shoes," many national referees wear all-black sneakers. I made the switch from dress shoes to sneakers after my first season of refereeing nationally, and the difference in how I feel at the end of each day is staggering—with dress shoes, I was sometimes unable to stand at the end of the day. With sneakers, the pain is reduced immensely. Expect to be on your feet for anywhere between eight and sixteen hours per day of refereeing. If you have foot problems, or any problems standing for long periods of time, I highly recommend the sneakers.

Attire at local or sectional events is at the discretion of the host club, division, or section. Some localities prefer the full national uniform as listed above, others couldn't care less if the referees show up in T-shirts and shorts. It never hurts to ask in advance. Keep in mind, however, that a referee will always be perceived by the fencers from the way he or she dresses, and so it is usually wise to err on the side of formality.

If you're flying to a tournament to referee, a good tip is to have all your shirts/pants dry cleaned and boxed. This will enable you to pack them on a carry-on travel bag, ensuring you are able to referee even if your luggage is delayed.

Preparing to Referee: Equipment

While your eyes and ears are the most important tools in your refereeing arsenal, you should also bring the following with you whenever you referee:

- USFA rulebook & penalty chart
- Pencils
- Scratch paper (I use index cards. A PDA works too, if you've got one and have a scoring program.)
- Countdown Timer
- Yellow, Red, and Black Cards, each of which should be kept in a different pocket for easy retrieval
- Bend Block (for measuring the bend in the blade)
- Something to read/do between rounds
- Bottled water
- Backpack to carry everything in
- A coin for determining priority

At a national tournament I assume that some of the above will be provided, but all bets are off at local events.

The FOC

The FOC (Fencing Official's Commission) is a group of senior officials that are responsible for overseeing fencing referees in the United States. Their specific responsibilities (taken from http://www.fencingofficials.org) are:

- Developing referees
- Assigning US referees to international teams and competitions
- Submitting candidates to the FIE for examination or removal as an international referee
- Preparation of clinic formats
- Examination development
- Rules legislation and interpretation
- Conducting hearing on matters refereed by the USFA Board of Directors
- Administration of referee examinations for Classes 1 through 5 ratings
- Selection and assigning of referees at the Nationals Championships and at all competitions in the United States which are part of the Qualifying procedure for international teams
- Liaison with schools and colleges on referees

At each National tournament, two or three members of the FOC will be assigned as the Head Referees for the event. They will determine which referees get assigned to which events, observe them throughout the weekend, give them advice and feedback, and release them at the end of each day. Generally, each Head Referee will take charge of one or two weapons throughout the event depending on their specialty.

At the beginning of each day, you should report to the Head Referees and make sure they know you are present. Generally, there is a morning meeting in the referees' break area at the beginning of each day and they take attendance there. They'll also discuss any topics pertinent to that day or the competition, such as rule changes or problem areas.

At the end of the day, one of the Head Referees will find you and let you know (usually via a handshake) that you are done refereeing for that day. If it's late in the day and you've been sitting around for a while without being released, it's okay to go find the Head Referee who is releasing people

and politely inquire if they have any assignments for you or if you are done for the day. The end of the day is also a good time to ask for feedback and areas for improvement, as it will be much quieter than at the height of the day and the assigners will have more time to chat with you.

Running a Pool

After arriving at your strip, hold the score sheet in your hand and loudly read off the names of the competitors in the pool, calling them to you. I recommend putting two checkmarks next to each competitor's name on the score sheet—the first signifies they are present, and the second signifies they have passes the start-of-pool inspection. That inspection should consist of the following checks:

1. The fencer's mask bears the mark of the preliminary inspection. If there has been no preliminary inspection, inspect the mask yourself and ensure it is free from any defects or major dents that could cause a safety issue.
2. The fencer has at least two body cords, all of which bear the mark of the preliminary inspection (if there was one).
3. The fencer has at least two weapons.
4. The fencer is wearing a plastron on his or her weapon arm.
5. The fencer is wearing a chest protector (if female).
6. Foil and sabre only: The fencer's lame bears the mark of the preliminary inspection (if there was one).
7. Sabre only: The fencer's overglove bears the mark of the preliminary inspection (if there was one).
8. Sabre only: The fencer has at least two mask cords, all of which bear the mark of the preliminary inspection (if there was one).
9. National competitions only: The fencer's last name is written on either the back of the lame or the back leg of the knickers.

After all fencers are present and have been inspected, I make an announcement that goes something like this:

> "Good morning, everyone. This is a pool of 7 fencers. We'll be fencing right here on Strip 23 *(*I point to the strip*)*. Your

names are here (**I point to the score sheet**), and your number is right to the left of your name here (**I point to the sheet**). I've circled the order we'll be using here (**I point to the sheet**). I'll be circling the bout that's currently fencing, and crossing it out and circling the next one at the end of each bout. I won't be announcing the bouts, but the clipboard won't be moving from this very spot (**I put the clipboard down on table**) and you can look at it anytime as long as you don't block the scoring machine or get in the way of the fencing. Please know when you're fencing and be ready to go as soon as the bout before you is over. Also, please remember to check your scores after each bout and sign the score sheet before leaving at the end of the pool. I will announce the first bout—it's Crowder vs. Hennig. Are there any questions before we begin the pool?"

I've found that this helps clarify many of the problems fencers have prior to starting the pool, and speeds up the pool by making it the responsibility of the fencers to know when they are supposed to be fencing. Announcing the bouts tends to slow down the pool, as fencers wait to hear their name called instead of already knowing where they are supposed to be. (For Youth events and any other events you feel the fencers may have a problem remembering when they're supposed to be on strip, you can of course revert to calling the bouts verbally.)

FOC policy states that the two fencers currently fencing and the referee presiding over the bout are the only people allowed inside the "pod" (the fencing area, cordoned off by barriers and curtains to separate it from the spectator area). This is sometimes relaxed to allow the other pool competitors to stay inside the barriers, as long as they stay out of the way and beyond the end lines of the strip. Coaches are not allowed inside the pod during the pool.

In local competitions, it's still a good idea to restrict access to the immediate fencing area even though there are no actual barriers.

Be sure to record the score on the score sheet after each bout. For a normal (5 touches scored) victory, simply record the letter V. For a victory

of less than five touches, record a V followed by the number of touches scored. For a defeat, simply record the number of touches scored. A final score of 4-2 would be recorded as "V4" in the winner's box and "2" in the loser's box. A final score of 2-2, in the case that someone wins on priority, would be recorded as "V2" in the winner's box and "2" in the loser's box.

After the pool has been completed, fill out the Victories, Touches Scored, Touches Received, and Indicators columns. Victories is simply a count of the victories for that fencer. Touches Scored is the sum of all touches scored by that fencer (add horizontally on the fencer's line), and Touches Received is the sum of all touches scored on that fencer (add vertically down the fencer's line). Indicators is Touches Scored subtracted by Touches Received. As a check, add together all the values of the Indicators column—it should add to zero. If it does not, there is a math error somewhere on the score sheet.

Ensure that all fencers have an opportunity to sign the score sheet prior to handing in the sheet. Note that you can have the fencers sign before you do all the math—the only thing they need to check and sign off on are the scores of their bouts.

The following illustration shows a properly filled out score sheet:

U S F A

Tournament: NAC A
Competition: Y6 MIXED FOIL
Round: 1 **Pool:** 3 **Strip:** 82
Referee: SEROTKIN

Barrage	#	1	2	3	4	V	TS	TR	Ind
	1								
	2								
	3								
	4								

Club	Name	#	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	V	TS	TR	Ind	PI
	STARBUCK	1		V	2	V	V4	3	V		4	24	17	+7	2
	APOLLO	2	1		V	V	0	V	V		4	21	23	-2	3
	BOOMER	3	V	4		V	V	V	V		5	29	16	+13	1
	HUSKER	4	3	3	1		V	2	V		2	19	21	-2	6
	HELO	5	4	V	3	3		V	V		3	25	17	+8	4
	RACETRACK	6	V4	2	4	V3	1		V		3	19	23	-4	5
	HOT DOG	7	0	4	1	0	2	3			0	10	30	-20	7
		8													

Warnings: YC-Covering (3) -6
YC-Turning
YC-Body Cord (5) -0 YC-Weight

Pool of 4 ~~6 Bouts~~	Pool of 5 ~~10 Bouts~~	Pool of 6 15 Bouts	Pool of 7 21 Bouts	Pool of 8 28 Bouts
1-4	1-2	1-2 5-3	1-2 6-1 3-5	2-3 8-3 3-7
2-3	3-4	4-5 1-6	3-4 2-6 4-1	1-5 6-7 4-8
1-3	5-1	2-3 4-2	5-6 6-2 7-1	7-4 4-2 2-6
2-4	2-3	5-6 3-6	7-1 6-7 2-5	6-8 8-1 3-5
3-4	5-4	3-1 5-1	1-4 3-1 5-5	1-2 7-5 1-7
1-2	1-3	6-4 3-4	2-5 4-6 1-3	3-4 3-6 4-6
	2-5	2-5 6-2	6-3 7-2 4-7	5-6 2-8 8-5
	4-1	1-4		8-7 5-4 7-2
	3-5			4-1 6-1 1-3
	4-2	Same order for 3 teammates 1*2*3, 4*5*6		5-2

Special Bout Orders For Teammates			
~~Pool of 5~~	~~Pool of 6~~	Pool of 7	~~Pool of 8~~
1-4 6-4	3-1 2-5	1-2 6-2 1-4	~~2-3 3-8 8-7~~
2-5 1-2	4-2 3-6	~~4-5 3-4 2-7~~	7-4 2-8 5-6
3-6 3-4	~~1-4 4-5~~	6-7 7-5 5-3	6-8 5-4 3-4
~~5-1 5-6~~	2-3 6-2	3-1 1-6 6-4	1-2 6-1 8-1
4-2 2-3	5-6 5-1	4-7 4-2 7-1	7-5 3-7 5-2
3-1 1-6	1-2 6-4	2-3 7-3 2-5	4-6 4-8 6-7
~~6-2 4-5~~	3-4 5-3	5-1 5-6 3-6	~~1-3 2-6 8-3~~
5-3	1-6		~~8-5 3-5 1-5~~
			4-2 4-1 7-2
3 pairs of teammates 1*4, 2*5, 3*6	four teammates 1*2*3*4	3 teammates 1*2*3	1-7 3 teammates 1*2*3

Running DEs

After arriving at your strip, simply call the first two fencers to the strip and announce the on-deck bout. There are some referees who take attendance for the entire tableau prior to beginning the bouts, but I find this to be a waste of time. With a large tableau there's always going to be someone running late, and why wait for them if they're not in the first bout?

For each DE bout, run the same pre-fencing inspection as you would at the beginning of a pool:

1. The fencer's mask bears the mark of the preliminary inspection. If there has been no preliminary inspection, inspect the mask yourself and ensure it is free from any defects or major dents that could cause a safety issue.
2. The fencer has at least two body cords, all of which bear the mark of the preliminary inspection (if there was one).
3. The fencer has at least two weapons.
4. The fencer is wearing a plastron on his or her weapon arm.
5. The fencer is wearing a chest protector (if female).
6. Foil and sabre only: The fencer's lame bears the mark of the preliminary inspection (if there was one).
7. Sabre only: The fencer's overglove bears the mark of the preliminary inspection (if there was one).
8. Sabre only: The fencer has at least two mask cords, all of which bear the mark of the preliminary inspection (if there was one).
9. National competitions only: The fencer's last name is written on either the back of the lame or the back leg of the knickers.

These checks must be run prior to every single bout, even if it's the fencer's tenth DE bout!

The Alperstein Method: Noted USFA referee Don Alperstein came up with an innovative method of running a DE tableau several years ago. It is useable when a number of referees are sharing a series of strips, and the number of referees is at least one greater than the number of strips.

For the first series of bouts, the pre-bout checks occur on the strip. For all subsequent bouts, the on-deck referee finds and corrals the on-deck fencers in a pre-determined ready area. The referee conducts the pre-bout check of the fencers in that ready area and waits there with the fencers. When a strip becomes available, the referee accompanies to the open strip with the fencers and the bout commences.

This method saves time by handling the pre-bout check while other bouts are going on. Even if that check only takes one minute per fencer, for large tournaments that can still add up to finishing the tableau up to an hour earlier than otherwise would be possible. In later rounds, when there are no bouts waiting to be fenced, the Alperstein Method loses most of its usefulness.

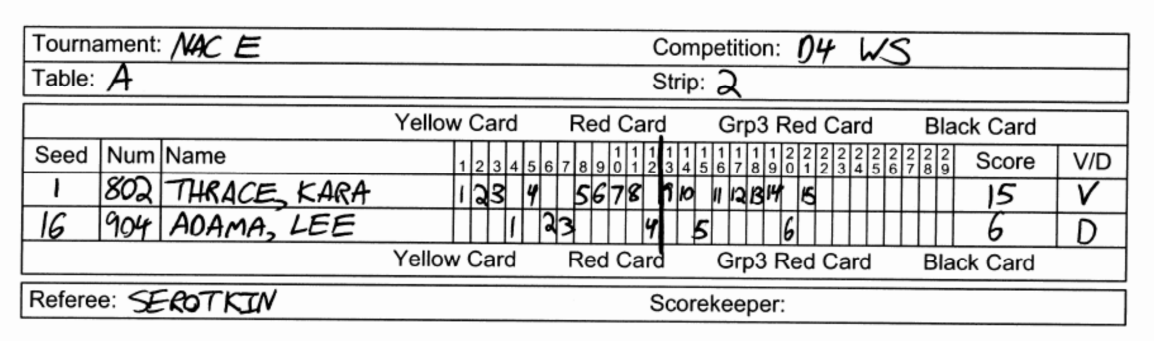
For DEs, the two fencers currently fencing, one coach for each fencer, and the referee presiding over the bout are the only people allowed inside the "pod" (the fencing area, cordoned off by barriers and curtains to separate it from the spectator area). Whereas during pools the other fencers are sometimes permitted to stay inside the barriers, during DEs this is not recommended due to the potential number of fencers per strip. Coaches must stay behind the end lines of the strip. Coaches may be on either side, regardless of which side their fencer is on. It's acceptable for both coaches to be on the same side.

In local competitions, it's still a good idea to restrict access to the immediate fencing area even though there are no actual barriers.

If you're keeping score by hand, record each touch on the score sheet as it occurs. At the end of each period, make a thick vertical line on the score sheet. This will help you keep track of what period you're in, just in case you forget. After the bout is completed, record the touches scored by each competitor and a "V" for the winner (Victory) and "D" for the loser (Defeat) on the score sheet. Ensure that both fencers have signed the score

sheet, hand the slip to the winner, and instruct the winner to hand the slip to the Bout Committee.

If you're keeping score by hand, the score sheet should look like the below illustration. The score was 8-4 at the end of the first period and ended with a score of 15-6.



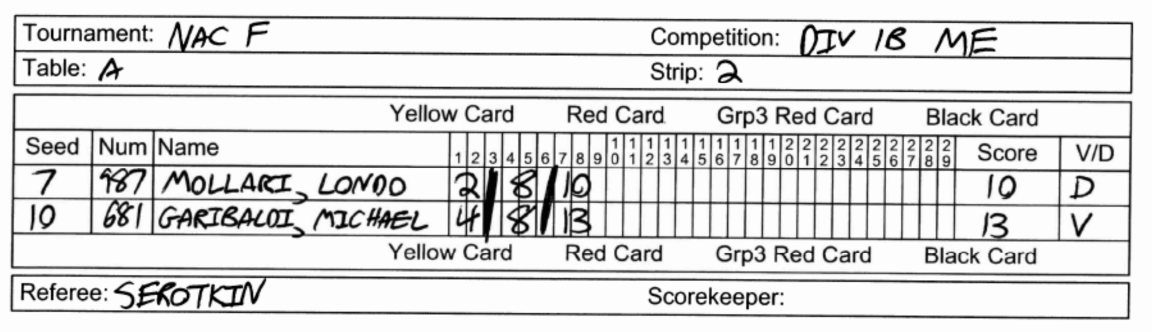
Tournament: NAC E — Competition: 04 WS

Table: A — Strip: 2

			Yellow Card	Red Card	Grp3 Red Card	Black Card		
Seed	Num	Name	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29				Score	V/D
1	802	THRACE, KARA	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15				15	V
16	904	ADAMA, LEE	1 2 3 4 5 6				6	D
			Yellow Card	Red Card	Grp3 Red Card	Black Card		

Referee: SEROTKIN — Scorekeeper:

If you've got a scoring machine that can record the score on it as you referee the bout, then you can simplify the score sheet to look something like the below illustration. Here, the score was 4-2 at the end of the first period, 8-8 at the end of the second period, and 13-10 when time expired at the end of the third period.



Tournament: NAC F — Competition: DIV 1B ME

Table: A — Strip: 2

			Yellow Card	Red Card	Grp3 Red Card	Black Card		
Seed	Num	Name	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29				Score	V/D
7	987	MOLLARI, LONDO	2 | 8 | 10				10	D
10	681	GARIBALDI, MICHAEL	4 | 8 | 13				13	V
			Yellow Card	Red Card	Grp3 Red Card	Black Card		

Referee: SEROTKIN — Scorekeeper:

Repechage

Repechage (French: repêchage, lit. "We don't know what's going on")

Repechage is a component sometimes used as part of a Direct Elimination table at U.S. National fencing events. It is no longer used by the FIE or by most other National fencing governing bodies.

Refereeing repechage is fundamentally no different than refereeing a series of regular Direct Elimination matches, but it is a much more confusing format—strip assignments can change after every single bout, and you generally are assigned each bout individually by the bout committee once repechage starts. Since the format is widely misunderstood, I've included here a complete description of how the format works and how fencers are eliminated.

In a tournament utilizing repechage, Direct Elimination proceeds as normal until the round of 32. Repechage is used to eliminate fencers until there are 8 fencers remaining. Then, standard single-elimination DEs resume for the rounds of 8, 4, and 2.

In short, repechage means that fencers get a second chance if they lose one bout. If they win, they advance, just as in a regular format. If they lose one bout, they get to keep fencing until they lose a second bout or win the entire competition.

START of ROUND 1:
No one has fenced yet.

In the first round of repechage, everyone fences who they would have ordinarily fenced (the #1 vs. #32, #16 vs. #17, etc.).

START of ROUND 2:
16 fencers with 1 victory

16 fencers with 1 defeat

Then, the winners' bracket continues for one more round (the #1 vs. #16, assuming the higher seeds win) and the losers fence each other in a corresponding losers bracket (#17 vs. #32). The losers of the losers bracket have lost twice, so they are eliminated.

START of ROUND 3:
8 fencers with 2 defeats (ELIMINATED IN ROUND 2)
8 fencers with 2 victories and 0 defeats
8 fencers with 1 victory and then 1 defeat
8 fencers with 1 defeat and then 1 victory

Here's where it gets a little hairy. We reseed the 16 fencers with a loss into a table of 16 and fence it until only 4 fencers remain. The 12 fencers who lose during this bracket have 2 losses and are defeated, and the 4 fencers left will all have three victories total and one loss.

We also have the 8 undefeated fencers fence one more round in the winners' bracket. The winning 4 fencers advance out of repechage, and the losers have 1 defeat and have to fence some more.

So we're down to 12 fencers total.

START of ROUND 4:
8 fencers with 2 defeats (ELIMINATED IN ROUND 2)
8 fencers with 1 victory and 2 defeats (ELIMINATED IN ROUND 3)
4 fencers with 2 victories and 2 defeats (ELIMINATED IN ROUND 3)
4 fencers with 3 victories and 1 defeat (winners of the losers' bracket)
4 fencers with 2 victories and 1 defeat (losers of the winners' bracket)
4 fencers with 3 victories (winners of the winners' bracket)

Now, the winners of the losers' bracket and the losers of the winners' bracket are seeded into a table of 8 and fence one round. The losers have 2

defeats and are eliminated, and the winners advance out of repechage!

END of ROUND 4:
8 fencers with 2 defeats (ELIMINATED IN ROUND 2)
8 fencers with 1 victory and 2 defeats (ELIMINATED IN ROUND 3)
4 fencers with 2 victories and 2 defeats (ELIMINATED IN ROUND 3)
4 fencers with 2 or 3 victories and 2 defeats (ELIMINATED IN ROUND 4)
4 fencers with 3 or 4 victories and 1 defeat (winners of the Round 4 bracket)
4 fencers with 3 victories (winners of the winners' bracket)

The 8 fencers still standing are the final 8--they're seeded into a table of 8, repechage is over, and the tournament finals commence.

Directing the Bout: Equipment Check

Assuming all pre-bout checks have been completed, the following equipment checks should be made once the fencers have plugged into the reels and are ready to fence. In foil:

- Insulating tape covering the barrel and foible of the blade is present and in good condition
- The barrel of the weapon is not loose
- The barrel spring passes the 500g weight test
- There are no obvious breaks in the wire of the blade, and the wire does not pop out of the wire groove at any point on the blade
- The bend in the blade is not greater than 1 cm
- The wire inside the bell guard is insulated for its entire length
- A retaining device is present inside the bell guard that fastens the body cord securely to the socket
- The body cord's alligator clip is securely fastened to the back of the lame, on the weapon-arm side
- The reel's retaining clip is present and securely fastened
- No obvious evidence of cheating is observed

In epee:

- The barrel of the weapon is not loose
- The barrel spring passes the 750g weight test
- The tip passes both of the shim tests
- Both barrel screws are present
- There are no obvious breaks in the wire of the blade, and the wire does not pop out of the wire groove at any point on the blade
- The bend in the blade is not greater than 1 cm
- The wires inside the bell guard are insulated for their entire length

- A retaining device is present inside the bell guard that fastens the body cord securely to the socket
- The reel's retaining clip is present and securely fastened
- No obvious evidence of cheating is observed

In sabre:

- The bend in the blade is not greater than 4 cm
- A retaining device is present inside the bell guard that fastens the body cord securely to the socket
- The body cord's alligator clip is securely fastened to the back of the lame, on the weapon-arm side
- The reel's retaining clip is present and securely fastened
- No obvious evidence of cheating is observed

In foil, the fencers should then simultaneously test on each other's lames and ensure that both valid lights on the machine are activated. In sabre, the fencers should then simultaneously test on each other's masks—held away from the lame—and ensure that both valid lights on the machine are activated. In epee, the fencers should test hitting each other's bell guards and ensure that no touch is recorded.

Directing the Bout: Starting the Action

t.18 1. Beginning the bout

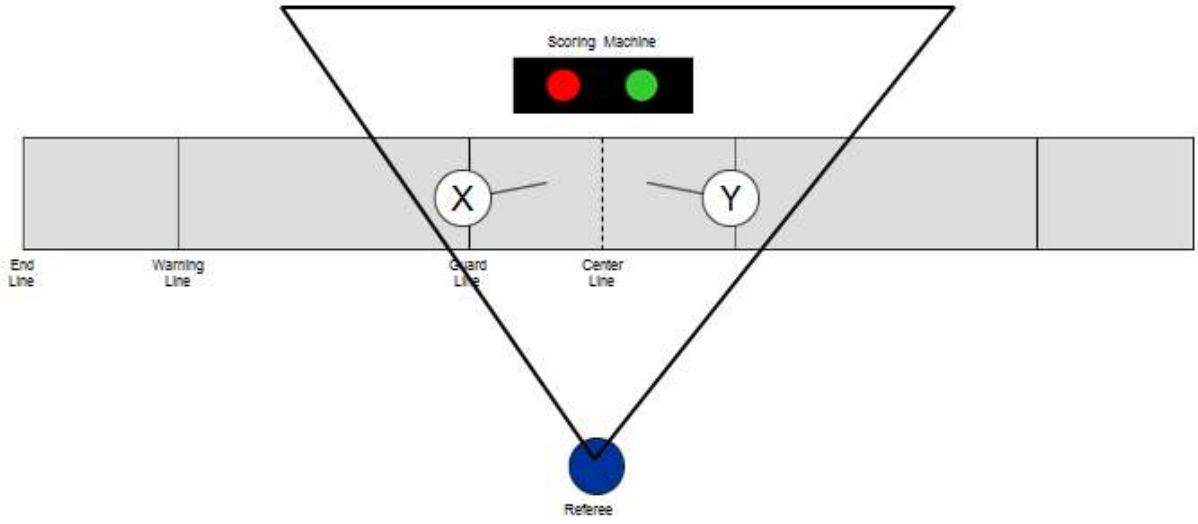
The start of the bout is signaled by the word 'Fence'. No movement made or initiated before the word 'Fence' is counted.

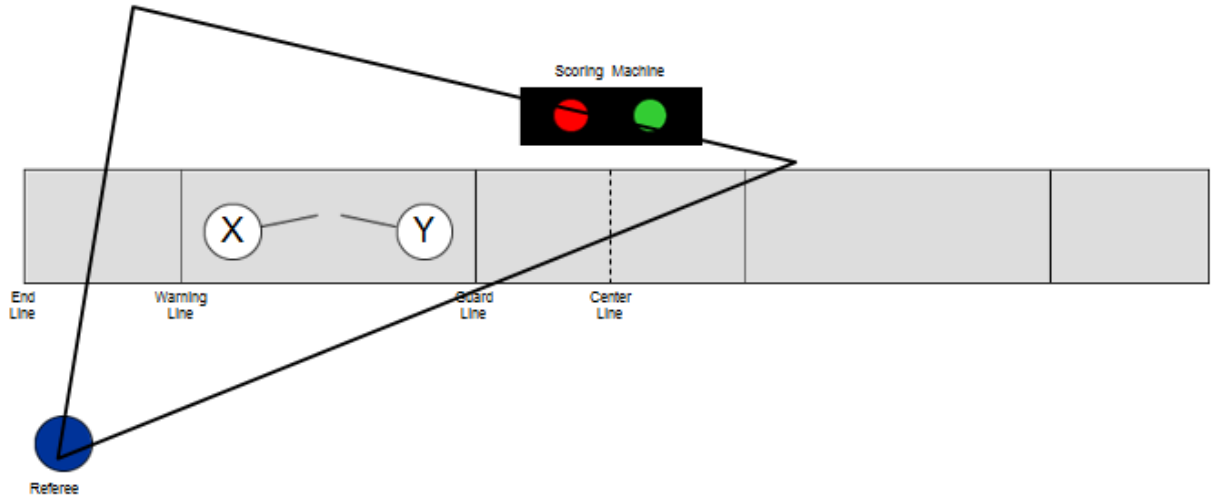
Call the fencers on guard with the command, "On Guard!" Ask the fencers if they are ready with the command, "Ready?" If the fencers say "Yes," or they do not respond, then they are assumed to be ready. To begin the action, give the command, "Fence!" Be sure to allow at least a second or two between "Ready?" and "Fence!" to give the fencers an opportunity to indicate that they are not ready. Also, vary the length of time you give between the two commands to prevent fencers from jumping the gun. If one or both fencers move before the "Fence!" command is given, do not allow the action to continue. Reset the fencers and begin again.

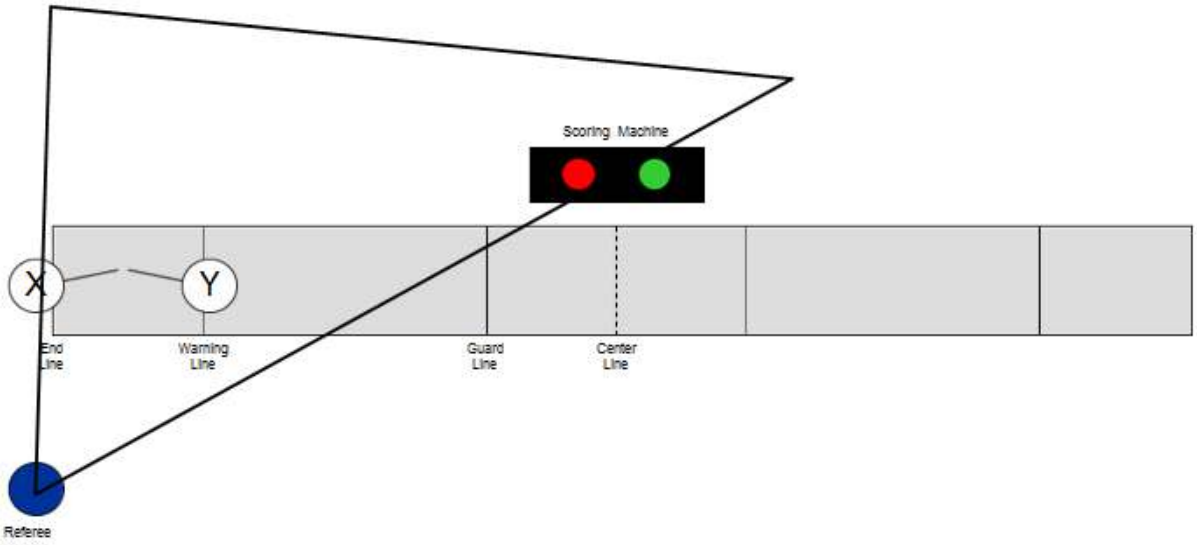
Directing the Bout: Where to Stand

While the match is underway, it's vital that you move with the action. You should position yourself such that your view of the scoring machine is unobstructed. In most situations, this means positioning the machine between the two fencers. Near the ends of the strip, however, it is preferable to stand even with the end-line. This allows for the best view of the action while allowing for the machine to be unobstructed and visible in your peripheral vision.

Standing at least three meters removed from the strip yields for the best view of the action. Many novice referees have a tendency to stand practically on top of the strip, which does not allow for the action as a whole to be viewed as accurately.




Scoring Machine
X
Y
End Line
Warning Line
Guard Line
Center Line
Referee

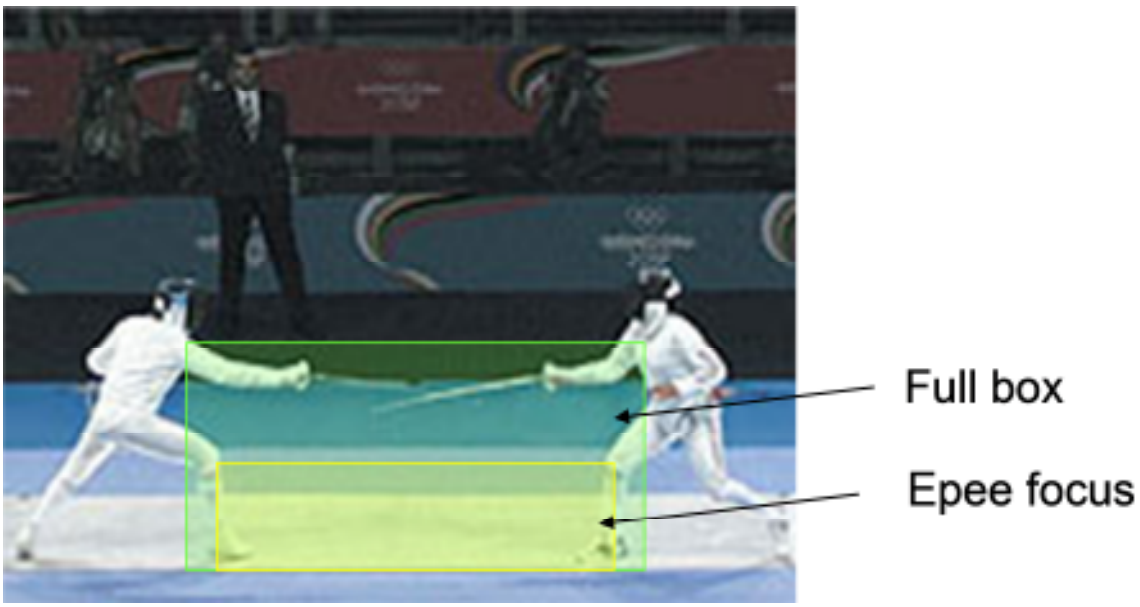

Scoring Machine
X
Y
End Line
Warning Line
Guard Line
Center Line
Referee

Directing the Bout: What to Watch

Imagine a box in space between the two fencers. The top two corners of the box are the fencers' bell guards, and the bottom two corners are the fencers' feet. The scoring machine is ideally in the dead center of the box, but this may not be possible depending on how high off the ground the scoring machine is set. 95% of the things a referee needs to watch during the bout occur inside that box.

In epee, the most common calls a referee needs to make are foot touches and leaving the strip. As such, it's advisable to narrow the box so you're focusing almost entirely on the feet and the strip. Under most circumstances, watching everything higher than the knees out of your peripheral vision works out just fine.

In sabre, watching the feet (except for crossovers) is somewhat less important and you'll want to focus more on the top half of the box.



Directing the Bout: When to Call Halt

t.18

2. Stopping the bout

The bout stops on the word 'Halt', except in the case of special events occurring which modify the regular and normal conditions of the bout (cf. also t.32).

As soon as the order 'Halt' has been given, a competitor may not start a new action; only the movement which has been begun before the order was given remains valid. Everything which takes place afterwards is entirely non-valid (But cf. t.32).

If a competitor stops before the word 'Halt', and is touched, the touch is valid.

The order 'Halt' is also given if the fencing of the competitors is dangerous, confused, or contrary to the Rules, if one of the competitors is disarmed or leaves the strip, or if, while retreating, he approaches too near the spectators or the Referee (cf. t.28, t.55/6 and t.73/j).

To call halt, say the command "Halt!" in a clear voice. There is a hand signal for halt as well, which is generally used anytime the action is stopped for something other than a touch being scored. Simple, right? Well, not exactly.

The conditions in which you should call a halt are pretty clearly defined in the rulebook:

- A touch has been scored (soft halt)
- A penalty has occurred (soft halt)
- A fencer is unable to properly wield his weapon or is disarmed (soft halt)
- Continuing the bout would cause for dangerous or confused fencing (soft halt)
- Corps-a-corps in epee (soft halt)
- A fencer approaches too near the spectators or the referee (soft halt)

- One fencer passes the other, or both pass each other (soft halt)

- A fencer has left the lateral limit of the strip (soft/hard halt)

- A blade has broken (hard halt)
- Time has expired (hard halt)
- A fencer leaves the rear limit of the strip (hard halt)

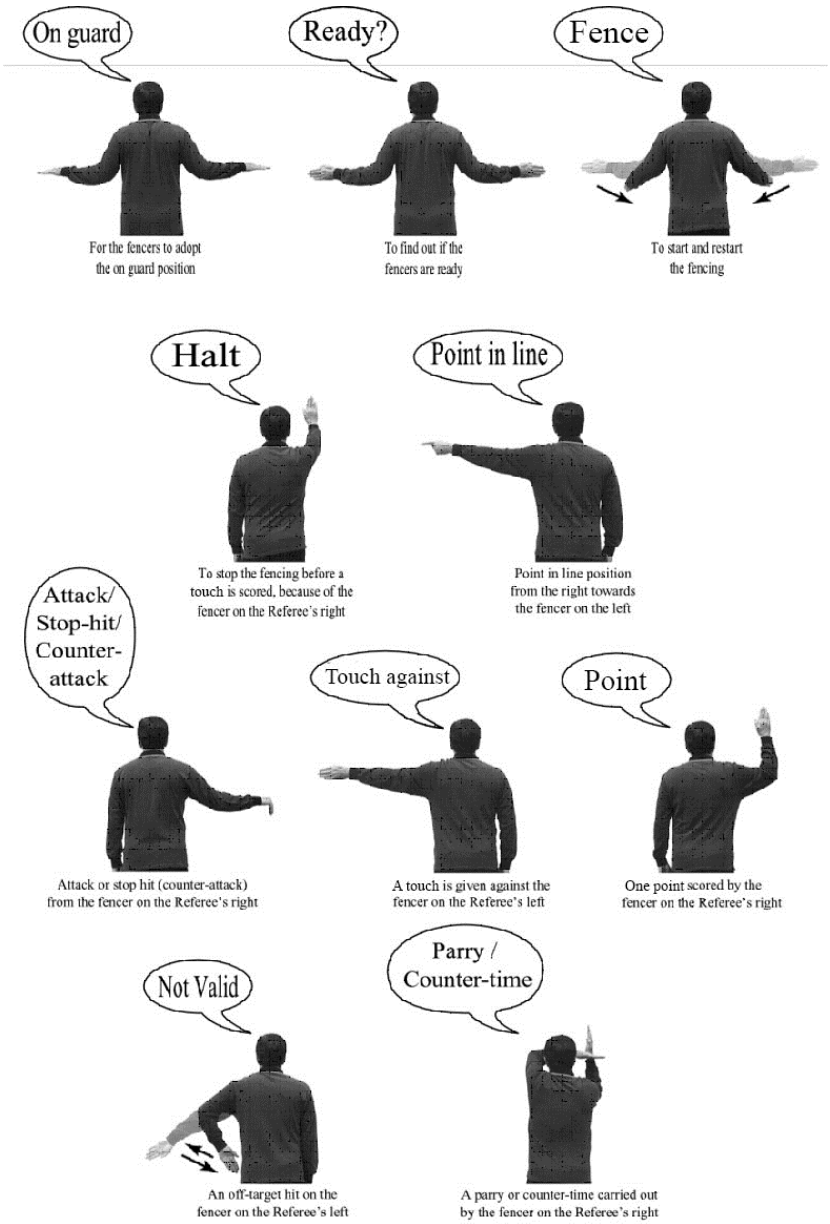
With a "hard halt," no action that occurred or finished after the halt can be valid. With a "soft halt," an action that was in progress when the situation that caused the halt occurred is valid. For example: X lunges, Y drops his weapon, and X's attack finishes and scores. Since the attack had begun prior to Y dropping his weapon, the touch scored as a result of that attack is valid. Had Y's blade snapped instead of having been dropped, it would have causes a hard halt and X's touch would not have been valid.

A fencer leaving the strip can be either soft or hard, depending on the situation. If a fencer leaves the strip with one foot, it is a soft halt. If a fencer leaves the strip with two feet, it is a hard halt for that fencer but a soft halt for the opponent—touches started before the halt are valid for the opponent, but not for the fencer who left the strip.

Directing the Bout: Reconstructing the Phrase

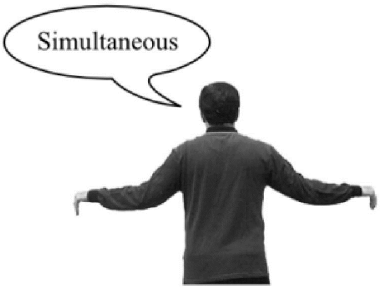
t.42 As soon as the bout has stopped, the Referee reconstructs briefly the movements which composed the last fencing phrase.

The FIE (adopted fully by the USFA) has created a list of hand signals that referees are required to use when reconstructing the phrase:

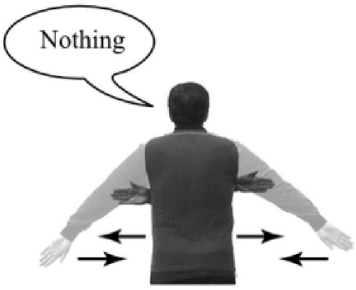


Both fencers are hit

Each fencer scores a hit

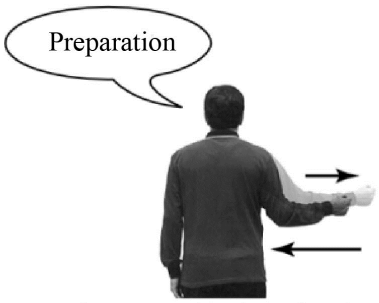


Simultaneous attacks



No hit or warning

Offensive action from the fencer on the Referee's right; too short and does not hit



Incorrect attack or riposte from the fencer on the Referee's right

By mimicry, the Referee demonstrates the offence of the fencer on the right and shows the card corresponding to the offence concerned

NOTES

1. The Referee analyses the fencing and announces his decisions by means of the signals and words above.
2. In following the fencing phrase the Referee uses the following words without making the signals: "Riposte!", "Counter-riposte!", "Remise!", "Reprise!", "Redouble!"
3. The fencers may politely ask the Referee for a more complete analysis of the fencing phrase.
4. Each signal must last 1–2 seconds, be expressive and be correctly made. Above they refer to the fencer on the Referee's right.

Take a look at the notes at the bottom—if a fencer asks you to restate the analysis of the phrase, you should just repeat what you said the first time along with the appropriate hand signals. Never explain the action beyond the facts—the words to go along with the hand signals are really all you should ever have to say to reconstruct the phrase.

You should only reconstruct the last relevant phrase that resulted in a touch being scored—you do not need to explain everything that happened from the time you said "Fence!" to the time you said "Halt!" Furthermore, if there were twelve counter-ripostes in a row, no one will mind if you abbreviate that to, "The final parry and riposte is from the left."

In the case of a penalty or other non-touch condition that needs to be explained, you should reconstruct the phrase first, then describe the condition and award any penalties, and then annul or award the touch as appropriate. For example: "The attack from the left was parried, the riposte from the right was valid. There's a yellow card on the right for covering target, and so the touch for the right is annulled. En garde!"

Directing the Bout: Keeping Time and Score

If the scoring machine being used can record and display the score and time, then the only thing you need in your hands is the remote control for the machine. Just be sure to update the machine after each touch, incrementing the score as appropriate. Most machines that keep time will automatically stop the time when a touch is scored which is a helpful feature—but remember that if you call halt for something other than a touch, you'll need to manually stop the time. It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with how the remote works before the event starts (so that you don't have to figure it out during the first pool bout.) Be sure you know how to rearm the machine after time expires.

Otherwise, you will need to keep score by hand. Hold the following items in your hands as you direct the bout:

- Index card or scrap paper (and optionally, a mini-clipboard to keep the scrap paper on)
- Pencil
- Countdown timer

Do *not* carry the entire score sheet and clipboard while you are refereeing. It is unwieldy and gets in the way of proper hand signals. Record touches on the index card, creating a separate area for each bout and ticking off each touch as it is scored. After the bout has been completed, transfer the final score to the score sheet.

Use the timer to keep time during the bout. I usually hold the timer to my ear when time gets low so that I don't have to glance down at it and potentially miss an action. Even better, if you can find one, is a timer that vibrates instead of beeps.

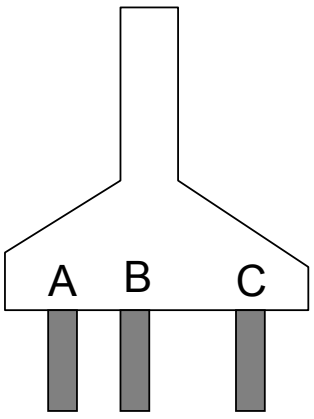
The fencers are allowed to ask the score and the time remaining during each and every stoppage in the action. You should clearly announce the score and/or time remaining when asked, speaking not just to the fencer that asked but to both fencers.

Directing the Bout: Identifying Equipment Problems

When equipment problems happen—and they will—it's the referee's responsibility to determine what fault has occurred and take the appropriate action. For simple problems, you can make this determination himself. If you are unable to determine the fault, you should call over an armorer.

Refereeing at my very first national event, I got stuck doing a pool of Y12 Women's Foil. I had never seen prior, nor have seen since, so many equipment problems in one pool. I continued to try to figure out all the equipment problems myself, confiscating equipment and handing out penalty cards left and right. Midway through the pool, I was convinced that one girl's electric jacket was faulty—I confiscated it, which forced her parents to buy her a new lame on the spot so she could continue in the pool. A few bouts later, when that lame started to have the same faults, I finally wizened up and called an armorer over. Turns out that the scoring machine itself was faulty, and half of the penalties I had given were for non-existent equipment problems. ***When in doubt, call the armorer.***

That being said, there are many simple equipment problems that can be diagnosed quickly. This is easiest done in epee, since epee has the simplest wiring scheme. Here's a diagram of a standard 3-prong body cord plug, for reference:



If a fencer's epee fails to register a touch when the tip is pressed:

1. Ensure all body cord, reel, and floor cord connections are firmly secured. Press the tip of the fencer's weapon. If that doesn't work:

2. Detach the fencer's body cord from his weapon. Touch a metal object (an epee shim works well) to both the A and B prongs on the plug of the body cord at the same time. If a light goes on, the fencer's weapon is at fault. If that doesn't work:

3. Partly detach the other end of the fencer's body cord from the reel cord—leave it connected, but partly expose the body cord's prongs. Touch a metal object to the A and B prongs at the same time. If a light goes on, the fencer's body cord is at fault. If that doesn't work:

4. Detach the reel from the floor cord plug. Touch a metal object to the A and B prongs of the floor cord at the same time. If a light goes on, the reel is at fault. If that doesn't work:

5. Partly detach the other end of the floor cord from the scoring machine—leave it connected, but party expose the floor cord's prongs. Touch a metal object to the A and B prongs at the same time. If a light goes on, the floor cord is at fault. If that doesn't work:

6. Call the armorer!

If a fencer's epee (or foil) registers valid touches on its bell guard:

1. Clean the tip of the opponent's weapon and depress the opponent's tip on the bell guard. If a light still turns on:

2. Detach the fencer's body cord from his weapon. Depress the opponent's tip on the C line of the body cord. If no light goes on, the fencer's weapon is at fault. If a light still turns on:

3. Partly detach the other end of the fencer's body cord from the reel cord—leave it connected, but partly expose the body cord's prongs. Depress the opponent's tip on the C line prong. If no light goes on, the fencer's body cord is at fault. If a light still turns on:

4. Detach the reel from the floor cord plug. Depress the opponent's tip on the C prong of the floor cord. If no light goes on, the reel is at fault. If a light still turns on:

5. Partly detach the other end of the floor cord from the scoring machine—leave it connected, but party expose the floor cord's prongs. Depress the opponent's tip on the C prong. If no light goes on, the floor cord is at fault. If a light still turns on:

6. Call the armorer!

If a fencer registers touches on his lame as off-target in foil:

1. Clean the tip of the opponent's weapon and depress the opponent's tip on the bell guard. If that doesn't work:

2. Remove the alligator clip from the electrical jacket. Depress the opponent's tip directly on the alligator clip. If the valid light goes on, the fencer's lame is at fault. If that doesn't work:

3. Partly detach the other end of the fencer's body cord from the reel cord—leave it connected, but partly expose the body cord's prongs. Depress the opponent's tip on the A line prong. If the valid light goes on, the fencer's body cord is at fault. If that doesn't work:

4. Detach the reel from the floor cord plug. Depress the opponent's tip on the A prong of the floor cord. If the valid light goes on, the reel is at fault. If that doesn't work:

5. Partly detach the other end of the floor cord from the scoring machine—leave it connected, but party expose the floor cord's prongs. Depress the opponent's tip on the A prong. If the valid light goes on, the floor cord is at fault. If that doesn't work:

6. Call the armorer!

Directing the Bout: Non-Combativity

The rules concerning non-combativity (called passivity in previous incarnations) has changed numerous times in the past few years. So, for reference, here's the current actual rule text:

t.87.4
When both fencers make clear their unwillingness to fence, the Referee will immediately call "Halt!"

If one of the two criteria below is present, there is unwillingness to fight.

a) Criterion of time: approximately one minute of fencing without a touch.
b) Absence of blade contact or excessive distance (greater than the distance of an advance-lunge) for at least 15 seconds.

Individual Events
t.87.5

a) If during the first two periods of a direct elimination bout both fencers make clear their unwillingness to fence, the Referee will proceed to the next period, without the minute rest.
b) When both fencers make clear their unwillingness to fence during the third period of a direct elimination bout, the Referee will proceed to a last minute of fencing. This last minute, which will be fenced in its entirety, will be decisive and will be preceded by a drawing of lots to decide the winner should the scores be equal at the end of the minute.

Team events
t.87.6

a) If both teams make clear their unwillingness to fence during a team match, the Referee will proceed to the next bout.
b) If both teams make clear their unwillingness to fence during the last bout, the Referee will proceed to a last minute of fencing. This last minute, which will be fenced in its entirety, will be decisive and will be preceded by a drawing of lots to decide the winner should the scores be equal at the end of the minute.

Here are some things to remember:

- Non-combativity only exists in 10- or 15-touch direct elimination bouts. Non-combativity cannot occur in youth events that fence a best 2 out of 3 format. These bouts are similar to a pool bout.
- If non-combativity is called, there is no one-minute rest between periods, and the coaches may not approach the strip. The next period begins immediately, and the fencers start back on their on-guard lines.
- If non-combativity occurs in the final period, this period ends; the referee must first flip a coin for priority, and the fencers fence for one

minute. But unlike the regular priority minute, this is NOT sudden death, and the minute must be fenced in its entirety. If the score is tied at the end of this entire minute, whoever has priority wins the bout.

- Only 1 of the 2 criteria listed in t.87.4 must occur for the referee to call non-combativity.
- In foil, an off target counts as a touch and "resets" the clock.
- Note the rule language carefully:
    - *Approximately* one minute of fencing without a touch. If there is a fencing phrase in progress, be careful not to call halt too early just because the clock hit one minute.
    - *At least* 15 seconds without blade contact or excessive distance. This means the referee could wait longer if he feels the fencers are being combative.

Directing the Bout: Video Replay

Video replay is now used at all NACs and National Championship tournaments. Here are the basics of what you need to know.

For all DE bouts where video replay is utilized, each fencer has two challenges to "spend." If the call is upheld, the fencer who challenged loses one of their challenges. If the call is changed in favor of the fencer making the challenge, however, the fencer does not lose a challenge. Once a fencer loses both of their challenges, that fencer cannot challenge again for the remainder of the bout.

Additionally, the bout referee can decide to review the last action on his own prerogative without one of the fencers challenging. Also, if there is a two-light touch on the deciding touch in the bout (either 14-14 or a tie score in priority), the bout referee must review the action before making a call. The video replay official can also request that the strip referee come to review an action on the video.

For any bout using the replay system, there will be two referees assigned to the bout—the bout referee and the video referee. If you are the bout referee, your job is to referee the bout as normal. If one of the fencers challenges a call, it is your responsibility to review the video replay of the last action in conjunction with the video referee, at least once at full speed and at least once at reduced speed. After reviewing the video, you should confer with the video referee and take his advice into consideration, but the final decision on whether to uphold or reverse the call is yours alone.

If you are the video referee, you should watch all actions live as they occur—there are things you can see or hear live that sometimes do not come across on the video replay. If one of the fencers challenges a call (or the bout referee wants to review a call on his own), you should review the video replay of the action in conjunction with the bout referee, at least once at full speed and at least once at reduced speed. You must offer your opinion to the bout referee—if you do not provide a second opinion to the bout referee, you are not doing your job.

Between Refereeing Assignments

When you referee at any large tournament, but particularly at National events, you will invariably have downtime between rounds. Bring a book, an iPod, or anything else that will keep you relaxed and occupied. Don't wander too far from the bout committee table, or you'll miss your name being called for your next assignment. At the beginning of the day, it's a good idea to take a few minutes to "warm up" your eyes by watching some of the fencer who are warming up and mentally calling the actions.

If you want to improve your refereeing, one of the best things you can do during breaks is shadow a more experienced referee. Try to figure out why they're calling what they're calling, and don't be afraid to ask questions when they have free time.

Be sure to take advantage of the free meals for the referees. When the assigner or bout committee tells you to go eat, go eat—it may be your only chance that day. Starving yourself won't help you make better calls! Also be sure to drink an adequate amount of water to stay hydrated during the day. It will also help prevent you from losing your voice—chances are you'll be talking more than you usually do over the course of a day.

One final note—keep in mind that you may be on the strip for hours at a time before you have a break in assignments. If you really need it, don't be afraid to take a five minute break in the middle of the pool or DE tableau to give yourself a bathroom break! Better to finish five minutes later than to be distracted for the next hour.

Right-of-Way in a Nutshell

1. A properly executed attack has priority over a counterattack.
2. A properly executed stop-hit (attack in preparation) has priority over an attack.
3. A riposte has priority over a remise.
4. A properly established point-in-line has priority over everything.
5. None of this applies in epee.

That's all there is to it. Simple, right? Har, har.

I am purposefully **not** including a complete description of right of way—that can be found in the rulebook, and there's no reason to duplicate it here. What I am aiming to do in the following sections is focus on are the "sticking points" in each weapon—what is most often debated or misunderstood, and what the current interpretation are for each of those scenarios.

Foil: "The Attack in Foil" by Bill Oliver

Bill Oliver is a past Chairman of the Fencing Official's Commission. What follows is an article written by Mr. Oliver in 2004 which details the current interpretation of what constitutes an attack in foil.

Much has been said about what does and does not constitute an attack in foil. Tradition contends that the attack must have a straight arm, with the tip of the foil constantly pointing towards the opponent's target, in a line drawn from the top of the shoulder thorough the tip of the blade. Any deviation from this results in a total loss of any priority of the action.

Popular belief has it that any aggressive action (footwork, bladework, bad breath) has priority, and nothing can remove that priority, except a parry.

Reality is, of course somewhere between.

Article t.7 states that

> **t.7**
> The *attack* is the initial offensive action made by extending the arm and continuously threatening the opponent's target, preceding the launching of the lunge or fleche.

This seems fairly obvious: In order to have the priority of attack, one must begin to extend one's arm and threaten the opponent's target before beginning the lunge (the final action of the attack.) Key words: Extending arm, continuous threat, preceding the launching of the lunge.

Further, article t.56 states:

> **t.56**
> …every initial offensive action which is correctly executed must be parried or completely avoided….

A correct attack retains priority until it fails.

So, what constitutes a "correct" attack? And, what makes it fail?

Article t.56 goes on to state:

t.56
In order to judge the correctness of an attack the following points must be considered:
The simple attack, direct or indirect (cf. t.8), is correctly executed when the extending of the arm, the point threatening the valid target, precedes the initiation of the lunge or the fleche.

What we are usually discussing when we talk attack is a simple attack: Extended arm, point threatening, before the front foot lands on the lunge or fleche.

However, this type of type attack is far less common than:

t.56
The compound attack (cf. t.8) is correctly executed when the arm is extending in the presentation of the first feint, with the point threatening the valid target, and the arm is not bent between the successive actions of the attack and the initiation of the lunge or the flèche.

This requires close examination. The arm has to be extending in the first action. It cannot be bent between the last action of the attack and the lunge or fleche. It doesn't necessarily follow that bending of the arm constitutes an incorrectly executed attack.. Just that the arm is not bent between the final action of the attack and the initiation of the last footwork action.

To put it another way, in a compound attack, that first action must have an extending arm that constitutes a threat of valid target. It must then continually constitute a threat. And finally, the arm can't be bent, or pulled back in the final action.

This means that what happens between the initial action and the final action is very broadly defined. The only requirement is that there must continually be a threat.

"Threat" can be defined in many ways. It is not defined in the foil section of the rules. Today, top referees have a very liberal definition of threat, but a strict interpretation of the initial and final actions. So, we might see a top-level foil fencer make an initial offensive action, by extending the arm (even slightly), and making a threat, followed by any number of arm motions, including bending the elbow, holding the blade up or down, or waiving it around, while making continuous advances toward the opponent. Then, as the opponent runs out of strip to retreat, and begins an offensive action of his/her own, the attacker begins the final action with an extending arm and a continuation of the threat. Two lights. The initial offensive action has the priority.

This does not mean that such an action cannot successfully be stopped.

Article t.8 states:

> **t.8**
> *Counter-attacks* are offensive or offensive–defensive actions made during the offensive action of the opponent.

Article t.59 goes on to state:

> **t.59 (d)**
> When compound attacks are made, the opponent has the right to stop hit; but to be valid, the stop hit must precede the conclusion of the attack by an interval of fencing time; that is to say that the stop hit must arrive before the attacker has begun the final movement of the attack.

And this, I believe is the crux of foil fencing. To make an initial offensive action that satisfies the strict interpretation of today, then to make a series of foot/blade actions that constitute a continual threat, but that are difficult to parry, (while remaining out of counter-attack distance) and then to shrink the distance between the fencers such that the opponent has no choice but to counter attack, and to then launch the final action during that brief time between the start of the counter attack and it's arrival on the attacker's valid target. No small trick. At the highest levels of foil, such actions are usually obvious. Either the counter attack is in time, or it isn't. Either the attack was continuous, or it wasn't. In club-level bouts, it's anything but obvious!

Article t.60 goes into some detail on exactly what is required for a counter attack to take over the priority from the attack:

> **t.60**
> 2. *Only the fencer who attacks is counted as touched*:
> (a) If he initiates his attack when his opponent has his point in line (cf. t.10) without deflecting the opponent's weapon. Referees must ensure that a mere grazing of the blades is not considered as sufficient to deflect the opponent's blade.
> (b) If he attempts to find the blade, does not succeed (is the object of a dérobement) and continues the attack.
> (c) If, during a compound attack, his opponent finds the blade, but he continues the attack and his opponent ripostes immediately.
> (d) If, during a compound attack, he makes a momentary pause, during which time the opponent makes a stop hit, after which the attacker continues his attack.
> (e) If, during a compound attack, he is stop-hit in time before he begins his final movement.
> (f) If he makes a touch by a remise, redoublement or reprise when his original attack has been parried and his opponent has made a riposte which is immediate, simple, and executed in one period of fencing time without withdrawing the arm.

If we all had the luxury of observing Olympic-class fencing, many of these discussions would be unnecessary. It's in the local club, or weekend tournament that we have trouble. Many fencers are skilled enough to recognize small errors on the part of their opponent. The problem is that, in many cases, the gap between recognizing the opportunity and executing the response is often greater than the "window of opportunity."

We see the situation that would allow a counter attack to "steal" the priority from an attack. We think of the correct response. We begin the correct action into the opening. The opponent begins the final action of the composed attack. We arrive on target. We're hit.

A small error on the part of the attacker doesn't usually result in a loss of priority. It takes a major error for that. A major error is either beginning the offensive action without an extending arm, or withdrawing the arm during the final action. Beginning or ending the offensive action without an extending arm is usually called a "preparation."

Contemporary foil fencing has evolved into a much more aggressive sport, with a broad, liberal definition of "threat" but more strict guidelines for beginning and ending the attack. The rules definitely favor the aggressive fencer, and make few allowances for the opponent to take the priority away from the attack, short of a parry. They also penalize the aggressive fencer who fails to make an extension first and last.

Foil: "Does the landing of the front foot end the attack in foil?" By Bill Oliver

Bill Oliver is a past Chairman of the Fencing Official's Commission. What follows is a Fencing.Net forum post written by Mr. Oliver in June 2010.

1. The "Powers that Be" have decided that there must be an end to the attack in foil. (this is a convention, not a rule. It's akin to ROW - which arm has to be extending?)

2. The end of the attack in foil has been determined to be with or just after the landing of the front foot (attack compose is accorded due priority) this is not subject to interpretation. That's the way it is...

3. If an attack ends, there is an opportunity for the opponent to seize the offensive. This is the hard part. At some point, the attack is over, and the attack from the opponent begins. When this occurs is up to the referee.

4. At the highest levels, the athletes, coaches, and referees agree that the likely end of the attack occurs with or just after the landing of the front foot. A well executed attack, ending with disengage, will be given priority over a fast counter attack. On the other hand, an attack that is ended short of the target, is considered to be over.

5. If the attack ends, there is an opportunity for the opponent to seize the advantage and establish the ROW. Hesitation, here, is death.

6. Frequently, at events of less than "Olympic" level, a fencer "sees" the end of attack, and decides to attack that "opportunity", but in the quarter of a second that it takes to make that decision, the opportunity for attack into the failed attack is gone. The call is "attack, NO! counter-attack, NO. Remise of Attack, Yes."

7. At the highest levels, the decision to make the correct response takes less than a quarter of a second. The call is "attack, NO! Attack, Yes."

The FIE video that has been published is incorrect. I have discussed this issue with members of the FIE Arbitrage Commission, and have requested that the errant video clips be removed from the Internet, so as to promote the correct interpretation of the rules of ROW.

8. The "Residual Point in Line" that has been, in the past, acceptable as a continuation of the attack in time, is no longer. The attack has a logical end. While there is an opportunity for "remise" or "counter attack" in the face of a "hesitation" on the part of the

defender, it's rare. Such an "attack" has an end. Response will be, by definition, a new attack.

Foil: The Beat vs. The Parry

One of the hardest calls a referee must make in foil occurs when both fencers are trying to find the blade at the same time—the attacking fencer trying to beat, and the defending fencer trying to parry.

If there is ONE blade contact, then you must determine who initiated the blade contact. If the beat started before the parry, then it is a beat attack. If the parry started before the beat, then it is a parry-riposte.

Now, at first this seemingly goes against logic—why shouldn't the last person to initiate the blade contact have priority? Think about it this way: in an attack/counterattack situation, the counterattacker was the second person to attack. The counterattacker does not have priority. Likewise, the second person to initiate the blade contact in essence performed a counter-beat—it is a reaction to the other fencer's beat, and it does not have priority. You can't parry a beat, and you can't beat a parry.

You should generally give priority to the offensive fencer, where it cannot be distinguished if the action is a beat or a parry. So, a tie goes to the attacker. When at all possible, however, you should determine who initiated the blade contact to avoid having to enforce that interpretation.

If there are TWO distinct blade contacts, then you should determine who controlled the second contact. If the defender controlled the second contact, then it was likely a beat attack that was parried; the defender has priority. If the attacker controlled the second contact, then it was likely a beat attack in preparation that was parried; the (original) attacker has priority.

Epee

Right-of-way doesn't apply to epee. If one person hits, they get a point. If both people hit within 1/25th of a second, both lights will turn on and both fencers receive a touch.

As mentioned in the "What to Watch" section, most of what you want to watch is at the knees and below. Here are most of the common calls in epee (though they are relevant to foil and sabre as well):

- If one fencer passes the other fencer (if both fencers pass each other, treat both as the "Fencer who passes"):

	Fencer who passes	Fencer who was passed
Starts an action BEFORE the pass and lands BEFORE the pass	VALID	VALID
Starts an action BEFORE the pass and lands AFTER the pass	NOT VALID	VALID
Starts an action AFTER the pass (and lands AFTER the pass)	NOT VALID	NOT VALID

- If a fencer steps off the strip with ONE foot:

	Fencer who leaves the strip	Fencer who doesn't leave the strip
Starts an action BEFORE the leaving and lands BEFORE the leaving	VALID	VALID
Starts an action BEFORE the leaving and lands AFTER the leaving	VALID	VALID
Starts an action AFTER the leaving	NOT VALID	NOT VALID

- If a fencer steps off the strip with TWO feet:

	Fencer who leaves the strip	Fencer who doesn't leave the strip
Starts an action BEFORE the leaving and lands BEFORE the leaving	VALID	VALID
Starts an action BEFORE the leaving and lands AFTER the leaving	NOT VALID	VALID
Starts an action AFTER the leaving	NOT VALID	NOT VALID

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What's the difference between disturbing order and unsportsmanlike conduct?

A: I wrote the following in my capacity as the head referee for the Virginia Division. I believe it provides a good definition for these penalties, as well as how referees should apply the rules with respect to them. *(Originally posted on the Virginia Division Forum in December 2008.)*

Anyone in attendance at a Virginia fencing event is expected to conduct themselves in a sportsmanlike manner at all times. This applies to fencers, parents, coaches, spectators, referees, and everyone else.

All referees at Virginia fencing events are expected to take reasonable and appropriate measures, under USFA guidelines, to maintain both order and sportsmanlike conduct on their strips. The rules regarding conduct must be enforced impartially and in a standard fashion, as failing to do so can give a tangible advantage to a participant in the event.

Order is defined as a condition during which bouts are running smoothly and without substantial interruption. Any person causing a substantial disruption to a bout or to any of the active participants in a bout can be disturbing order, subject to the discretion of the referee.

Disturbing order is a Group III penalty. For a spectator, this means that the first offense is a yellow card (warning) and the second offense is a black card (expulsion). For a fencer, the first offense is a red card and the second offense is a black card.

For the sake of defusing most situations before they escalate, referees may, at their discretion, issue a verbal warning to the individual(s) in question and inform them as to the rules with regards to disturbing order.

Sportsmanlike conduct is defined as a condition during which all commonly accepted standards of decency and public appropriateness are being followed.

Unsportsmanlike conduct is a Group IV penalty, which means it is grounds for a black card (expulsion) on the first offense. Unsportsmanlike conduct is a severe offense at all times; it should not be tolerated under any conditions.

Let this be clear: Referees should not be looking to card for these offenses, just as they should not be looking to not card for these offenses. Referees should card appropriately, no less and no more.

I ask that all referees follow these standard guidelines when refereeing in the Virginia Division.

Thank you,

Ian Serotkin
Chairman, Fencing Officials of Virginia

Q: Does the clashing of bell guards count as corps-a-corps?

A: No. Corps-a-corps, literally meaning BODY-to-BODY in French, means that the bodies of the fencers touch. The bell guard is not part of the body, any more than the foible or tip of the blade is part of the fencer's body. Hard clashing of the bell guards may, however, cause one or both fencers to be unable to properly wield their weapons, in which case the action should be halted and the fencers should be replaced on guard (without penalty).

Q: If there's a tie score in the overtime minute of an epee bout, does a double touch change the score?

A. No. The Rule committee of the FOC has determined that, during the overtime minute mandated by a tie score at expiration of regulation time, in both Direct elimination and Pools, double touches (in epee) will not be awarded, the score will not change, and the fencers will retain their respective positions on the strip. If a final minute of fencing time has been reached as a result of Non-Combativity, all valid touches during the minute, including double touches in epee, will be awarded until one fencer reaches 15 points and/or time expires.

Q: What's the deal with the 2011 rule change regarding stepping off the side of the strip?

A: Here's the new rule text:

t.28.1
If a competitor crosses one of the lateral boundaries of the strip, he must retreat one meter from the point where he left the strip, and if he goes off the strip during an attack, he must return to the position he occupied when he started his attack and then retreat a further meter (but cf. t.29).

t.28.2.
If the exercise of this penalty places a competitor with both feet beyond the rear limit of the strip, that competitor is considered as having been touched.

So, in a nutshell, the rule change is that the fencer who steps off the strip **retreats** one meter, instead of the opponent **advancing** one meter as they would have under the old rule. Some things to keep in mind:

- An action that ends with one foot off the strip remains valid as before. The fencer must have at least one foot on the strip.

- If the fencer who leaves the strip is not making an offensive action (moving forward), they lose one meter from the spot they left the strip. But if the fencer is making an offensive action, they must return to the spot they started that action, and then retreat one meter from that spot. As far as determining where the offensive action began, the application of this rule, is currently the final part of your attack (advance-lunge or fleche). Preparatory actions are not considered.

- This rule change leads to situations where, during infighting, a fencer steps off the strip and their opponent actually must retreat as well to take proper distance. If this infighting occurs at the end of the strip, it is important to remember that a fencer who stays on the strip cannot be placed behind the end line. For instance: Bob is fencing John. They are at Bob's end of the strip. Bob has both feet on the strip with one foot on the end line. John steps off the strip immediately in front of Bob. John must now retreat one meter. If this happened in the middle of the strip, Bob would likely also have to retreat in order to take proper distance. Since Bob cannot be forced off the back of the strip, John must continue to retreat until he reached proper distance.

- If the fencer is within the last meter of the strip and steps off the side, he must retreat a meter off the back of the strip, and a point is awarded against him.