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ELITE FENCING COACHING

PRIVATE COACHING RESOURCE SERIES

The Fencer's Video Analysis Guide



How to watch your own bout footage, identify patterns, take effective notes, and turn every recorded bout into a coaching session — even when your coach isn't in the room.

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A Note from Coach Derek

Your parent filmed the bout. Your coach asked you to review it. You opened the video, watched it once, thought "yeah, that was rough," and closed it. Sound familiar?

Most fencers don't know how to watch their own footage. They watch the whole bout at full speed, react emotionally to the touches they lost, and walk away without learning anything. That's not analysis – that's just reliving the bout.

Real video analysis is a skill, and like every other skill in fencing, it can be taught and practiced. This guide gives you a structured method for reviewing bout footage that will actually improve your fencing. It's the same process I use when I review footage for my private students. Now you can do it yourself.

– Coach Derek

Why Video Analysis Matters

Your memory of a bout is unreliable. In the moment, your brain is flooded with adrenaline, emotion, and sensory overload. You remember the touches that felt significant – the dramatic win, the frustrating loss – but you forget the quiet moments that actually determined the outcome. You forget the four advances before the lunge. You forget your hand position during the parry. You forget that you retreated to the end of the strip before every touch against you.

Video doesn't forget. Video shows you exactly what happened, without the emotional filter. It shows you what you actually did versus what you thought you did. And that gap – between perception and reality – is where the biggest improvements live.

Fencers who regularly review footage improve faster than fencers who don't, period. Not because watching video is magic, but because it gives you specific, accurate information about what to work on next. Without video, your training is guided by vague feelings. With video, your training is guided by evidence.



Before You Watch: Setup

What You Need

A device with a screen large enough to see footwork clearly – a laptop or tablet is ideal, a phone works but is harder. A way to pause, rewind, and play at half speed (most video players and phone apps support this). A notebook or your fencer's journal (see the Journal Template guide) and a pen. Quiet space with no distractions. The bout video, labeled with the event, round, and opponent so you know the context.

Mindset Before Watching

You are not watching this video to feel good or bad about your performance. You are watching it to gather information. Approach the footage like a scientist, not a fan. You're not rooting for yourself or cringing at mistakes – you're observing, noting patterns, and identifying specific actions that worked or didn't work.

If you find yourself getting emotional while watching (frustrated at a missed touch, angry at a call), pause the video. Take a breath. Remind yourself: the bout is over. The score is final. The only thing this footage can do now is make you better for the next one.

COACH'S TIP: Wait at least 2–3 hours after the bout before watching the footage. Ideally, watch it the next day. You need emotional distance to analyze effectively. Watching footage in the car on the way home from the tournament is the worst time – you're still in the emotional aftermath.



The Three-Pass Method

Don't try to see everything in one viewing. Watch every bout three times, each time focusing on something different. This is the method I use for every bout review, and it's the most efficient way to extract useful information from footage.

Pass 1: The Big Picture (Full Speed)

Watch the entire bout at normal speed without pausing. Don't take notes yet. Just watch. Pay attention to the overall feel of the bout: who controlled the distance? Who was the aggressor? Did the tempo change during the bout? Did one fencer adjust and the other didn't?

After Pass 1, answer these questions in your notebook:

Who controlled the bout overall? Was it you or the opponent? Was it split, with one fencer controlling the first half and the other controlling the second?

What was the general rhythm? Fast exchanges or patient distance fencing? Did the rhythm change?

Where on the strip did most of the action happen? Were you in the center, pushed back, or in the opponent's territory?

What was your emotional state? Can you see tension in your body language? Frustration after touches against? Rushing when behind?

Pass 2: Your Actions (Half Speed)

Watch the bout again at half speed. This time, focus only on yourself. Pause after every touch (for and against) and answer specific questions.

For every touch you scored:

What action did you use? (Direct attack, parry-riposte, counterattack, compound attack, etc.) What footwork preceded the touch? How many advances? From what distance? What did the opponent do that created the opening? Did they make a mistake, or did you create the opportunity? Could you repeat this action reliably, or was it lucky timing?

For every touch scored against you:

What action did the opponent use? What did you do (or fail to do) defensively? Were you at the wrong distance? Did you react too late? Did you react to the wrong thing (fell for a feint, parried the wrong line)? Did the opponent do the same thing multiple times? If so, why didn't you adjust?

Pass 3: The Opponent's Patterns (Half Speed)

Watch a third time, but now focus entirely on the opponent. Pretend you're scouting them for your next bout. This is where the real tactical intelligence comes from.

Look for these patterns:

What is their preferred attack? Do they always go to the same target? Do they always use the same preparation footwork (same number of advances before lunging)?

What is their preferred defense? Do they always take the same parry? Do they retreat or stand their ground?

What do they do at neutral distance? Do they bounce? Stand still? Use blade engagement? Keep the blade absent?

What do they do when they're ahead? Do they slow down and play safe, or keep attacking?

What do they do when they're behind? Do they get more aggressive, or more tentative?

Do they have a tell? A specific movement that always precedes their attack (a hand twitch, a weight shift, a blade movement)?

KEY CONCEPT: Pass 1 tells you what happened. Pass 2 tells you what you did. Pass 3 tells you what the opponent did. Together, they give you a complete tactical picture that you can use to train smarter and prepare for the next time you face a similar opponent.



What to Look For: The Checklist

Footwork

Is your en garde position consistent? Knees bent, weight balanced, not leaning forward or backward? Are your advances and retreats clean, or are your feet crossing, dragging, or landing unevenly? How deep is your lunge? Is your recovery fast or slow? Are you using the whole strip, or getting trapped at the end? Do you move forward with purpose, or drift aimlessly?

Distance

Are you attacking from the right distance, or lunging short or crashing in too close? When the opponent attacks, are you at a distance where your defense works, or are you too close to parry effectively? Do you control the distance or does the opponent? Are your attacks falling short repeatedly (distance too long) or are they arriving on the guard (distance too close)?

Blade Work

Is your arm extending before your feet move on the attack? Is your point control accurate — hitting valid target consistently? Are your parries clean and definitive, or are you swiping at the blade? Is your riposte immediate after the parry, or is there a delay? Are your feints convincing enough to draw a reaction?

Timing and Tempo

Are you attacking when the opponent is ready (bad timing) or when they're in transition (good timing)? Are you varying your tempo, or is every action at the same speed? Do you speed up when behind (common mistake) or maintain your tempo? Can you see moments where you had time to think versus moments where you were reacting blindly?

Tactical Decisions

Did you have a plan, or were you just reacting? Did you use the same action repeatedly? If it worked, good. If it didn't, why didn't you change? Did you adjust after the opponent scored the same way twice? Did you use second intention or compound actions, or were all your attacks simple? Did you manage the bout (strip position, score awareness, tempo control)?

Body Language and Composure

What does your body language say after a touch against? Do you slump, shake your head, look at the ceiling? Or do you reset calmly and get back in en garde? What does your body language say after a touch for? Do you celebrate excessively (wasting energy and focus) or reset quickly? Can you see the moment your composure breaks during the bout? What caused it?



Taking Effective Notes

The Touch Log

For each touch in the bout, record the following in a simple table or list format:

Touch number. Score after the touch. Who scored. What action was used. What created the opening (opponent's mistake, your setup, or neutral exchange). One-word assessment: clean, lucky, avoidable, pattern.

Example: "Touch 4. Score 2-2. Opponent scored. Their advance-lunge direct to 4. I was flat-footed at the end of the strip. Avoidable – I let them push me back without fighting for territory."

The Pattern Summary

After completing your three passes and touch log, write a short summary (3-5 sentences) that captures the key patterns. This is the most important part of your notes because it's what you'll bring to your next practice session.

Example: "I scored best with parry 4 riposte (3 of my 5 touches). The opponent scored most often with a direct attack when I was retreating to the end of the strip (3 of their 5 touches). I need to work on holding my ground in the center and not retreating passively. My counterattacks were too late – I need to start the extension earlier."

The Action Items

End every video review with 2-3 specific action items for your next practice. Not vague goals like "fence better" or "be faster." Specific, trainable actions.

Good action items: "Practice parry 6 riposte against direct attacks to the outside." "Work on holding the center of the strip when the opponent advances." "Train the counterattack with an earlier arm extension."

Bad action items: "Be more aggressive." "Don't lose." "Fence smarter." These are wishes, not training plans.

COACH'S TIP: Share your notes with your coach before your next lesson. When you walk in and say "I watched my bout against Smith, and I noticed I'm getting pushed to the end of the strip before every touch against me – can we work on holding the center?" – that's a fencer who's going to improve fast. Your coach will love you for it.



Advanced Video Analysis

Comparing Two Bouts

Once you're comfortable with the three-pass method, start comparing bouts. Watch a bout you won and a bout you lost from the same tournament. What was different? Did your footwork change? Did your tactical approach change? Did your composure change? Often the difference between a win and a loss is not a dramatic technical issue — it's a small shift in distance, timing, or emotional control.

Watching Other Fencers

Apply the same three-pass method to footage of fencers you admire or fencers who beat you. Watch a top fencer's bout and note their patterns the same way you'd note your own. How do they manage distance? When do they attack? How do they recover from a touch against? This trains your tactical eye and gives you ideas to bring into your own training.

Building a Scouting File

If you fence the same opponents repeatedly (common in regional circuits), keep a file on each one. After every bout against them, add to the file: their preferred attack, their preferred parry, their distance tendencies, their emotional patterns. Over time, you'll have a detailed tactical profile that you can review before your next bout against them. The best competitive fencers do this. It's not obsessive — it's preparation.

Using Slow Motion and Frame-by-Frame

Most phones and video players allow frame-by-frame playback. Use it for specific moments: the exact instant your opponent's attack begins (to study their preparation), the moment of your parry (to check blade position), and the timing of your riposte (to measure the gap between parry and extension). Frame-by-frame analysis is time-consuming, so save it for the most important touches — the ones that decided the bout.



Video Analysis Schedule

You don't need to analyze every bout from every tournament. Here's a realistic schedule that produces results without burning you out.

After every tournament: Full three-pass analysis of your closest DE (the bout that was most competitive, win or lose). This is the bout with the most tactical information because both fencers were evenly matched.

Once a week during the season: Quick single-pass review of one practice bout or lesson footage. Look for one specific thing you're working on (e.g., "Am I extending my arm before lunging?").

Before a major tournament: Review your last bout against any opponent you're likely to face again. Review your scouting file. Identify your top 3 action items and bring them to your final practice before the event.

Monthly: Compare a bout from this month to a bout from last month. Look for progress on your action items. Are the patterns changing? Is the issue you identified last month still showing up, or have you fixed it?



Final Coach's Note

Video analysis is the closest thing to having a coach watch every bout with you. It's free, it's available anytime, and it gives you information that your memory simply cannot provide. The fencers who use it consistently improve faster than those who don't.

Start with the three-pass method and the touch log. That alone will transform how you prepare for practice and competition. As you get more comfortable, add the scouting file and the comparison analysis. Within a few months, you'll start seeing patterns in real time during bouts – not just on video afterward. That's when video analysis stops being homework and starts being a competitive advantage.

The camera doesn't lie. Learn to listen to what it's telling you.

– Coach Derek