



Wasatch Hema Beginner's Guide



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Preface to the Guide

This document is a supplementary guide to Beginner's Longsword as taught by True Edge Academy of Swordsmanship and the UCSA. Interpretations herein are subject to change over time. Represented here are the current interpretations of historical swordsmanship by modern interpreters and sources considered well researched by the HEMA community at large and approved by local instructors. Students should use this guide and its resources to gain understanding in foundational concepts common to both primary longsword traditions. Please refer all questions regarding content and interpretation to the instructors.

Conduct

Every student is expected to conduct themselves in such a way that puts the safety and security of themselves and fellow students first. Poor sportsmanship, self-control, and attitude will not be tolerated. Engaging in risky behaviors will receive warning. Studying martial arts requires that you can trust your fellow students and Instructors; everyone's health and wellness are in the hands of their fellow students. If you feel unsafe in any class situation, please speak to an Instructor immediately. We promote an inclusive environment.

Dress code

Athletic clothing is highly recommended. Certain clothing can be restrictive and discourages students from performing actions properly. Please refrain from wearing items that restrain movements such as squats, lunges, full arm rotation, and bending at the waist. A t-shirt and sweats/athletic shorts/leggings (etc....) are considered appropriate dress for martial activities. Shoes must be reasonably clean, free of debris, and provide good support for the wearer's needs. A good athletic shoe is usually fine. Jewelry is strongly discouraged unless made for athletic activity (rubber/silicone rings), as it can get easily caught, damaged, or cause physical harm to the wearer upon impact. Wasatch HEMA is not responsible for any items damaged that are worn against recommendations. Hair and body should be well groomed; Students will be in close contact with other students and should maintain high hygiene standards and manage bodily odor accordingly.

Club Gear Usage and Maintenance

Basic gear for practice will be provided by the club at no cost to the student. Borrowed gear should be wiped down and stored appropriately at the end of each class.



Figure 1: Student being reprimanded for abusing gear. Source:wiktenauer.com

How to Hold a Sword

There are three main grips used by the dominant hand in longsword; these are the Hammer Grip, the Handshake/Pistol/Channel Grip, and the Thumb Grip. No grip should be held so tightly as to cause strain on the forearm, and every grip should allow for some mobility of the weapon unless it is contacting a target. The non-dominant hand should remain on or near the pommel in most cases.

Hammer Grip

This is the most natural grip for most beginners. The sword is held at 90° to the arm, fingers and thumb wrapped around the hilt. The hand bones should remain in line with the wrist. The blade should be in alignment with the knuckles.

Figure 2: Demonstration of a hammer grip on a longsword.



Handshake/Pistol/Channel Grip

This grip allows the sword to sit in-line with the thumb against the thumb-pad of the hand, to an angle of ~45° degrees. The hand bones should remain well aligned with the wrist. The blade should be in alignment with the knuckles. This grip is the most common for most sword work and is important for proper cutting posture.

Figure 3: Demonstration of a handshake grip on a longsword.



Thumb Grip

The sword is gripped similarly to a hammer grip, but with the thumb extended up the hilt toward the blade. The blade turns to align the flat in the view of the user, or to the user's left and right. Hand bones should remain in line with the wrist.



Figure 4: Demonstration of a thumb grip on a longsword.

For a more detailed discussion of hand grips for swordplay: <https://youtu.be/1bLUT5Q7xVg>



Figure 5: Impossible grips and proof that drawing a hand is hard. Source: wiktenauer.com

Parts of a Longsword

Students are required to know the basic parts of a Feder. Students will also need to identify the long/short edge and which areas of the blade constitute the Strong/Middle/Weak:

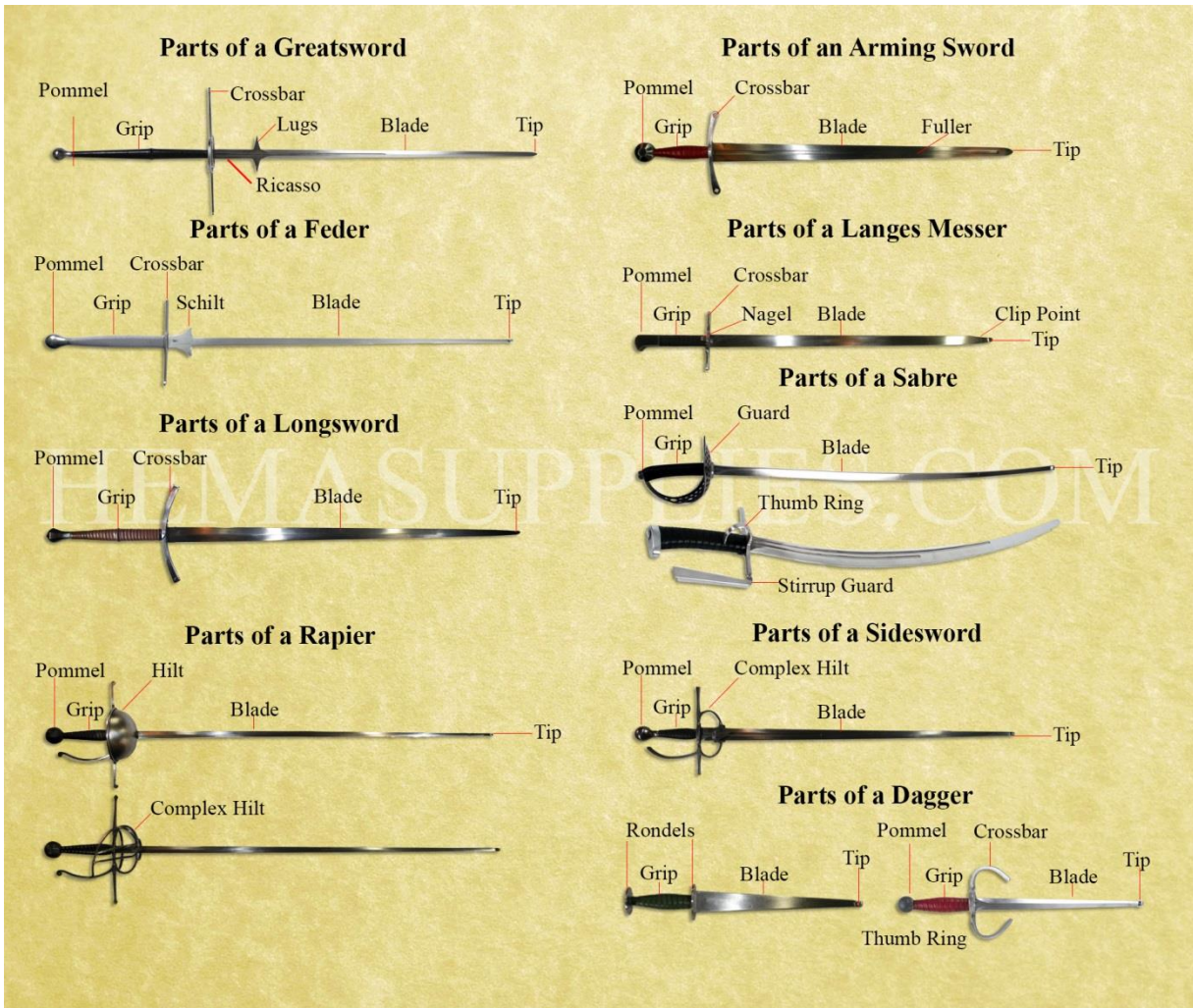


Figure 5: Common HEMA weapon anatomy (Image Credit: hemasupplies.com)

Long Edge

Also: True Edge. This is the edge aligned with the knuckles when the sword is held in a standard hammer or handshake grip.

Short Edge

Also: False Edge. This is the edge aligned with the wrist when held in a standard hammer or handshake grip.

Strong

The section of sword from crossguard/bar to the middle of the blade. This is where the most mechanical leverage can be applied.

Middle

The middle point of the blade.

Weak

The section of the sword from the middle to the tip. It is difficult to apply leverage with this section of the blade.

Want to know more about the various properties of longswords? Here is a fun article that details some finer points: <http://swordstem.com/2018/04/19/center-of-percussion-vibration-node-balance-point-what-does-it-all-mean>

Footwork and Stances

The art begins at the feet, and those who can move accordingly can both attack and defend themselves well. Learning to step properly and well is a foundational to good sword fighting. Students must be able to demonstrate all basic and complex steps for advancement. Complex steps are denoted with a [C] and are a combination of 2 or more basic footworks.

Basic Stance for Sword fighting

Begin with feet hip-width apart. Take a step back with the dominant foot (same as the dominant hand) and allow the toes of said foot to turn $\sim 45^\circ$ outward. Sit slightly into the stance, allowing the center of gravity to stabilize. Knees should be bent, and should bend toward the toes. Hips should be open enough to properly support the stance. Core should be engaged enough to keep the upper torso in-line with the hips and to support the lower back properly. Shoulders should align and point the same direction as the hips (no twisting).



Figure 6: Demonstration of the Basic Stance.

Stepping- General Advice

When taking a step the heel should strike first, then the toe/ball of the foot, and the knee should bend toward the toes as weight is transferred into the limb. This allows for the limb to properly catch and support each action, and allows for proper joint action. Please see this video as an example: "Footwork for Swordsmanship"- *London Longsword*: <https://youtu.be/b0i1bXE7yLw>

Simple Step

Stance opens wider/ lower. This is achieved by either moving the front foot one step forward, or the rear foot one step backward.

Gathering Step

Stance closes/ rises. This is achieved by moving either the front foot one step back toward the center of gravity or the back foot one step toward the center of gravity.

Passing Step

One foot passes the other; stance does not change unless needed.

Pivot

2 types- Pivot around one foot to change angle relative to your center or pivot on both feet to reverse the direction one faces.

Triangle Step [C]

Passing step is taken about 45° from the line of attack, with pivot to face opponent on new attack line and a small gathering step to recover a good stance.

Traverse Step [C]

Passing step over the center line with pivot and a small gathering step to recover a stable stance; Changes line of attack.

Closing Step [C]

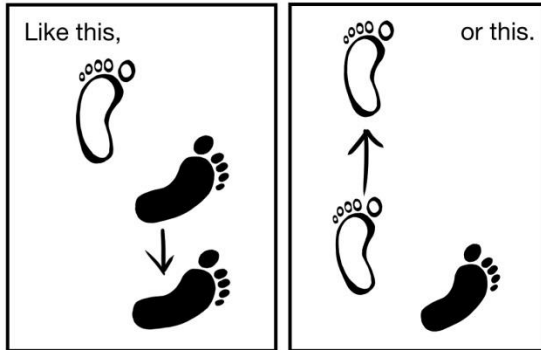
Simple Step, then Passing Step; used to close distance and enter the War (Krieg).

Please reference the two diagrams that follow for more discussion and visualization of these footworks.

Longsword Footwork – Basic Steps

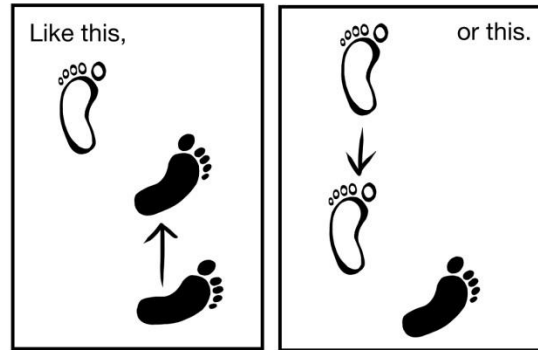
Simple

Move front foot forward or back foot back.



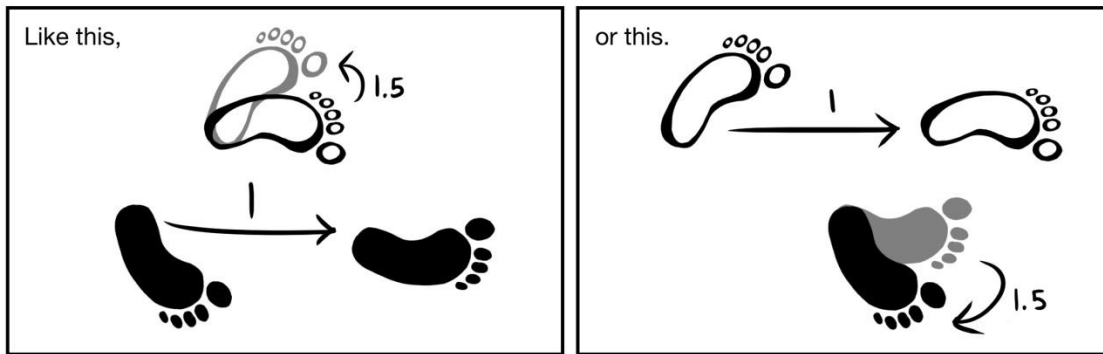
Gather

Pull one foot towards the other.



Passing

Switch which foot is in front by moving a foot from the front to the back, or vice versa.



Pivot

Change the direction you face by using one foot as an anchor while you turn.

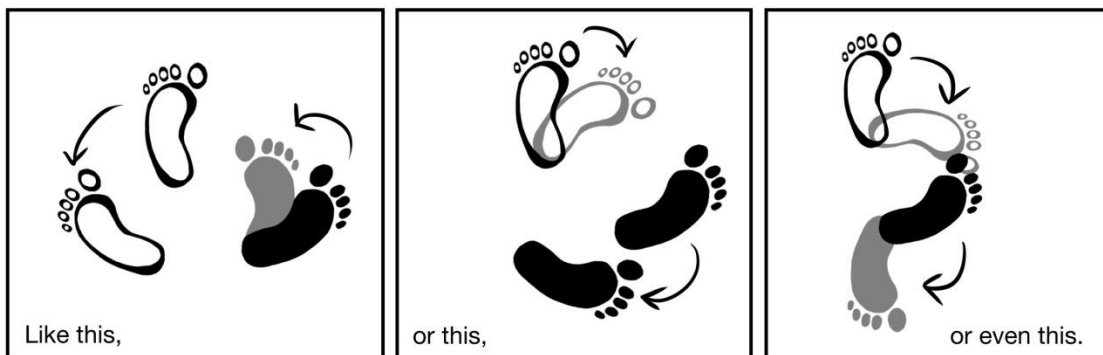


Figure 7: Diagram showing Basic footworks. Image Credit: A.Roberts of TEAOS

Longsword Footwork

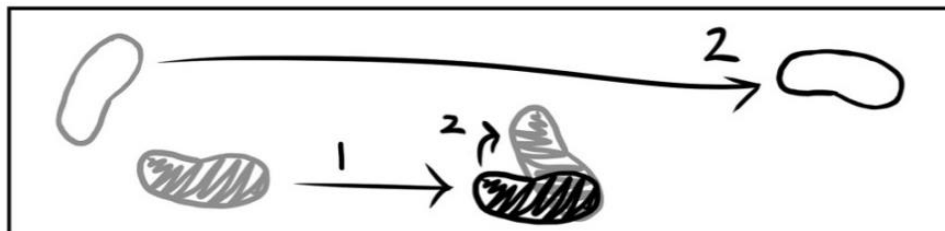
Complex Steps:

Complex steps combine two simple steps to move the swords person in advantageous ways.

Closing steps move the fencer from a safe out-of-range distance (pre-fencing), into striking range (war). **Triangle steps** move a fencer off-line from their opponent while maintaining control of the center. **Traverse steps** cross the line of attack and can be used to maneuver a fencer past their opponent. Some plays call for specific steps, with triangle being most common.

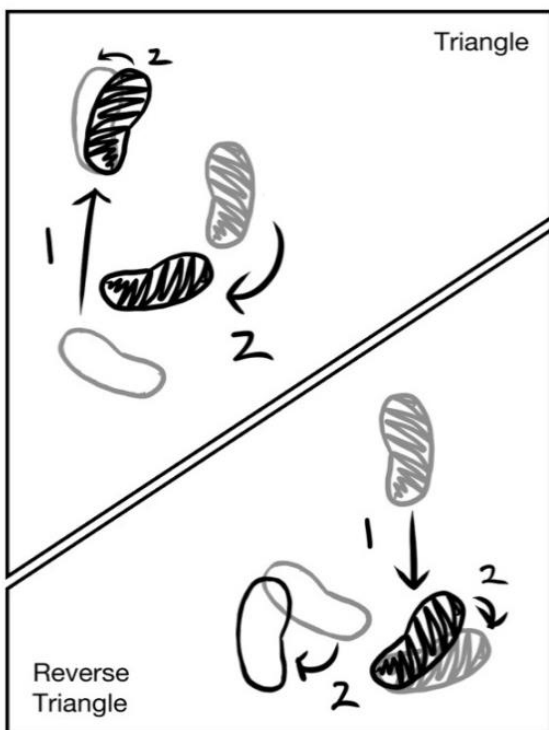
Closing

Simple + Passing.
Step forward with front foot, then do a cross step with back foot.



Triangle

Passing + Pivot.
Cross step with back or front foot, then pivot slightly to bring new rear foot behind, but not past front foot.



Traverse

Step with back foot across front foot, then pivot to face your opponent, or follow up with a passing step to travel past them and leave krieg (preferably while slicing through and "killing" them).

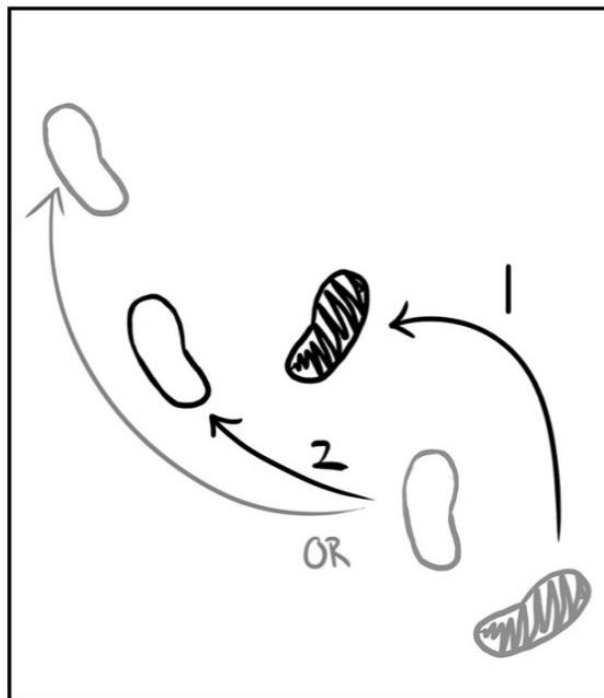


Figure 8: Diagram showing Complex Steps. Image Credit: A.Roberts of TEAOS.

High Stance (Oberwag)

High Stance has the feet closest together and the highest center of gravity. Fighters regularly maneuver through the high stance while stepping.



Figure 9: Student standing in High Stance.

Middle Stance (Mittelwag)

Middle Stance has the feet set slightly wider and a stable center of gravity. This is the also the basic martial stance. Fighters spend most of their time in Middle Stance.



Figure 10: Student standing in Middle Stance.

Low Stance (Unterwag)

Low Stance has feet set very widely and the lowest center of gravity. Fighters who step or lunge deeply will end up in Low Stance.



Figure 11: Student standing in Low Stance.

Four Basic Cuts

Left and Right Overcut (Oberhau [G] or Fendente [I])

Diagonal cuts to the upper openings that begin high. Cut should begin at the shoulder or higher. Grip should get the point moving forward, followed by extension of the arms, then turning of the torso, followed by stepping, and then follow through. Students should not hit the ground upon finishing a cut. Students should work to extend the point forward. This video provides more discussion on the basics of this cut: “Delivering a Proper Decending Cut – Understanding HEMA” – *Blood and Iron HEMA*: <https://youtu.be/H8WuCoGbMq0>

Left and Right Undercut (Unterhau [G] or Sotano [I])

Diagonal cuts to the lower openings that begin low. The cut generally begins low, pommel drawing the cut diagonally upward. Torso should turn as the cut comes forward. Stepping should occur as needed. Cut should finish high with arms still extended in most cases. This video provides more discussion on the basics of this cut: “Delivering a Proper Ascending Cut-Understanding HEMA”- *Blood and Iron HEMA*: <https://youtu.be/1TnZbTpJs0g>

Together these cuts form the basis of the Meyer Square, a general cutting exercise.

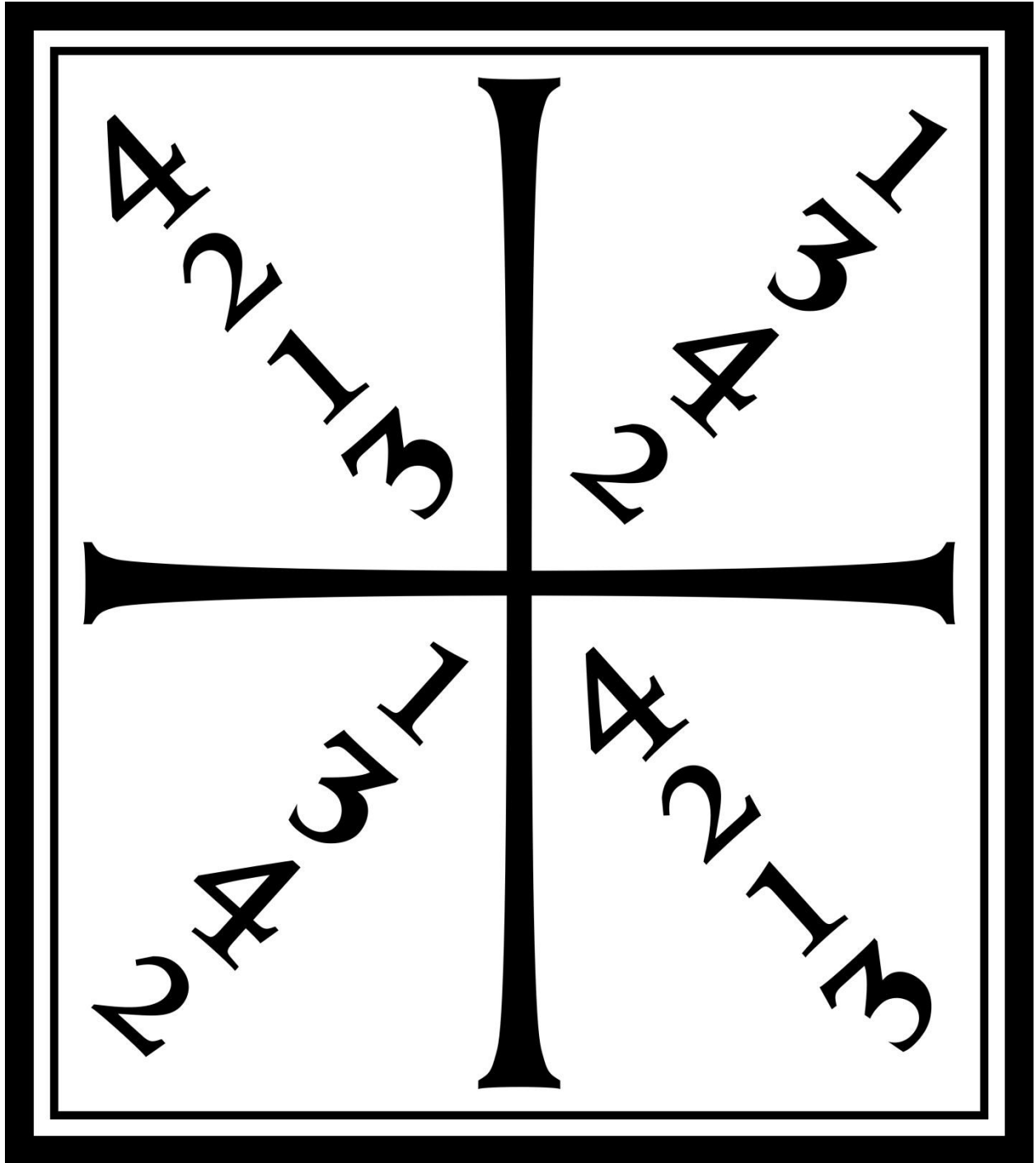


Figure 12: Meyer's Square Cutting Exercise

Four Basic Guards

Basic Longsword Guards

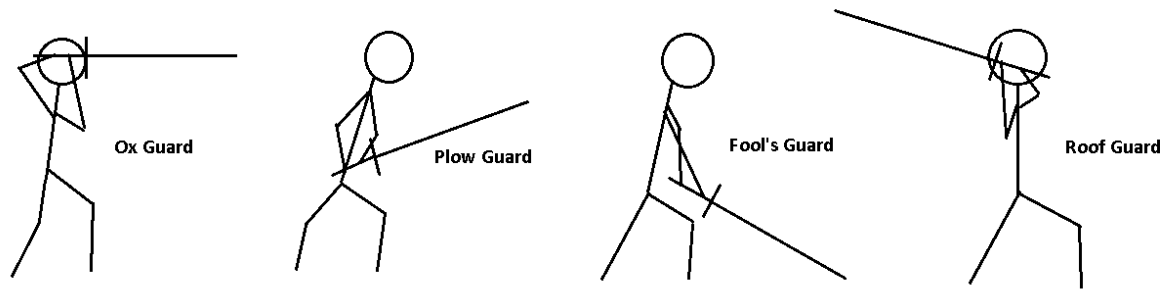


Figure 13: Stick figures showing basic guards.

Ox or Window (Ochs [G] or Fenestra [I])

Left and Right Ox guard the Upper Openings on the respective sides. This guard threatens with the point to high openings. Ox can be held in a hammer or thumb grip.



Figure 14: Instructor demonstrating Ox Guard on the left.

Plow or Short (Pflug [G] or Breve [I])

Left and Right Plow guard the Lower Openings on the respective sides. Plow threatens with the point to high or low openings.



Figure 15: Instructor demonstrating Plow Guard on the right.

From-the-Roof or Lady (Vom Tag [G] or Donna [I])

Protects Upper Openings on respective sides; Can be held above the head (High Vom Tag); Threatens with the edge/cutting. Roof is the standard starting location for overcuts.

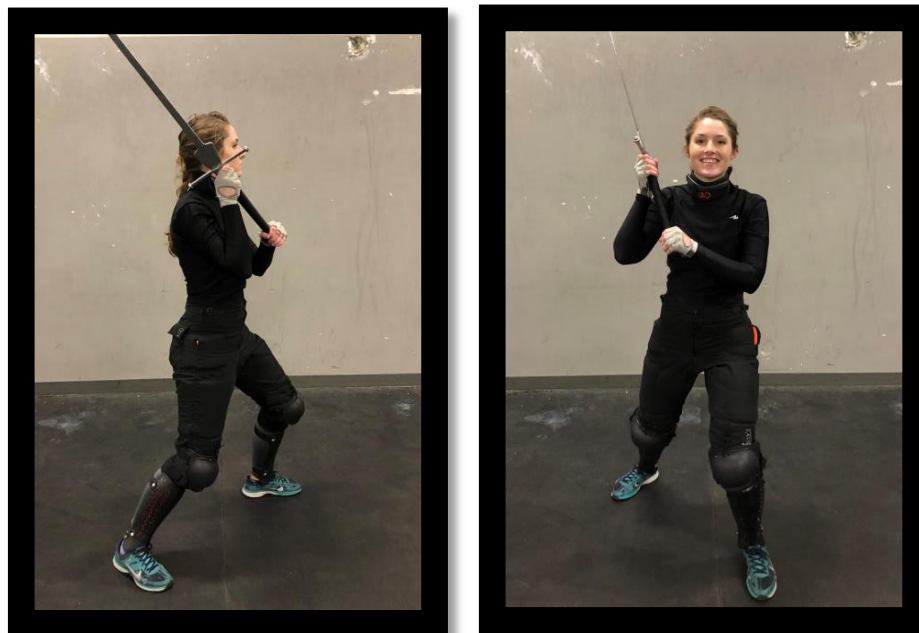


Figure 16: Instructor demonstrating Roof Guard on the right.

Fool or Iron Gate (Alber (G) or Ferro Mezana (I))

Protects Lower Openings; Threatens with edge/cutting.



Figure 17: Instructor demonstrating Fool's Guard.

Here is a video about how to pronounce the Guards and Cuts in German Longsword:
<https://youtu.be/7mC59FNJ5FA>

3 Distances (but 4 concepts...)

Pre-fighting (Zufechten)

Fighters are out of contact range with swords.

War (Kreig)

Fighters are engaged with swords, or are within distance to be hit by an opponent with a sword, or can hit an opponent with a sword.

Wrestling [Ringen (G) or Abzarrer (I)]

Fighters are engaged closely and can grab, push or pull, disarm, throw, or pommel appropriately.

Withdrawal (Abzug)

Disengagement and return to pre-fighting, usually while guarding.

Principles of Mechanical Advantage

Edge vs Flat

Swords can apply more force with the edge vs the flat. Turning your edge into an opponent's flat will grant a mechanical advantage.

Weak vs Strong

More force/torque can be applied to an opponent's blade if more of your blade is pressing/binding on his weak. You apply more force the closer to your crossguard you press. The weak of your opponent's blade is easier to move than their strong.

Overbind

This uses the edge to press down over your opponent's blade to take the center line. This tends to be stronger than an underbind/ trying to press up against an opponent's blade. For a successful overbind, more of your blade must be applied to the bind than that of your opponent's blade.

4 Openings

These are the main targets of attack. Both the head and torso are divided into upper, lower, left and right openings. Most attacks drive to these openings unless stated otherwise.

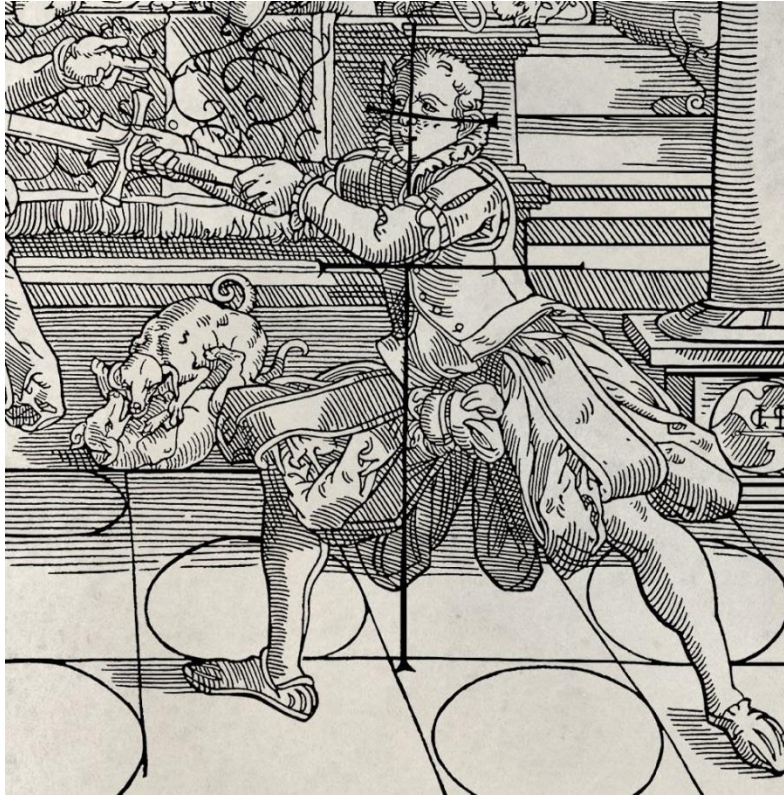


Figure 18: Meyer Diagram A showing the openings. Source: wiktenauer.com

The Do's and Don'ts of the New HEMA Student

Do - Come to class eager to learn the material. **Don't** - Come to class eager to share things you saw on Youtube.

Do - Come to class with a water bottle and wearing comfortable athletic clothes. **Don't** - Come to class wearing jeans, sandals, and/or heels.

Do - Do your own research about medieval history and weapons, especially using the recommended texts. **Don't** - Assume that you know more than your instructor and start an argument.

Do - Be excited about swords! **Don't** - Swing your sword around like a maniac and endanger your fellow students.

Do - Slow down and be deliberate about your practice. **Don't** - Equate speed with intent.

Do - Come to class regularly and practice in between. **Don't** - Come once a month and expect to be a swordmaster by the end of the year.

Do - Ask questions when you need clarification. **Don't** - Ask "what if" questions or a new question every 5 minutes. Try figuring it out on your own first, then verify.

Do - Talk to instructors before buying your own gear. **Don't** - Endanger yourself and waste a lot of money by buying gear without asking about recommendations.

Do - Take quick breathers or a second to roll out your shoulders or whatever you personally, physically need. **Don't** - Give up.

Do - Push yourself. **Don't** - Injure yourself or pass out.

Do - Understand physical skills take time to master. **Don't** - Quit because you don't get it right the first day you try.

Do - Do any "homework" that your instructor gives you. **Don't** - Expect your instructor to handhold you to greatness.

Do - Have fun. **Don't** - Not have fun. Learning to fight with swords is a unique, rewarding, and awesome endeavor.

Do - Seek out the strengths of your partners and help them through their weaknesses. **Don't** - Form a mental hierarchy of "who can beat whom."