



Brief glossaries of fencing

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1. General glossary

Definition of fencing :

« Fencing is not only a codified sports activity where the purpose is to hit with a foil, an epee or a sabre, it is also an artistic and leisure practice where the purpose is to produce a spectacle of modern or ancient fights, with one or several weapons». (Gérard Six).

Among all sports languages, that of fencing is the richest and it deserves all your attention. Your technical knowledge can build itself only through a theoretical approach and a knowledge of this small dictionary of the fencing, of which here are the key words.

(F.) = Foil ; (E.)= Epée ; (S.)= Sabre ; (R.I.) = International Rules. All definitions get for a right-handed fencer.

Advance : A progression of the front foot followed by a progression of the rear foot. When moving the rear foot first, it never passes over the front foot : this is a form of stepping particular to fencing.

Angulation : Of the Latin cavus: hollow. Attack, riposte and counter-attack in angling, is to carry out an offensive or counter-offensive attack with an exaggerated displacement (angulation) of the hand in the line where the action ends. Stretching at the weapon arm by a trajectory bends of the hand.

Arm : used in « *to arm a thrust* » : run-up, retreat of the weapon bearing arm before hitting or launching a thrust.

Assault : Fundamental situation of fencing where 2 fencers fight by confronting their technique, their judgment and their temper. The assault can be "free" or "in subject".

Assembly : Position of the fencer after having straightened the two arms, the legs and joining the feet. The assembly can be made forward or backward. It is used in the Salut des Armes or at the end of a fencing lesson. In the counter-offensive, it is sometimes combined with a stop-hit.

Attack : An initial offensive action executed by stretching at the weapon arm and carrying on with a progressive movement (linge, fleche, etc). It can be simple or compound, reinforced by actions on the opposing blade.

Attack on the blade : Actions executed on the opposing blade. They include : the beat, the glance, the pressure.

Back cutting edge : The part opposite to the cutting edges. Also called "contre taille" counter-cutting edge. (S.)

Balestra : A forward bound followed by a lunge. Forward bound with call of back foot, reception on back foot. Then call of the front foot.

Belly : The lower left part of the target. (S.)

Blade : Synonym of lame which means blade.

Bout : Match where the result counts.

Ceding parry : Parry used uniquely against an offensive by taking of the blade (attack riposte). Consists of turning aside the opposing blade while carrying it along (without leaving it) in a line other than the one in which the attack was intended to finish. Ex : on a « octave opposition », « ceding parry on quarte ».

Circular : The circular parries are called « counter » and take the name of the line in which they are executed. The semi-circular parries can also be called « semi-counters » or « demi-cercles ».

Circular parry : Called counter, it takes the name of the line in which it is executed. Formerly called « semi-counter » ou « semi-circle ». Example : semi-circle or high Septime, or take-up, taken from the guard of Sixte. Parry taken from a high line to the opposite low line or vice versa. Some prefer to call it Diagonal parry.

Compound attack : Attack which included one more feints of attack.

Compound parry : A term used by some to define a succession of parries used against compound offensive actions. It is to be noted that a trompement parry should not be called a parry.

Continuation : Imprecise term sometimes used to designate a prolonged offensive action, which may be remise or redoubling attack.

Conversion of the weapon hand : Action of turning the hand ; passage from supination to pronation or vice-versa.

Corner judge : Assistant of the referee ; his function is to determine the validity of a hit of a non-electric foil, and, of an electric foil, to supervise the correct use of the rear hand or arm. (F.) A ground judge ; his function is to determine whether the hit of the weapon is valid or is invalid. (E.) Assistant to the referee ; his function is to determine the validity of a hit. (S.)

Corps à corps : Situation in which two fencers are in bodily contact.

Counter-time : Procedure which consists of parrying an opponent's counter-attack and then taking the offensive.

Counter-attack : A simple or compound counter-offensive action on an opponent's attack. It is sometimes executed while stepping forward, sometimes by retreating or by ducking, sometimes with a half-lunge or an extension of the guard.

Counter-disengagement : Dérobement (escape) from a change of engagement of the opponent by a disengagement or evasion from a circular parry by a disengagement. Example : Feint of a straight thrust, counter-disengagement.

Counter-offensive : Ensemble of actions carried out on the opponent's offensive.

Counter-riposte : Hit carried out after having parried the opponent's riposte. It can be simple, compound, taking of the blade immediately or a temps perdu (off-fencing time), executed with the fencer lunging, on guard, while retreating, while stepping forward, while lunging, with a fleche or with a lateral displacement. The second counter-riposte is the hit carried out after having parried the opponent's counter-riposte.

Covered : To protect oneself from the point of from the opposing weapon (sabre) with the aid of the blade ; or the guard or displacement of the hand, the fore-arm. One speaks of covered engagement, covered guard, covering in the offensive, and so on.

Cross-over : Taking of the blade in which one carries the opponent's blade in a high line in order to bring it down to a low line of the same side. It can also be executed from a low line to a high line.

Cutting edge : The fine part of the blade, opposite to the back and the upper edge. Sometimes called « taille » or edge of sword. (S.)

Cut-over : From a high line to a high line, it is a simple offensive action carried out by parrying over and in front the opponent's point. It is executed either by sliding on the opponent's blade up to the point by a backward motion (once called coupe "à la mouche"), or without blade contact. From the lower line, it is executed by passing below and in front the opponent's point.

Defensive : Ensemble of actions designed to check the opponent's offensive. Includes parries, ducking and retreating.

Dérobement (slip away) : An offensive action or counter-offensive action which consists of withdrawing one's blade from the hold of the opponent (attack on the blade, taking of the blade).

Development : Extension (or display) of the weapon arm followed by the lunge.

Diagonal parry : Parry taken from a high line to the opposite low line or vice versa.

Disengagement : A simple offensive action which in leaving the line in which one is in, to attack in another. From the high line the disengagement is made under the opponent's blade ; from the low line, over it.

Direct parry : A parry executed without an impact on the opponent's blade while maintaining the contact.

Disarming : It is to bring down or to blow up the weapon of the opponent by a strong parry or an attack on the blade. Action subjected to certain rules of courtesy and fight.

Direct elimination : Competition formula in which fencers are eliminated after one defeat.

Double hit : Sometimes called « coup pour coup » or « coup fourré ». This occurs when two fencers hit each other at the same time. In foil and in sabre, they are decided between by application of the rules. In épée, they are both declared hits.

Ducking : Method of avoiding the point with a rapid displacement of the body.

Engagement : Situation of two blades in contact. Taking the engagement consists of making contact with the opponent's blade. The double engagement is the succession of two engagements or of two changes of engagement.

Envelopment : Taking of the blade in which one takes possession of the opponent's blade in one and keeping it in this line with a circular movement of the weapon point.

Evasion : To elude the opponent's blade.

Face : The target situated on each side of the mask. One speaks of right face and left face (S.)

Feint : Semblance of an action destined to take advantage of a reaction or lack of reaction of the opponent.

Fencing phrase : An uninterrupted exchange of blade actions, ending either with a hit or with the fencers breaking off. The duration of a phrase depends on the skill and inclination of the fencers involved.

Fencing position : Place which the fencer's hand can take in the four lines. There are eight positions : Four in supination (Quarte, Sixte, Septime, Octave), four in pronation (Prime, Seconde, Tierce, Quinte). They also give their names to the different parries (F., E).

Flank : Target situated beneath the weapon arm of the fencer.

Flèche : An offensive progression in which the fencer throws his/her body out of balance in a forward action preceded by a straightening of the arm and with an alternative power stroke of the legs. Passing forward in running.

Glance : Prolonged pressure, abrupt and powerful, executed by sliding towards the strong part of the blade. May allow the disarmament of the opponent.

Guard : The best position in which to initiate offensive, defensive or counter-offensive techniques. The weapon point is either at the high or lower level but always directed toward the target. The guard can be modified to an offensive, defensive or counter-offensive position depending on tactical conditions during the bout.

Head : The part of the target made up of the top of the mask. It gives its name to an attack carried out on the mask (S).

Hit : To reach the opponent with the point or the cutting edge of the weapon.

In quartata : An Italian term. Ducking accomplished by turning the body sideways and counter-attacking in the line of Quarte.

Judgement of the hit : The decision of the referee as to the priority, the validity or the annulment of a hit.

Liement : The taking of the opponent's blade to bring it progressively from a high line to a low line or vice versa.

Line : Portion of the target considered in relation to the blade of the fencer. There are four lines : two high (above, inside) and two low (outside, below). (F., E.)

Lunge: The basic attack in fencing where a fencer closes the distance between foes by moving the front leg forward while the back leg remains stationary and straightens out.

Measure : Etymologically, determined dimension considered as normal, desirable. An old term. See distance.

Molinello : Crossing hit, raising, carried by a sabre fencer, from the flank in the opposite banderolle when this last one is right-handed.

Non-valid hit: A hit reaching the opponent outside the limits of the target. The bout is evaluated by hits given and hits received.

Octave : The position covering the outside line, the weapon point lower than the hand in supination. (F., E.)

Offensive : An ensemble of actions destined to hit the opponent.

Opposition : Taking of the blade where one takes possession of the opposing blade in controlling it progressively in the same line until the end of the offensive action.

Parry : The parade des coups de pointe is the action protecting oneself from an opponent's attack by turning aside his/her blade with one's weapon. The parade des coups de tranchant is the action of blocking the opponent's blade with weapon, The parry takes the name of the position where it takes place. Once can parry du tac (very rapidly), in opposition or by ceding.

Pass : to make a thrust is to carry out an attack. Final part of the attack.

Passing backward : A movement by which one increases the distance between himself and the opponent by putting the front foot behind the back foot.

Passing forward : A movement by which one advances on the opponent by putting the back foot in front of the front foot.

Preparation : Movement of the blade, body. or of the legs which precedes the situation that one has the intention of creating. Thus, there preparations to the offensive, to the defensive and to the counter-offensive.

Pressure : A more or less rapid push made on the opposite blade with the aim of pushing it aside or making it react.

Pronation : Position of the hand when the palm is turned towards the ground.

Rapprochement assault : Situation of assault in which the two fencers are placed at a very short distance from each other, without bodily contact.

Redoubling : A second offensive action, simple, compound or preceding an action on the blade, executed by lunging or by a flèche after a return to on guard. The evolution of fencing prompts one to include the redoubling in the reprises.

Remise : A second offensive action which consists of replacing one's point in the same line without drawing back the arm or action on the opponent's blade. It is used against the opponent who parries without riposting, who ripostes à temps perdu (loss of fencing time), who ripostes indirectly or in making a compound movement. In these last two cases, it becomes counter-offensive but does not have priority. There is a remise after any offensive action ; it takes the name of the offensive action which preceded it.

Reprise : A renewed attack. A second offensive action. It can be simple, compound or be preceded by actions of the blade. It is generally executed against opponents who do not riposte.

Retreat : Backward displacement in order to move back from the opponent.

Riposte : An offensive action carried out after the parry. It can be immediate or after lost time, simple or compound, by taking the blade with the feet planted or coordinated with a displacement.

Salute : A motion of courtesy that one makes at the beginning and at the end of a bout (addressed to the opponent, the referee and to the audience) or a fencing lesson (addressed to the Master. Ch. Besnard (1635), Breton fencing teacher is the first one who taught the "reverence", the ancient name of this courteous usage.

Simple attack : Offensive action, direct or indirect, executed all at once and coordinated with the feint, the flèche or a step forward, It is direct when it is carried out in the same line of attack (straight thrust), indirect when it is carried out from the line of attack to another or over and under the opposing blade (cut-over, disengagement).

Simultaneous attacks : Attacks launched at the same time by both fencers.

Stand still : Term used to designate the parry riposte, counter riposte, and counter-attacks executed without any displacement of the feet. Used incorrectly to qualify an attack effectuated by lunging.

Stepping backwards : To execute a backward motion of the rear foot, followed by a backward displacement of the front foot first. In the past, the term "romper la mesure" was used, that is to say breaking the distance of the opponent.

Straight thrust : Simple attack carried out directly in the line which it began, Synonym : direct attack.

Streamer : target, and by extension attacks of sabre of edge carried out transversely to the high part of the adversary, opposed to the weapon arm. Also said attack to the belly.

Stop hit : Simple counter-offensive action.

Supination : The position of the hand when the palm is turned upwards.

Taking the blade : An action in which one takes possession of the opponent's blade while mastering it. It can be combined with a direct attack (attack by taking the blade) or preceding a simple or compound attack (preparation of attack).

Thrust : An old term designating a hit carried out by the point of the weapon.

Time : The duration of a simple offensive action. It is, and always has been, one of the essential conventions of foil fencing. The Time is thus necessarily variable (actions, fencers).

Time feint : Or compound stop coming from the Italian naming " finta in tempo ".
Dérobement of the parry on a search for counter-time.

Valid hit : A hit to a part of the target.

Weapon arm : Weapon bearing arm. Except in the case of a wound duly certified, the fencer cannot change the weapon to the other hand during a match. (R.I.)

2. Glossary of weapons and equipment

Few names of weapons or fencing equipment:

Badelaire: Short ancient epee with a large and curved blade. Scimitar.

Bancal: Sabre with curve blade.

Braquemart: Short epee blade with double cutting edge from 14th and 15th century.

Bib: Piece of material attached to the bottom of the mask for neck protection.

Blade: It is composed of 3 functional parts and the tongue: The weaker part (insulated in electric foil), the middle part used for an action on the blade (engagement, pressure and beat), the strong part used for parry and taking of the blade.

Button: bent button at the extremity of the sabre blade.

Brette: Ancient epee long and narrow from the 16th century.

Capuce: Semi-circular metallic part connecting the sabre guard to the end of the grip.

Carrelet: Foil with square blade.

Claymore: Big and wide epee used by Scottish warrior and held with both hands.

Colichemarde: Epee beginning with a large blade that suddenly narrows into a square end.

Coquille: Circular and convex metallic cap used to protect the hand.

Coutelas: Short epee with only one cutting edge.

Coutille: Large and sharp epee fixed to a staff.

Croisette: Foil with cross-shaped guard.

Dragonne: Ribbon attached at the end of the grip to embellish the sabre or epee.

Espadon: Big and wide epee with two cutting edges held with both hands.

Estramagon: Long and heavy epee with double cutting edge from Middle Age to 18th century.

Fauchon: Sabre of the Middle Age with only one cutting edge.

Gauntlet: Small leather sleeve attached to the glove to protect wrist.

Glaive: Fighting epee with 2 cutting edges used to slash or cut.

Grip: Made of wood, metal or plastic designed to hold the blade.

Mercy: Dagger used to threaten the enemy and force him to beg for mercy.

Piste: Fencing area in which the combat takes place.

Pommel: Metallic nut which enables to secure and balance the weapon.

Rapier: Long and narrow epee with semi-circular guard.

Tongue: Extension of the blade allowing putting together the guard, the grip and the pommel.

Target area: Area of the opponent's body where touches are considered valid. It varies for the 3 weapons.

Thread: Cutting edge of the blade.

Scimitar: A short, curved, Oriental sword with a sharp edge on the convex side only.

Chronological marks concerning weapons:

Chronologically speaking, one can observe:

- "L'epee d'arcon" with two cutting edges used to slash and cut,
- Then "l'estocade", quadrangular epee, straight and hard.
- Then the rapier (end of 15th century),
- Then the Colichemarde (end of the 16th century),
- And the Foil (17th century).

Until the Renaissance, two type of epee could be distinguished: one with a light groove blade for slashes and the other with a heavy blade for cuts. Both were most commonly used to damage armours, or even injure the opponent limb.

The rapier appeared at the end of the 15th century, it was an epee of long and narrow blade mainly used to thrust (1). From Spanish origin, the rapier developed overtime to

become the perfect weapon for duels. The rapier was usually designed with a hilt to engage and break the opponent's blade. The quillons were long and straight and would come out of the hilt (2).

The dagger, a weapon with large, short and sharp blade (3), was not seen until the 14th century. The dagger finally involved into a secondary weapon for the left hand in the 16th century.

At the end of the 16th century, the Italian master started teaching fencing with both rapier and dagger in England.

In a treatise dating from 1610 (4), Capo-Ferro described the epee and part of the blade: strong, weak, sharp, its length should be "twice the length of the arm"! However it is only in the work of Egerton Castle, "Master of Fence" (5), translated into French under the title "Fencing and fencers", (Paris 1888), that full details concerning both the rapier and the dagger, as well as many sketches, can be found.

In France the word Rapier is badly considered due to its used in duels from 15th to 18th century. It often associated with "Swashbuckler" and the hired assassins. However the dagger, first wore pointing down on the stomach, then horizontally on the kidneys, was referred to as the "mercy" in the Middle Age because it was held on the loser's throat until he begged for mercy!.

(1) (3) Definition of the Larousse encyclopédique

(2) *Histoire de l'Escrime* - Pierre LACAZE - Editions Estienne 1971

(4) le "*Gran simulacro dell'arte e dell'inso della scherma*" Capo Ferro, Sienna 1610

(5) "*The Masters of Fence*" - Egerton CASTLE - London 1884

Name of famous epees

- Coutian: Ogier's epee.
- Durandal: Roland's epee via Maure Helmont, killed by Roland.
- Escalibur: King Arthur's epee.
- Flamberge: Renaud de Montaudau's epee.
- Joyeuse: Charlemagne's epee.
- Tisona: Cid's epee.

3. Glossary of combat and events terms

Assault: friendly combat between two fencers without officially taking into account the score.

Bout : combat between two fencers where the score is taken into account (winner, loser, draw, and score)

Challenge : Event endowed with a trophy and its allocation concerns several years.

Championship : Individual or team. Name given to a competition held to determine the best fencer or the best team at each weapon for a group, for a specific region and for a specific period of time.

Competition : It is the aggregate of the bouts (individual competitions) or of the matches (team competitions) required to determine the winner of the event. Competitions are distinguished by weapons, by the competitors' sex, by their age and by the fact that they are for individuals or for teams.

Criterion : Event organized by a Department or Region Committee or a Federation, which does not award the title of champion.

A fencer entered in a Criterion is going to be interested in the formula of the event. Generally, there are one or several rounds of "pools" followed by rounds "of direct elimination".

The direct elimination is the formula " Davis Cup" where the loser of a match is eliminated and where the winner passes to the following round (1/16th, 1/8th, 1/4).

Match : The aggregate of the bouts fought between the fencers of two different teams.

The pool is a group of fencers (4,5,6) where each one meets the others. The classification is made according to (and by order)

- the number of victories
- in case of equality: the difference between hits given (TD) and hits received (TR)
- in case of new equality, the fencer who gave most hits is first.

Tournament : The aggregate of the competitions, individual and team, held at the same place, at the same period and under the same aegis.

4. Glossary of artistic and theatrical fencing

Fencing is not only a competitive sport where one attempts to score touches in a bout. It can also be practiced as an artistic activity where the goal is to perform a choreographed show of modern or ancient sword fighting using one or more weapons.

The technical terms used in theatrical fencing are sometimes different from those used in modern fencing.

Counter-volte: while in on garde in a tierce position, a second intention is made after a parry of tierce, executing a circular stroke from left to right, and carrying out a reverse riposte or brisé.

Coronet: a simple attack to the head or flank using a horizontal circular movement. One can distinguish an inside coronet (or back-handed stroke) and an outside coronet (or a fore-handed stroke).

Cross parry (low cross, high cross, inside cross, outside cross): a defensive action carried out with two weapons, forming a cross with both weapons that allows one to parry an opponent's attack.

Disarming: an action that can be executed by froissement or with the help of both a dagger and rapier to leverage the opponent's blade to disarm.

Ducking: ducking or evading was a common defensive action done by moving the body out of the path of attack without using the protection of a weapon.

Enlevé: a simple attack to the legs executed by a vertical downward moulinet.

Fauchages: an attack to the shoulder or legs, using a big stick or a two-handed sword, executed by a horizontal moulinet. Grabbing the weapon with two hands, threaten to the head, foot, flank or chest. Performed in a show, this indicates the target to be attacked. While in fausse-garde, the non-weapon hand signals the target and the weapon, pointing in front or behind, above or to the side of the head.

Moulinet: a circular movement executed with a vertical or horizontal motion using the wrist or elbow to counter the momentum of the sword.

Revers: a circular movement starting from the tierce position, drawing the rapier back and behind the head, circling the weapon guard around the head, keeping the blade tight around the legs, then completed with a horizontal strike to the opponent's head or flank.

Stroke: a simple attack, executed by a vertical circular stroke, which combines a circular action of a strike and swing, with an inside quarte stroke and an outside tierce stroke.

Volte: a spiral action executed with two leans, while in the tierce position, after making a parry quarte. Finish in fausse-garde.