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ELITE FENCING COACHING

PRIVATE COACHING RESOURCE SERIES

Épée-Specific Bladework

Actions & Exercises



The blade actions that define épée fencing — hand attacks, point control, counterattacks, and the precise distance-based scoring that makes épée the dueling weapon.

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A Note from Coach Derek

Épée bladework is different from foil bladework because the tactical context is different. There is no right-of-way, the entire body is target, and the closest target – the hand and forearm – is almost always the first thing you can reach.

This means épée bladework is built around precision to small targets, counterattacking, and the ability to score without being scored on in return. The big, sweeping attacks that work in foil are dangerous in épée because they expose your arm and hand to the counterattack.

Every blade action in this guide is designed for the reality of épée: score cleanly, protect your hand, and avoid the double touch.

– Coach Derek

Offensive Blade Actions

The Hand Attack (Coupé au Poignet)

The most important offensive action in épée. A direct attack to the opponent's wrist or forearm — the closest valid target. The hand attack requires minimal lunging because the target is close, but it demands extreme point accuracy because the wrist is only a few inches wide.

Hand Mechanics: From en garde, extend the arm with the point aimed at the top of the opponent's wrist (the flat area between the glove cuff and the guard). The thumb stays at 1 o'clock. The extension is smooth and direct — no preparatory movements that telegraph the attack. The lunge is short; the hand attack is about reach and precision, not explosive distance.

Common Mistake: Aiming too broadly at "the arm." The wrist is the primary target because it's closest and most consistently available. Attacking the upper arm or shoulder requires closing more distance and exposes your own hand. Train yourself to aim at the wrist first, forearm second, upper arm never.

Exercise: 50 hand attacks to a glove mounted at en garde height. Focus on hitting the top of the wrist consistently. Move the glove target to different positions (high, low, rotated) and adapt. 2 sets.

The Angulated Attack

An attack where the wrist is angled to reach around the opponent's guard (the bell-shaped hand protection on the épée). In épée, the guard is much larger than in foil, and the opponent can use it to block straight-line attacks to the hand. Angulation gets the point around the guard to score on the wrist or forearm.

Hand Mechanics: Extend the arm toward the opponent's hand, then angle the wrist inward (pronation to approximately 10 o'clock) or outward (supination to approximately 3 o'clock) just before the point arrives. The angulation wraps the point around the edge of their guard. The blade bends slightly on contact. The key is that the angulation happens at the last moment — too early and the opponent adjusts their guard position.

Exercise: 20 angulated attacks to the inside of the wrist (pronated). 20 to the outside of the wrist (supinated). Partner holds their épée in en garde with the guard protecting the direct line. 3 sets.

The Flick

A whipping action that causes the blade to bend and the point to arc over or around the opponent's guard or parry to hit the shoulder, upper arm, or back. The flick is uniquely effective in épée because the entire body is target, and the flick can reach areas that direct attacks cannot. It's particularly useful against opponents who keep a very tight guard position.

Hand Mechanics: Extend the arm toward the opponent's guard or shoulder. As the arm reaches full extension, snap the wrist sharply downward (or to the side). The blade bends and the point whips over the target, scoring on the shoulder or upper arm. The snap is a wrist action — the arm stays extended. The flick requires a specific blade stiffness (more flexible blades flick better).

Common Mistake: Flicking to the hand. The hand is too close for a flick to work — the blade doesn't have room to bend. Flick to the shoulder, upper arm, or back of the shoulder. Use the flick as a complement to hand attacks, not a replacement.

Exercise: 20 flicks to the shoulder from medium distance. 20 flicks to the back of the shoulder (opponent turned slightly). 3 sets. Focus on a clean wrist snap and consistent landing.

The Direct Attack to the Body

A straight-line attack to the torso, similar to a foil direct attack but with different tactical context. In épée, the body attack is used when the opponent protects their hand well but leaves the torso open, or when you've closed to close distance and the body is the largest available target.

Hand Mechanics: Identical to the foil direct attack. Thumb at 1 o'clock, full extension, straight-line delivery to the chest. The difference is tactical: in épée, the body attack is usually preceded by footwork that closes past the hand-attack range, and it's almost always accompanied by a strong defensive awareness because at body-attack distance, the opponent can counterattack to your hand.

Exercise: 30 direct attacks to a chest-height target with a preceding advance that closes from hand-attack distance to body-attack distance. Focus on the transition from long to close range. 2 sets.

The Low-Line Attack

An attack targeting the opponent's thigh, knee, or foot. These targets don't exist in foil (off-target) or saber (below the waist is not valid). In épée, the foot and thigh are valid targets that many fencers forget to protect. The low-line attack requires a specific hand position and often a modified lunge.

Hand Mechanics: Lower the hand and arm to aim the point at the opponent's thigh or knee. The thumb rotates to approximately 3 o'clock (supination). The lunge is often modified — instead of driving forward at standard height, the front leg drives slightly lower and the torso lowers to reach the target. Some épée fencers use a specific "low lunge" where the back knee drops closer to the ground.

Exercise: 20 low-line attacks to the thigh. 10 attacks to the knee. 10 attacks to the top of the foot (the hardest target). 3 sets. Use a low target pad or have a partner in full gear.

COACH'S TIP: Épée offense is about target selection, not just execution. Before you attack, decide which target you're aiming for: hand, arm, body, or leg. Each requires different hand position, different distance, and different timing. The best épéeists switch targets constantly, keeping the opponent guessing about where the next touch will land.



Defensive Blade Actions

The Counterattack (Arrêt)

The most important defensive action in épée. As the opponent attacks, you extend your arm to score on their advancing hand, arm, or body. Unlike foil, the épée counterattack doesn't need to arrive a full tempo ahead — it just needs to land before or simultaneously with the opponent's touch (within 40ms for a double touch, or earlier for a single light).

Hand Mechanics: As the opponent begins their attack, extend the arm with the point aimed at their closest advancing target — usually the wrist or forearm. The extension must be fast and direct. The arm extends straight, not up or to the side. Your point arrives on their arm as their arm extends toward you, catching them in the gap between their guard and their attacking motion.

Exercise: 30 counterattacks against a partner's advance-lunge. Aim for the wrist. Track single-touch success rate (your touch lands, theirs misses) versus double-touch rate (both land). Target: at least 60% single-touch counterattacks. 3 sets.

The Opposition Parry

In épée, the opposition parry is more important than the lateral parry. An opposition parry takes the opponent's blade and holds it while you riposte, maintaining blade contact throughout. This is critical in épée because if you release the blade after the parry, the opponent can remise (re-attack immediately) and create a double touch.

Hand Mechanics: Take the parry (6 or 4) with firm lateral pressure. Instead of releasing after the parry, maintain blade contact and immediately extend forward with the riposte while keeping their blade displaced. The key is continuous pressure — your blade stays in contact with theirs from the moment of the parry through the entire riposte extension. This prevents the remise.

Exercise: 20 opposition parry-ripostes in 6. 20 in 4. Partner attacks and immediately attempts a remise after being parried. Your opposition should prevent the remise from scoring. 3 sets.

The Parry-Riposte to the Hand

After parrying the opponent's attack, riposte not to the body but to the hand or forearm. This is an épée-specific variation. The hand riposte is shorter, faster, and harder to defend against than a body riposte because the hand is closer and the opponent's hand is often in a poor defensive position after their failed attack.

Hand Mechanics: Take the parry normally. On the riposte, aim the point downward toward the opponent's wrist rather than forward toward the chest. The hand drops slightly and the point angles down. This requires a change in wrist angle — supinate slightly (thumb toward 2–3 o'clock) to aim the point at the top of their wrist.

Exercise: 15 parry-riposte-to-hand sequences in 4. 15 in 6. Partner attacks and recovers. Your riposte must land on their wrist or forearm, not their body. 3 sets.

The Point-in-Line

The fully extended arm with point threatening — functionally similar to foil's point-in-line, but in épée it doesn't carry right-of-way. Instead, it serves as a physical barrier. The opponent must deal with your extended blade before attacking, either by beating it aside, binding it, or going around it. Meanwhile, your extended point is aimed at their hand or forearm, threatening a counterattack if they advance into range.

Hand Mechanics: Full arm extension, point aimed at the opponent's wrist. Hold the position while maintaining or slightly increasing distance. If the opponent advances, your extended point arrives on their hand before their blade can reach your body. This creates a "wall" that the opponent must solve before attacking.

Exercise: Establish point-in-line and retreat while maintaining the position. Partner advances and attempts to beat or bind the blade. Practice holding the line for as long as possible. When they successfully beat the blade, immediately recover the extension. 15 repetitions. 3 sets.

The Remise

An immediate re-attack after the opponent's parry, without withdrawing the arm. The remise is more common in épée than foil because there's no right-of-way — in foil, the riposte always has priority, but in épée, a fast remise can score before or simultaneously with the riposte.

Hand Mechanics: After your attack is parried, keep the arm extended and immediately redirect the point to a different part of the target. If your attack to the body was parried in 4, remise to the flank (outside body) or drop the point to the thigh. Don't pull the arm back — the remise works because the arm stays forward and the point simply moves to a new target.

Exercise: 20 attack-remise sequences. Partner parries and ripostes slowly. Your remise should arrive on target before or simultaneously with their riposte. 3 sets. Focus on keeping the arm extended and redirecting the point.

COACH'S TIP: The counterattack and the remise are the two most important épée-specific blade actions. They define the weapon. A counterattack is scoring while defending. A remise is continuing to score after being defended against. Both are fundamentally about refusing to give up the initiative — even when the opponent thinks they've won the exchange.



Bladework Practice Routines

Daily Hand-Target Warm-Up (5 Minutes)

Before every practice: 20 hand attacks to a glove target (10 inside, 10 outside). 20 angulated attacks (10 pronated, 10 supinated). 10 flicks to the shoulder. All from stationary en garde. Focus on point accuracy, not speed. This builds the precision that makes épée scoring consistent.

Weekly Bladework Session (20 Minutes)

Dedicated bladework practice with a partner: 5 minutes of hand attacks with footwork. 5 minutes of counterattack timing drills. 5 minutes of opposition parry-riposte sequences. 5 minutes of remise practice. All with full distance management – no stationary drills.

Competition Prep Drill

Fence 5-touch bouts with a rule: double touches count as 0–0 for both fencers. This forces clean scoring – counterattacks must land clearly ahead, attacks must be set up to avoid the counterattack, and every exchange must produce a single touch, not a double. 6 bouts.



Final Coach's Note

Épée bladework is the most honest of the three weapons. There's no referee interpretation, no right-of-way judgment, no off-target halt. Either you hit or you didn't. Either you scored without being hit or you traded touches. The machine decides.

Start with the hand attack and the counterattack. Those two actions are the foundation of épée bladework at every level, from beginner to Olympic. Add the angulated attack and the opposition parry next. Then the flick and the remise. Build your épée vocabulary one action at a time, and always with the obsessive precision that the weapon demands.

In épée, the point doesn't care about right-of-way. It only cares about accuracy and timing. Train both relentlessly.

– Coach Derek