

Manitoba Fencing Association

PARENT'S GUIDE TO



FENCING



About

The Manitoba Fencing Association (MFA) is a non-profit sport governing body. Managed by a volunteer board of directors, we are responsible for fencing programs and events in the province, as well as helping prepare athletes to compete nationally. Our purpose is to promote the sport of fencing in Manitoba, and to actively support provincial fencers in attaining their highest potential in provincial, national, and international competitions.

The MFA offers:

- Camps
- Tournament registration
- Tournament equipment
- Provincial rankings
- Coach, official, and armourer training
- Merchandise
- Administrative support for clubs and athletes
- Marketing of fencing provincially
- Liaison with the Canadian Fencing Federation
- Liability insurance for all active members and clubs

For questions or feedback to improve this manual, please contact our head office.

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For Parents

This booklet has been prepared by the MFA, adapted from the Alberta Fencing Association, to acquaint you with the sport of fencing and to explain how the sport may work for your child.

Any fencer under 20 years of age as of January 1 of that year is a Junior. Junior athletes are subdivided into four specific groups: under 20 years old (or Junior), under 17 years old (or Cadet), under 15 years old, and under 13 years old. The information that follows will give you and your junior fencer the basic information necessary to allow you both to enjoy participating in the sport.

The major motivational factor for children and adolescents entering any sport is the desire to have fun! We want your child to have fun in fencing, and we will show you how you can help us make the sport more enjoyable for your child.

A Short Background

The first instance of fencing for sport appears in an ancient Egyptian temple built by Ramses III. The bas-relief shows a sporting competition with blades and masks, and the hieroglyphs with the picture describe the sporting nature of the competition. Greek and Roman swordplay also provided foundation for modern fencing, especially the Roman emphasis on the thrust as a superior offensive action to the cut. During the Middle Ages, swordplay was the domain of the nobility, but the invention of gunpowder gradually transformed the sword from a necessary weapon of war and justice into a fashion accessory. Swords became thinner, with the centre of gravity at the hand, and guards became more complex and were utilized for defense. Fencing masters began to publish treatises during the Renaissance, and the foil was first mentioned in the 17th century. The first fencing mask appeared in the late 18th century, which had the effect of encouraging faster and more daring actions now that the face was protected. Fencing as a sport began to come into its own at this time, and in 1890 it was first suggested to count the hits of the weapon and keep score.

Fencing was part of the first Olympic Games in 1896, and has been in every modern Olympiad since. Women's fencing events were first held during the 1924 Games in Paris.

Electric scoring for epee was introduced in the 1930s, and was followed by electric scoring for foil in the 1950s and for sabre in the 1980s. The development of electrical scoring and more concise rules has made the sport more exciting than ever.

Some famous fencers include British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill, singers Bruce Dickinson and Neil Diamond, actor Jerry O'Connell, US General George S. Patton, US Presidents Harry Truman and Theodore Roosevelt, and writer Alexandre Dumas.

Fencing has also been spotted in pop culture, which heightens public interest in fencing. Movies like *Star Wars* and books like *The Spiderwick Chronicles* feature swordplay and get people thinking, "That looks like fun... I'd like to try it!"

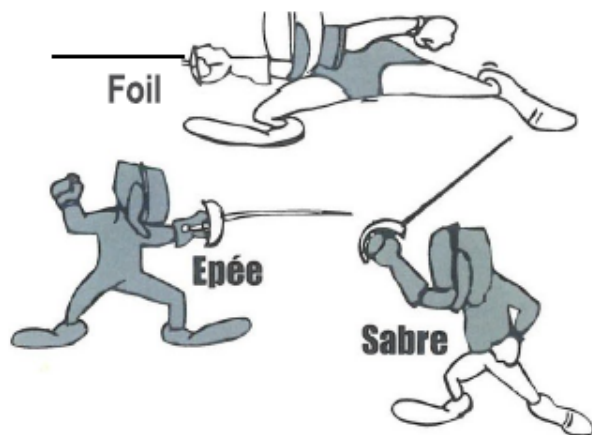
The Three Weapons

The **epee** is descended from dueling swords and practice. The blade is triangular in cross-section and quite stiff. Since the whole body is considered target, the guard is large and bell-shaped to protect the hand from hits. Hits to target are made with the tip of the blade only.

The foil evolved from the small sword and was the first sport weapon in fencing. The blade is rectangular in cross-section and very flexible. Since only the torso is target, the guard is much smaller than the epee. As with epee, hits are made only with the tip.

The **sabre** developed from the cavalry sabre. The sabre blade is Y-shaped in cross-section with the tip folded over to form a button. Points are scored with the edges as well as the tip. Target includes the head, arms and torso to the waist. The guard has a knuckle guard to protect the hand from hits.

The three weapons and their target areas are shown below.



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Modern Fencing: How It Works

Fencing involves three basic skills: bladework, footwork, and tactics. These skills can be learned at any age, and every fencer continually attempts to improve his or her mastery of them. Strength and size can be factors in fencing, but because of all the different ways individuals can score touches, people of all shapes, sizes, and fitness levels are successful fencers.

Bladework allows the fencer to hit his opponent despite the opponent's best defensive effort, or defend himself despite the opponent's best offensive effort. Bladework entails small, controlled movements of the fencer's arm, with most of the fine control coming from his fingers. Whole-arm and exaggerated movements with the blade are not uncommon in a beginning fencer. Fencers learn to reduce the size of their arm movements as their skills grow and they become more comfortable with the blade and begin to see it as an extension of their arm.

Footwork allows the fencer to move herself into offensive or defensive distances quickly and in a controlled manner. Footwork tends to be the most physically demanding skill, and is where fencing's cardiovascular workout comes from. Footwork also teaches body and spatial awareness, as well as balance, posture, and weight distribution.

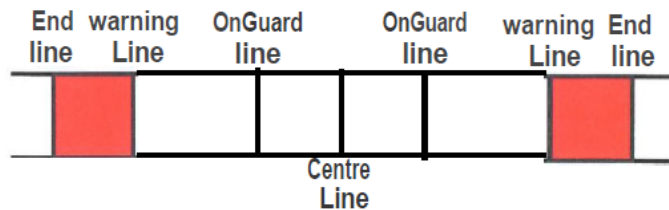
Tactics comprises the thinking and planning used by fencers to attack their opponent and defend against various attacks themselves. It is the component that has earned fencing the description of "physical chess." Tactics combines the small, controlled movements developed in bladework with the strength, speed, and spatial awareness developed in footwork to attack and defend successfully.

There are many schools of thought as to which of the skills is the most difficult to learn. However, it is safe to say that no matter which skill you or your child feels is the most difficult, fencing is a sport that can be learned in a short time, but takes a lifetime to master.

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The Piste

Fencing can be done on any surface as long as it is safe. For competitions, fencing occurs on a fencing strip or piste. The piste is a rectangular strip of metal, usually made of copper mesh or aluminum, measuring 14 metres long by 1.5 to 2 metres wide. The metal piste is electrically grounded so that if either fencer hits the piste, the scoring box does not indicate a hit.



Seven lines are painted on the piste. The line in the centre of the piste is known as the centre line. Two metres on either side of this line are the on guard lines, where each fencer starts after a point has been awarded. Three metres behind the on guard lines are the warning lines, and two meters beyond those are the end lines. Fencers cannot step over the end lines with both feet. If they do, their opponent gets a point.

All fencing action takes place on the piste. The referee will stop the bout each time a fencer crosses the side boundaries with one or both feet, or passes an opponent while remaining on the piste. When a fencer leaves the piste with one foot, the referee will centre the fencer on guard in the middle of the piste. If a fencer leaves the piste with both feet, his opponent is awarded a distance penalty of 1 m from where he was when action stopped. The fencer who left the strip must come on guard a proper distance away, even if this means crossing the end line. A penalty point is awarded if a fencer comes on guard beyond the end line.

Sometimes a fencer intentionally leaves the piste to avoid being hit. This is an offense against the rules and the fencer will receive a warning the first time. If it happens again, the fencer will be penalized and his opponent will receive a point.

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The Touch

The actual bout is monitored by a referee. The referee manages the bout and decides who has scored a touch. Points are registered in a bout by the scoring box. The box receives an electrical impulse when the spring in the tip of the weapon is depressed for foil and epee or when the blade connects with the lame in sabre. Touches can be either valid (coloured lights) or invalid (white lights) and target areas differ from weapon to weapon, as described earlier.

In a competitive event, all fencers are seeded based on their past year's performance in all sanctioned competitions. They are then divided into pools of between five and eight fencers, which are balanced for strength according to the fencers' seeding. Each fencer will fence every other fencer in their pool. After the completion of the pools, the fencers are ranked according to how well they did in the pool round, and are seeded into a direct elimination tableau according to that ranking. Fencers then fence their opponents as determined by the tableau, with the winners moving on in the competition. This process continues until a winner is determined. In most competitions, there is no bout for third place; two bronze medals are awarded.

A pool fencing bout goes to five touches with a time limit of three minutes (plus one minute overtime if the score is tied). Direct elimination bouts are fenced to fifteen touches with a time limit of nine minutes, divided into three three-minute periods (plus one minute overtime if the score is tied). Direct elimination bouts for children in the under 13 age category are only fenced to ten touches or six minutes.

All bouts are fenced in stop-time, where the clock and all action stops after every hit or stoppage in play. In the case of a tie at the end of regular time, one fencer receives priority based on a coin toss or other random mechanism. The winner is the person to score the next point or, if there is no point scored by either fencer during the overtime minute, the fencer who received priority wins the bout.

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Priority or Right of Way

In foil and sabre, double touches are not awarded. Instead, foil and sabre are governed by the rules of right of way or priority.

These rules were developed from the assumption that an individual who was attacked with a real sword should first attempt to defend himself before initiating any offensive action. The priority of an attack is given the following order: point in line, attack, parry/riposte, and finally, counter-attack.

Point in line is defined as a straight arm threatening the valid target area of the opponent. This straight arm must be in place prior to an opponent's attack and maintains priority whether the fencer establishing the line is moving or standing still. However, the point cannot move (unless to avoid their opponent's blade) or be deflected to maintain priority. Generally, any blade contact removes the priority of point in line.

The **attack** is an offensive action defined as an extending arm threatening the opponent's valid target area. An attack may begin from no greater than a step-lunge distance as long as the extension of the arm precedes the lunge. This is why in training there is great emphasis on extending the arm before lunging. The attack has priority unless it is either deflected from the valid target, misses, or stops short of the opponent's valid target. There are several kinds of attacks, including beat attacks and compound attacks.

A **parry** is a defensive action in which the fencer deflects the opponent's attack, causing it to miss. Following the parry, a fencer must initiate an immediate attack called a **riposte** in order to take priority.

Sometimes a fencer will react to another's attack by starting his own rather than parrying. This attack is not in time and is called a **counter attack**. A counter attack only has priority if the original attack loses priority by either missing or stopping short of the valid target area.

Penalties

A fencer who breaks the rules of fencing will receive a penalty, as signified by a coloured card. The colour of the card denotes the severity of the penalty. The card colours are yellow, red and black, and referees will display the card when they give a fencer a penalty.

A **yellow card** is considered a warning. Any further infraction of any type will result in a red card (for a fencer) or a black card (for a spectator).

When the referee gives a fencer a **red card**, his opponent gets a point. A fencer can lose a bout on a red card if it is the last point his opponent needs. Certain yellow or red card offenses can also result in a valid hit being annulled for the fencer at fault.

A **black card** means that the fencer, or any other person, is expelled from the competition or venue. Black cards can be given without previous yellow or red cards.

Penalties come in family groups.

Group 1 penalties allow one warning (yellow card) with all subsequent penalties in this group resulting in a penalty point (red card). Some examples of Group 1 penalties are: failure to have proper, working equipment; colliding with your opponent; turning back on an opponent; refusing to obey the referee's orders; undressing on the strip; and hits made with violence.

Group 2 penalties result in an immediate penalty point (red card) with all subsequent penalties in this group resulting in a penalty point (red card). Some examples of Group 2 penalties are: use of the non-sword arm/hand; absence of weapon control marks; deliberate hits not on your opponent; and dangerous, violent or vindictive actions.

Group 3 penalties result in an immediate penalty point (red card) with any subsequent penalty in this group resulting in expulsion from the event, competition and/or venue (black card). Some

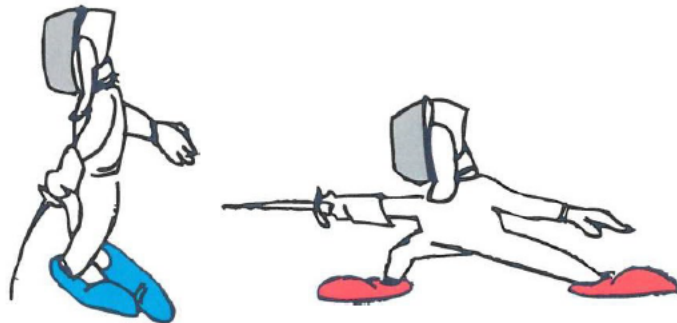
examples of Group 3 penalties are: disturbing order on the piste (red card for fencer, yellow card for anybody else); and dishonest fencing.

Group 4 penalties result in immediate expulsion from the event, competition and/or venue (black card). Some examples of group 4 penalties are: offence against sportsmanship; profiting from collusion; favouring an opponent; fraudulent equipment marks; deliberate brutality; and doping.

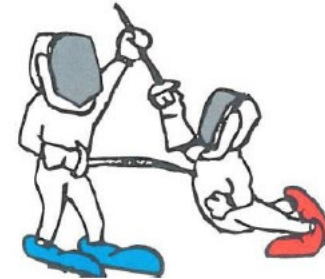
Following are examples of yellow, red and black card offences.



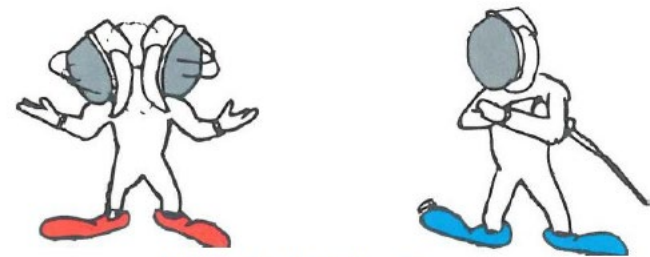
Yellow Card-Incidental corps-a-corps



Yellow Card-Turning the back



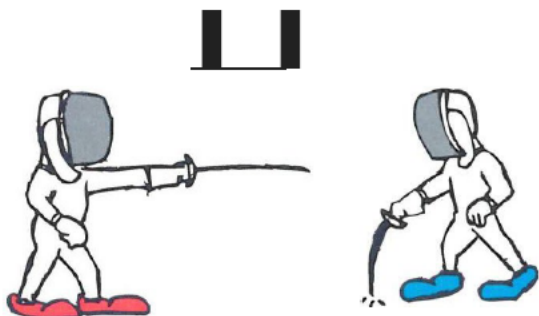
Yellow Card-Irregular use of unarmed hand/arm



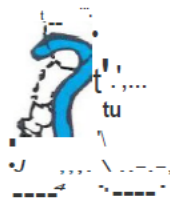
Yellow Card-Delay of game



Red Card-Vindictive blow or action



Red Card- Deliberate hit not on opponent



Black Card- Not present when called after three one-minute intervals



Black Card- Offence against sportsmanship

What You CanDo as a Parent

Fencing is a great sport for children as it encourages good sportsmanship, self discipline, improved concentration, increased self esteem, and team spirit in an individual sport setting. It teaches children how to be gracious winners and learn from defeat. It also increases their general fitness.

For your child to get the most out of fencing, it is important that you support and encourage them by showing interest in the sport. You have to participate in fencing, but learning the basics like those in this manual will allow you to talk with your child about what he or she is learning. Even more important, being a role model for good sportsmanship and showing respect for coaches, officials, and opponents will directly influence your child's behaviour. Fencing has a history of honourable and gentlemanly conduct, and if you exhibit this in your relations with the people in the sport, you show interest in and respect for the sport, which will greatly influence how much your child enjoys fencing.

Please remember that your child is participating in fencing and that it is important for them to set their goals in consultation with their coach. The coach has specialized training to understand the sport, competition level, and your child's stage of development. Understanding the coach's expectations for your child will allow you to complement your role with your child's goals. There will also come a point where individual lessons from a qualified coach will be crucial to your child's development as a fencer. Individual lessons provide focused training at your child's specific level of skill, and will greatly enhance his skills and knowledge of fencing.

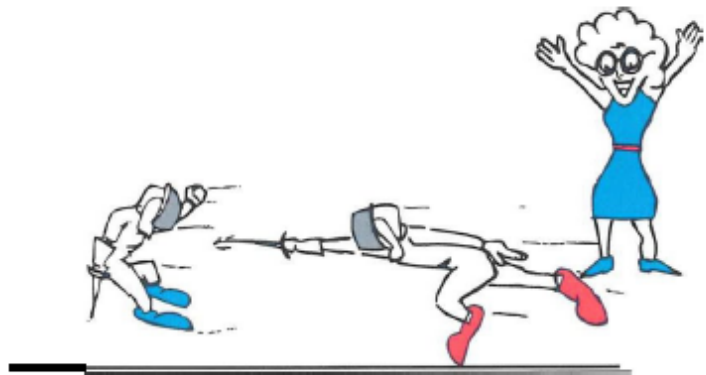
When your child is ready to compete, it is important that you help them prepare for it. All combative competitions result in only one winner. This means that everybody else lost at some point during the competition. Good goal setting, coupled with a desire to learn and grow from defeat, is the only way to ensure that your child does not turn a loss into a losing attitude. Parents should encourage their children to always try their best. Focus on positive attitudes, disable excuses, and let the coach handle the fencing details. Keep the emphasis on growth and fun.

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Understand and recognize that there is the dark side to competition. Every competitor, no matter what age, understands the concept of winning and losing. Unrealistic expectations always yield disappointment and tears. No matter how much you prepare your child, or the strength of their opponent, they will expect to win as soon as they are called on to the piste. It is up to the parents, coaches and community to reinforce the concept that *winning* isn't everything, *trying your best* is everything. Winning is just a companion that comes along for the ride. Realistic goals, like getting through the first direct elimination round rather than getting the gold medal, will go a long way towards teaching your child good goal-setting.

Developing a positive self image is best accomplished in an environment where learning and fun are emphasized and winning is ignored. Encourage your child by highlighting the successes ("You got two points in that bout! That's great!") and things they do well ("That second point you got was a perfect parry-riposte!"). Every athlete is a winner when they try their best.

The Coaching Association of Canada's Code of Conduct for Parents emphasizes your right to be treated with respect and to have a positive learning environment for your child. Your participation in respectful relationships and work to help create this positive environment is vital to your child's success and enjoyment of the sport.



Fencer's Equipment

There are two things to keep in mind when selecting fencing equipment. Safety is the first. The fencer should have properly constructed equipment to maximize safety. The second is freedom of movement. All clothing should be comfortable and allow the fencer to perform all movements.

Fencing equipment can be purchased at fairly reasonable prices. Fencers do not need the most expensive equipment to be adequately protected. Clothing sometimes can be purchased secondhand at local clubs. Some clubs offer certain equipment for use with classes. Once your child wishes to fence competitively, he will need the following equipment:

- Glove
- Mask
- Jacket
- Sous-Plastron (under-jacket)
- Breeches
- Electric weapons (minimum 2)
- Body wires (minimum 2), plus head cords for sabre
- Lame jacket (foil and sabre)
- Knee-high white socks
- Fencing bag (optional)

Some Basic Terms

Allez	"Go." The command to begin fencing.
Attack	The initial offensive action made by extending the arm with the point (or cutting edge) threatening the opponent's valid target.
Beat	An attack preparation made by sharply beating the opponent's blade with your own. Followed with an extension, known as a beat attack.
Bout	Combat in which the score is kept and a winner decided.
Counter-attack	An attack made into the opponent's attack.
Coupe	A movement of deception in which the point is moved from one side of the opponent's blade to the other by passing over the point.
Disengagement	A movement of deception in which the point is moved from one side of the opponent's blade to the other by passing around the guard.
Engagement	Position where the blades are in contact.
En garde	The position of readiness adopted by a fencer, or the command from the referee to adopt a position of readiness.
Epee	A thrusting weapon that is heavier and has a larger guard than the foil. The entire body is target in epee and touches are scored with the tip only.
Feint	A false attack used to provoke a defensive response.

Fleche	A method of delivering an attack in which the rear leg passes the front. Illegal in sabre.
Foible	The weak part of the blade, the third of the blade behind the point.
Foil	A light thrusting weapon with a small, round guard. The target area for foil is restricted to the torso and bib of the mask, and touches are scored with the tip only.
Forte	The strong part of the blade, the third of the blade in front of the guard.
Guard	The part of the weapon that protects the hand.
Lunge	The classic method of delivering an attack. An action of the legs which transports you rapidly towards your opponent.
Parry	A defensive movement made with the blade that deflects the opponent's attack.
Piste	The field of play. Also called a strip.
Prets?	"Ready?" The interrogative command to be ready.
Prise-de-fer	A preparation of attack in which you grab or take your opponent's blade by applying pressure with your own.
Riposte	The offensive movement made by a fencer who has just parried their opponent's attack.
Sabre	A light cutting and thrusting weapon with a guard that includes a knuckle guard. The target area for sabre is from the waist up, not including the hands. Touches are scored with the tip or edges of the blade.

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Coaching Association of Canada Sample Code of Conduct for Parents can be found at www.coach.ca. More information on fencing's history can be found on the FIE website (www.fie.ch) or the MFA website (www.fencing.mb.ca).



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For contact information for any of these clubs, please visit the Manitoba Fencing Association website at www.fencing.mb.ca.



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