

HEMA Refereeing Course Overview

Part 1 – Rules of the Game

Objective: Build a solid understanding of the rules before stepping into the referee role.

- Introduction to the role and responsibilities of a HEMA referee
- Understanding the competition ruleset
 - Scoring systems
 - Valid target areas
 - Afterblows and exchange rules (where applicable)
 - Double hits and priority (if used)
- Match structure
 - Bout timings
 - Victory conditions
 - Timekeeping procedures
- Safety regulations
 - Illegal techniques
 - Prohibited target areas
 - Acceptable levels of force
 - When to stop a bout immediately
- Equipment inspection
 - Personal protective equipment (kit checking)
 - Weapon compliance
 - Identifying damaged or unsafe equipment
 - Dealing with equipment failures during a match
- Common rules misunderstandings
- Short rules quiz / discussion

Part 2 – Mechanics of Refereeing

Objective: Learn how to referee efficiently, consistently, and confidently.

- Positioning around the ring
 - Maintaining the best viewing angle
 - Avoiding obstructing judges or competitors
 - Moving safely during exchanges
- Using your vision effectively
 - Watching the whole exchange
 - Peripheral awareness
 - Recognising what you can and cannot confidently call
- Communication skills
 - Clear and confident voice projection
 - Consistent terminology
 - Keeping commands concise
- Standard referee commands
 - Starting bouts
 - Stopping action
 - Awarding points
 - Resetting competitors
- Hand signals
 - Standardised gestures
 - Making signals visible to judges and audience
- Controlling the pace of a match
 - Maintaining authority
 - Managing delays
 - Preventing confusion
- Working with judges and scorekeepers
 - Communication protocols
 - Making collaborative decisions
 - Resolving uncertainty

Part 3 – Managing Fencers and Difficult Situations

Objective: Develop the confidence to manage competitors professionally under pressure.

- Establishing authority from the start
- Controlling competitors without escalating situations
- Professional communication
 - Calm, direct language
 - Giving instructions clearly
 - De-escalation techniques
- Handling emotional competitors
 - Frustration
 - Disappointment
 - Anger
- Receiving protests
 - Listening appropriately
 - Knowing when discussion is over
 - Following the competition appeals process
- Aggressive neutrality
 - Remaining impartial while being decisive
 - Projecting confidence without hostility
- Enforcing penalties
 - Warnings
 - Point deductions
 - Disqualifications
- Looking after yourself as a referee
 - Working under pressure
 - Supporting fellow officials
 - Knowing when to ask for help
- Building consistency across an officiating team

Part 4 – Practical Refereeing Workshop

Objective: Apply knowledge in realistic, controlled competition scenarios.

- Briefing on the mock tournament format
- Rotating referee roles
 - Centre referee
 - Corner judge
 - Scorekeeper (optional)
- Standard bouts to build confidence
- Engineered scenarios including:
 - Simultaneous hits
 - Afterblow situations
 - Ring-outs
 - Illegal target strikes
 - Excessive force
 - Equipment failure
 - Broken weapons
 - Lost equipment
 - Missed calls
 - Judges disagreeing
 - Coaching from the sidelines
 - Fencer refusing instructions
 - Angry or argumentative competitors
 - Time-expiry edge cases
 - Medical stoppages
- Group discussion after each scenario
 - What happened?
 - Was the decision correct?
 - What alternatives were available?
- Individual feedback for each trainee referee
- Final assessment and Q&A

Course Outcomes

By the end of the course, participants should be able to:

- Apply the competition rules accurately and consistently.
- Conduct pre-bout safety and equipment inspections.
- Position themselves effectively to observe exchanges.
- Communicate clearly using standard commands and hand signals.
- Control bouts safely and professionally.
- Manage disputes and difficult competitors with confidence.
- Work effectively as part of an officiating team.
- Referee a HEMA bout safely, fairly, and consistently.