

# Introduction to Fencing

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This document is not intended to teach fencers how to fence. Rather, it is to give family and supporters a general overview of fencing so that they can understand what they are seeing when they attend a tournament.

## 1. Choose your weapon

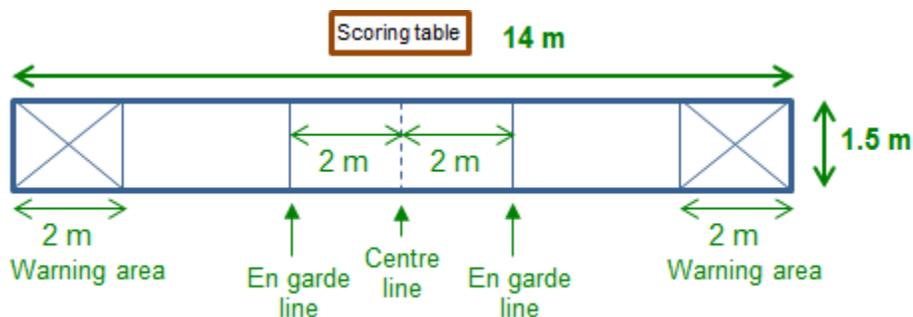
There are three weapons used in the sport of fencing; épée, foil and sabre. Each weapon has slightly different rules. Épée is the only weapon used at Pope, so the rest of this document summarises the rules for épée. If you want to see the complete rules for all three weapons, you can download them from the USA Fencing website: [www.usfencing.org/page/show/695208-rulebook](http://www.usfencing.org/page/show/695208-rulebook).

## 2. Electronic scoring

In épée, fencers score a “touch” by hitting any part of their opponent (from head to toe) with the tip of their weapon. The fencers’ weapons are electrically connected to the scoring box. When the tip of a fencer’s weapon is pushed, the buzzer sounds and the light on that fencer’s side of the box comes on *unless* the tip is touching something that is electrically grounded, such as the opponent’s weapon. This ensures that the light comes on when the fencer touches the opponent’s body, but not the opponent’s weapon. The light also comes on if the tip hits the floor, so it is up to the referee to decide if the tip touched the floor (a “floor touch”) instead of, for example, the opponent’s foot or toe (a “toe touch”).

## 3. The strip

The strip (or piste) is the “field of play” for fencing. At tournaments we mark it with blue tape stuck to the floor. In the diagram below, you will see that measurements are all in metres. If it’s been a while since you had to use metric measurements, remember that a metre is about 3’ 3” so 1.5 m is almost 5’ and 14 m is almost 46’.



Actually, strips can be anywhere between 1.5 m and 2 m wide. In high-level competition, they are usually 2 m, but in our league they are usually 1.5 m as space is at a premium.

## 4. Officials

A referee (sometimes called a director) is in charge of each strip, enforcing the rules, telling the fencers when to start and stop fencing and deciding who scores. The referee is usually assisted by a timer/scorekeeper who keeps track of time remaining in the current period as well as the score. In some bouts, there may also be two floor judges who help the referee look for “floor touches” and whether or not a fencer steps off the strip.

## 5. The bout

A bout is a single competition between two fencers. There are two types of bout in a tournament.

1. In the first round (Pools) fencers are divided into pools of 5 to 7 and everyone fences one bout against everyone else in the pool. These bouts consist of one 3-minute period and the winner is the first fencer to score five touches (a “touch” is a scoring hit) or the fencer who is ahead when time expires. If the score is tied when time expires, the referee tosses a coin to see who has “priority”. The fencers fence for one more minute and the first to take the lead is the winner. If the score is still tied after a minute, the fencer with priority is the winner.
2. The second round (Direct Elimination, or DE), is a standard single elimination bracket. Each bout consists of three 3-minute periods with one minute of rest between periods. The winner is the first fencer to score 15 touches. As in pools, if the score is tied when time expires, there is an extra minute of fencing with priority (there is no rest period before the extra minute of fencing).

Before the bout begins, the referee will test each fencer’s weapon to make sure it works with the scoring equipment and meets regulations. The fencers retreat behind their en garde line, salute each other and the referee and put on their masks. The referee issues three commands: “En garde” tells the fencers to prepare to fence, “Fencers ready?” gives the fencers a last chance to ask for a delay if they are not ready, and “Fence” starts the bout, and the timer.

Fencing continues until the referee calls “Halt” at which point the timer stops and the referee announces who, if anyone, has scored. “Touch right” or “Touch left” means the fencer on the right or left has scored, “Double touch” means both have scored (but if the score is 4-4 in a pool bout or 14-14 in a DE bout, a double touch results in no score as only one fencer can win the bout). During the extra one-minute “priority” period, double touches result in no score.

When the final touch is scored, the bout is not over until the fencers salute each other from the en garde line and then shake hands. Fencing is very particular about matters of honour, and a fencer can be expelled from a tournament for refusing to salute an opponent.

### Scoring

When a fencer touches his or her opponent with enough force to trigger the scoring device, that fencer scores a touch unless the action that resulted in the touch started after the referee called halt, or the touch is annulled for one of the reasons outlined below. Except for a penalty touch or when a fencer steps off the back of the strip (described below) the referee cannot award a touch unless the scoring box lights up. The way this is often described is that the referee can’t turn **on** a light (award a touch if the light didn’t come on), but can turn **off** a light (annul a touch event though the light came on).

### Passing the opponent

Halt is called whenever the fencers’ shoulders pass each other. If a touch is made before the fencers pass each other or as their shoulders are level, the touch counts. A touch made by the fencer being passed counts if made *immediately* after the attacking fencer passed. If a touch is registered after the shoulders pass by the fencer doing the passing, it is annulled.

## Crossing the limits of the strip

Halt is called whenever a fencer steps off the side of the strip with just one foot ("off" means all the way off, having a foot on the line does not count). A touch made by the fencer who steps off the strip counts if it is made before stepping off, or if the fencer steps off with only one foot and the touch was started before stepping off. A touch made by the fencer who does not step off the strip counts even if made immediately after the opponent stepped off.

Halt is called if a fencer crosses the rear limit of the strip with **both feet** and a touch is awarded to the other fencer. Note that a fencer whose back foot is on the ground and behind the rear line and whose front foot is in the air but not behind the rear line has **not** crossed the line with both feet.

## Other reasons to halt

Halt is called when:

- The two fencers come into contact (known as corps à corps - French for body on body). A fencer who causes corps à corps to avoid being touched or to jostle an opponent is penalised.
- A fencer turns his or her back to the opposing fencer (this is a safety rule). The fencer who turned his or her back is penalised.
- If one of the fencers falls, although touching the ground with the unarmed hand and/or the rear knee is allowed. A fencer who touches his or her opponent while falling is penalised.
- If the fencing becomes dangerous, or if one of the fencers is disarmed or approaches too near the referee or spectators.

## Restarting fencing

After a touch is scored, the fencers return to the en garde lines to restart. If no touch is scored (including a double touch at 4-4 in a pool bout, at 14-14 in a DE bout or any time during the priority period), the referee indicates a spot halfway between where the fencers were when halt was called and the fencers position themselves a blade's length from that spot.

However, in the case of a flèche attack (a running attack) or corps à corps, the fencer subjected to the flèche attack or corps à corps holds their ground and the other fencer retreats so that they are two blade lengths apart. In this process, a fencer who did not just incur a penalty cannot be forced to retreat beyond the rear of the strip, and to avoid that the referee adjusts the starting spot so that the fencer keeps one foot on the strip. However, a fencer who did incur a penalty (e.g. for corps à corps to avoid a touch) may be forced to retreat beyond the rear of the strip, and in this case a touch is awarded to the opponent and fencing resumes from the en garde line.

If a fencer crossed the side line with one or both feet, that fencer must retreat one metre. If the fencer was not advancing at the time, the one metre is measured from the point where he or she left the strip. If the fencer was advancing, the one metre is measured from where the final attack (advance-lunge or flèche) began. In this case, if retreating one metre causes the fencer to cross the rear line with both feet, a touch is awarded to the opponent and fencing resumes from the en garde line. The other fencer then advances or retreats so that the fencers are two blade lengths apart. The fencer who did not leave the strip cannot be forced to retreat beyond the rear of the strip.

## Non-combativity

If, during a DE bout, both fencers “make clear their unwillingness to fence”; the referee may halt the bout and proceed immediately to the next period (there is no one minute break). The rules say that “unwillingness to fence” means either of the following:

- No touch has been scored in **about** one minute of fencing time.
- The fencers have been outside of advance-lunge distance of each other for **at least** 15 seconds.

If non-combativity occurs during the third period, the referee will toss a coin to determine “priority”. The fencers then fence for one more minute. This is not sudden death, and unless one fencer reaches 15 touches, they fence the whole minute. If the score is tied after one minute, the fencer with priority is the winner.

## Injuries and cramps

If a fencer is injured or suffers a cramp during a bout, the referee will allow a break of up to 10 minutes for recovery. If unable to continue fencing after 10 minutes, the fencer must withdraw from the event. If a fencer withdraws during pools, none of that fencer’s pool bouts will be counted and the fencer will be listed as DNF (did not finish) in the final results. If a fencer withdraws during a DE bout, it is just as if he or she had lost that bout.

## Appeals

The referee is the sole judge of what happened during a bout and fencers may not appeal that judgement. However, if a fencer believes the referee has not applied the rules of fencing correctly, the fencer (but not the coach or any spectator) may politely appeal and if the referee does not change the ruling the fencer may ask for the Bout Committee to review it. The Bout Committee will ask the referee what happened and what the ruling was, and will either confirm the referee’s ruling or modify it. If they believe the fencer’s appeal was unjustified, the fencer is penalised.

## 6. Penalties

There are four groups of offences. Below is a description of the penalties for each group and a list of the offences in that group which could occur in a league tournament. Note that, in addition to the penalties described below, any touch scored by the offender as a result of the offence is annulled.

### Group 1

If this is the fencer's first penalty of any type in the bout, a Yellow Card (warning) is issued. Otherwise a Red Card (penalty touch against the fencer) is issued.

- Leaving the strip without permission.
- Causing corps à corps to avoid a touch.
- Turning the back to the opponent.
- Touching or taking hold of electrical equipment.
- Crossing the side of the strip to avoid being touched.
- Delaying the bout.
- Clothing/equipment not working or not regulation.
- Placing the weapon on the strip to straighten it.
- Refusal to obey the referee
- Jostling, disorderly fencing e.g. taking off mask before referee calls Halt, undressing on the strip.
- Touches with brutality or while falling.
- Unjustified appeal.
- Failure to appear on strip when called (black card for failure to appear on third call).

### Group 2

A Red Card (penalty touch against the fencer) is issued for each group 2 offence.

- Using the non-weapon arm or hand.
- Mask not stamped to show it was checked.
- Deliberate touch not on opponent (e.g. on the floor).
- Dangerous, violent or vindictive action.

### Group 3

A Red Card (penalty touch against the fencer) is issued for the first group 3 offence. A Black Card (expulsion from the tournament) is issued for a second group 3 offence.

- Dishonest fencing
- Fencer disturbing order on the strip.
- Anyone not on the strip disturbing order receives a yellow card for the first offence and a black card for a second offence.

### Group 4

A Black Card (expulsion from the tournament) is issued for any group 4 offense.

- Manifest cheating with equipment.
- Offense against sportsmanship. This includes violently or dangerously throwing a mask or other piece of equipment either during or after a bout.
- Deliberate brutality.
- Refusal to salute opponent and referee at the beginning or end of the bout.