



Safety Document

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1. Introduction

This is a document that will evolve and be added to as other weapon forms are studied beyond the current core curriculum and as equipment technology changes, e.g. blades, protective clothing etc.

Scope

This document is intended as a guide for all Students, Instructors and any Guest Instructors invited to teach at any venue of the Sheffield Academy of Western Martial Arts hereinafter called the Academy. Students should respect and abide by any additional requirements, e.g. in terms of protective clothing, which are given by Instructors that go above and beyond the requirements of this document.

All Students and Instructors, Guest or otherwise, must follow these guidelines if they wish to teach within a venue of The Academy. Any Instructor failing to meet the safety requirements of this document will not be allowed to teach at another venue of the Academy until such time as they choose to abide by these requirements.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to cover all the safety elements for each weapon form and the equipment required for each type of engagement during training sessions, events etc.

1. Protective clothing

Jacket

There are three types of acceptable fencing jacket: canvas (commercial) fencing jacket; leather jacket; ballistic nylon.

The jacket should be a commercial one, sold for the purpose of fencing. It should either fasten at the back or to the opposite side to the sword arm; i.e. fastens on left for a right-handed swordsman, and should be rated to a minimum of 350 Newtons, known as '350N'.

A leather jacket should be of four-ounce weight leather and a minimum of 2mm thick, with no seams on the front of the jacket.

Ballistic nylon jackets should be rated to a minimum of 550N and have no front seam.

Chest protection

Over the jacket, chest protection should be rear or side fastening and should have a smooth surface so as not to catch the point of the blade; i.e. no front seams.

Under the jacket, women should wear chest guards sold for martial arts or fencing; e.g. the breastplate type, insertable plastic guards to go in fencing jacket pockets, shielded sports bra. Underarm plastrons are optional (see section on Smallsword)
– The most commonly available of these are rated at circa 800N.

Other acceptable under-jacket protection: CE-rated motorcycle armour; Master Guard breastplate type for men; paintball armour.

Chest protection is particularly important for women, since impact damage is linked to the development of breast cysts.

Mask

Minimum of a 350N commercial, three-weapon fencing mask. Back of mask protection is advisable, though not required. Although this gives some protection to the back of the head and neck, it does not give full protection. While wearing the mask in any type of engagement the elasticated back-strap must remain fastened and under tension and must not pass over the top of a back spring piece, if the mask has one.

Gloves

Both hands must be covered beyond the cuff of the fencing jacket. The cuff of the glove should cover the jacket cuff so as to prevent a blade slipping under the jacket. Leather gloves are acceptable, as well as commercially available fencing gloves. Further protection required for the hands may be covered in other sections below.

Additional protection for specific situations

Sidesword

For experimental and open engagement groin protection and elbow protection are required. A leather gorget may also be worn.

Rapier

For experimental and open engagement, groin protection is required in addition to the usual protective clothing listed above. A leather gorget may also be worn.

See Section 5 for the definition of the types of permitted engagement.

Smallsword

It is advisable in experimental and open engagement to wear groin protection. A leather gorget and underarm plastron may also be worn.

Sabre

For sabre study, elbow protection is advisable. For experimental and open engagement, groin protection and elbow padding are required. Knee and wrist padding are also advisable in these types of engagement.

2. Blades

All blades must be capped with rubber, plastic or leather. Rubber and leather caps should present a blunt striking surface with a cross-section of at least half an inch.

Rubber caps used should be an arrow blunt, available from many stockists. Red or black blunts are allowed. These should be used on diamond profiled rapier blades. Arrow blunt tips should be securely attached by glueing or taping in place. Electrical tape can either go over the top of the blunt or just around the sides so that the blunt is firmly attached to the bated end of the blade.

Plastic caps should be the commercially-available tips sold for sports foil/epee. These caps should be used on smallswords fitted with sports epee blades. This should be attached by either glueing or taping. Tape should NOT be wound over the top of these tips because this causes slipping on fencing jackets and increases the risk of injury. The dummy electric epee caps that are commercially available may be used on epee blades with threaded tips and these should be wound with tape round the sides but not over the tip.

Leather caps should be at least 4mm thick and taped in place.

The tip must be in a contrasting colour to the blade so that its absence is apparent. In the case of sports sabre blades, the end of the blade must be folded over onto itself or fashioned in one piece to form a button (cap) with a square or rectangular section of 4mm minimum.

Any blade with kinks, sharp bends or cracks should not be used. Burrs must be filed off and the ends of quillons must be blunt. See Section 6 for further information on equipment maintenance.

Non-bated blades should not have their points ground off, since this can significantly alter the blade's temper, flexibility and durability.

Sidesword

For trial, drills, collaborative, experimental and open engagements (see Section 5), the only types of blade permitted are:

Darkwood Armory flexible sidesword blade
Del Tin practice sidesword blade
Hanwei SH2279 practical sidesword
Popinjays sideswords with schlager blades

Full-weight swords may be used ONLY in trial engagement, so the actual feel can be realised by the student.

Rapier

For all types of engagement, the following types of blade are permitted:

Darkwood Armory practice rapier
Darkwood Armory bated rapier
Del Tin FISAS rapier blade
Hanwei practical rapier SH1061 (37") or SH1060 (43")
Hanwei rapier sparring blade SH2255
Hanwei practical taza rapier blade SH2261
Hanwei schlager blade LASP01
Hanwei double-weight epee blade LASP02
Leon Paul theatrical sword blade W2B
Leon Paul reproduction rapier blade (schlager), diamond profile 34.25" WSB4
Leon Paul reproduction rapier blade (schlager), diamond profile 40" WSB6
Leon Paul epee blade, musketeer-style, no point WSB5
Leon Paul Feest spada (no longer in production and replaced by WSB8) WSB7
Leon Paul lame La Fontaine WSB8

Smallsword

All forms of smallsword – use non-electric sports fencing epee blades. These are available from both sports fencing and historical fencing suppliers.

Also -

Popinjay's smallsword (various styles all with practice epee blade).
Leon Paul theatre sword with small cup guard W2
Hanwei SH2324 Court Sword
Hanwei SSH2325 Washington Sword

These are the easiest sources to get a bated practice sword from.
There are of course other sources.

Beware though – certain makers do not currently supply their smallswords with bated blades (as of October 2007)! Ask carefully before purchasing.

Sabre

For drills, trial and collaborative engagement, you may use any sports fencing sabre blade or:

Hanwei SH2199 Pecoraro
Hanwei SH2200 Radaelli
Hanwei SH2201 Hutton

For experimental / open engagements, you may use any sports fencing sabre blade or:
Hanwei SH2199 or SH2200. Hutton sabres may not be used because the blade is not flexible enough and point attacks with these are strictly forbidden.

Singlestick may be used in open sabre engagement, instead of using steel, but only when the correct protective equipment is used. See Section 1 on protective clothing.

3. Off-hand weapons

Cloak or cape

A cloak or cape should be made of woollen cloth of at least medium weight with no weighted edges, chains or clasps.

Targe/target

Targes/targets should be wooden and covered in leather with rounded edges and no spikes on the body of the targe. Nails and studs used to fix the leather are acceptable as long as they are hammered in; targes are often commercially available with rounded studs across them, which is also acceptable.

Buckler

Bucklers should be made of wood covered in leather, wood edged with steel or of steel. They should have rounded edges with no spikes.

Dagger

Daggers should have a stiff unsharpened blade with rounded point or a flexi-blade. The stiff blade can be used for trial and drills, but only where no counter-attacking with the dagger blade is allowed.

The following flexible blades are permitted for us as a counter-attack weapon as well as a defensive one:

Safe-flex

Darkwood Armory

Leon Paul stage dagger

Hanwei SH1033 (blade LASP06)

Hanwei SH2262

Hanwei SH2256 (sparring blade)

4. Personal safety – medical conditions etc

Each member of the Academy should be medically capable of taking part in workshops and training sessions, or other such events. This is the responsibility of each individual member.

Members, or those seeking membership, who have medical conditions that may affect their ability to take part in strenuous exercise (such as heart conditions, diabetes, epilepsy, etc) should discuss with their doctor, and an instructor, the level of participation that is appropriate for them.

The same applies to any medication with listed side effects that may affect your performance (e.g. certain antihistamines or painkillers that can cause drowsiness) and will have the right to suggest restrictions to the type of engagement that you may take part in on that occasion.

There are certain medical conditions where, for obvious reasons (e.g. a broken limb, pregnancy etc.) open engagement will not be permitted. The instructor must be made aware of such a medical condition, especially if it is not immediately obvious.

5. Equipment maintenance

Jacket

There should be no rips, fraying or holes in the jacket. Any repairs made must not be likely to cause a blade to snag on them, or the garment cannot be used and should be replaced. Jackets should be checked before use in training sessions each week and before use during other events such as workshops etc.

Chest protection

Outside the jacket, chest protection should have no rips, fraying or holes. Protection worn inside the jacket should be replaced if it has holes or other obvious damage – eg deformation. Chest protection should be checked before use.

Mask

Masks should be checked for rust and replaced if there is any sign of metal parts not being in good working order. The edging strip that runs behind the mesh front of the mask must have no breaks in it. The same holds for the edging around the back of the mask.

Any damage to the back fastenings (the mask spring piece or elasticated back-strap) mean that the mask must be replaced, since it will no longer fit properly. Do not push out dents in a mask or you will weaken the mesh. The bib that covers the front of the neck below the mesh must not curl up, should have no rips, fraying or holes in it and should be securely attached to the mask.

If in doubt about the fit of a mask, or if the mask becomes deformed from its original shape – seek the advice of an instructor on replacement. The mask should be checked before use.

Gloves/gauntlets

It is imperative that gloves/gauntlets have no rips or holes in them and that they continue to cover the cuff of the jacket. Leather gloves may become brittle and should then be replaced. As with other clothing, this should be checked before use.

Other protective clothing

Rips, holes, rusting, deformation, dents or change in fit mean that the equipment is unsuitable and should be replaced. This should be checked before use. Where breeches are worn rather than trousers to fence in, there should be no bare skin showing below the breeches. Shoes should have a sole that grips the floor surface and should be replaced if the sole is worn.

Blades and other parts of the sword

Blades should be checked for bends, creases, signs of stress in the metal or rust and replaced (other than in the case of surface rust). Surface rust caused by handling a blade with uncovered hands should be kept to a minimum by regular cleaning. Burrs and splinters should be smoothed with a file (see exceptions below). If a sharp edge starts to form, it must be immediately blunted before being used again. With epee and sport sabre blades, emery paper should be used to file off rough edges.

It is particularly important to check the cap of the blade before each use to ensure that it is properly attached and meets the other conditions stipulated in Section 3 of this document. This must be done before use.

The guard of the sword and its quillons must be checked before each use for sharp edges, dents and deformation. The pommel and tang should be checked for signs of damage or stress. The sword should be complete and securely fastening together.

Off-hand weapons

All off-hand weapons must be checked before use for sharp edges, rips, holes, dents, protrusions or deformation. Dagger blades must be replaced if they show signs of bends, creases, stress or rust and burrs or splinters must be smoothed.

6. Engaging your opponent

All types of engagement must always be supervised. During any engagement, if anyone in the group calls 'Hold' or 'Halt' then the parties involved must immediately stop. Anyone may call hold or halt – either a student or an instructor. While any form of engagement is taking place, no person should have their back to the engagement.

Trial

This is done purely to work out the mechanics of a technique and as such the protective equipment requirements may be relaxed. For example, it may not be necessary to wear a mask because the two parties are not in striking distance, but are simply 'walking through' a technique so that both parties understand and are confident of the actions required to make a technique work.

Drill

This is the next stage on from trial engagement – the action is performed in measure and with intent. A strike is performed with intent in that it would have landed on target, had the defender not parried. It does not mean that the strike is performed at high speed or with extra force.

In drills, masks must be worn, along with protection to the appropriate level for that weapon. Drills are normally performed at between half and three-quarter speed of that used in open engagement.

Collaborative engagement

This is where a technique is explored by two people at between half and three-quarter speed, but only one part of the action is fixed. For example, if a set of defences has been practiced in a drill, then the attacks used may be changed and the drill then becomes a collaborative engagement.

Experimental engagement

This is the next stage on from collaborative engagement. It is where a set of techniques are tried out, but not in a fixed manner as in a drill. It is never done at more than three-quarter speed.

Open engagement

This is controlled combat. Each hit is to be acknowledged, unless both parties agree in advance that they will not acknowledge any hits. There will be times when an attack as 'second intention' lands both times and the defender will only be able to acknowledge the second hit of an attack sequence.

Acknowledging hits

Hits should only be acknowledged during open engagement and each hit must be acknowledged.

A hit will be acknowledged by stepping back from the engagement with both feet together while also moving both palms to face the opponent, at hip height then reset to a guard position.

More formally, a hit should be acknowledged by stepping back and putting both feet together, passing the sword to the offhand with the sword hand gesturing first to your heart and then to your opponent. You should then replace the sword in your sword hand and reset to a guard position.

The exception to this is when different rules of engagement are agreed in advance of the engagement by both parties.

Forbidden kinds of attack

The following attacks are never permitted other than in trial and drill when under proper close supervision and with reason to practice certain of these techniques.

Forbidden attacks are:

Pommel strikes.

Quillon strikes.

Initiating an attack from the rear of an opponent's body.

Striking the back of an opponent's head or neck.

Attacking when an opponent is acknowledging a hit, unless during a 'second intention' attack sequence (see above on this).

Point attacks with a Hutton sabre are also forbidden.

Disarm techniques should only be used for trial, drill and collaborative engagements under close supervision.

7. Training Equipment

8.1 All equipment brought to a venue of the Academy for the purpose of training must meet the requirements specified above. It is the owner's responsibility to check every piece of equipment before bringing it to the venue. The owner of the equipment will be held accountable for any incident involving equipment that was obviously faulty when brought to the venue.

8.2 If any individual borrows any piece of training equipment such as protective clothing or blades, it is their responsibility to check that the equipment meets the minimum safety standards specified in this document before they use it during any and all training sessions they attend.

8. Instruction

9.1 Any individual wishing to instruct any student at a training session being held by the Academy must abide by the rules stated above. Any Instructor may specify extra safety requirements for any part of their instruction, but may not fall below the minimum standards set by the Academy detailed above.

9.2 Any individual wishing to instruct any student at a training session being held by the Academy must hold a recognized Instructor or Maestro qualification, such as the BFHS Certified Instructor, before being allowed to do so. Any questions on what is a recognized qualification should be directed to the Chair of the Academy.

9.3 Any individual wishing to instruct any student at a training session being held by the Academy must hold appropriate insurance cover to allow him to do so; this must include individual and public liability. A copy of the insurance must be provided to the Chair of the Academy later than fourteen days before the training session.