

BHMA Sparring and Safety Rules

Guidelines For Drilling

- **Let your partner know about any injuries or conditions that may affect your ability to perform the drill.**
- **Training partners should start drills at a low intensity** corresponding to the experience of the partners involved with an initial, collaborative focus on making the movements work. As the partners get more comfortable with the drill, increase the speed and non-compliance elements of the drill.

Guidelines For Grappling

- Grappling is something that appears in many fencing systems, and is something we occasionally practice at BHMA. **The standard for grappling is only at a level of controlling your opponent's weapon whilst standing.** Joint locks, throws, holds and going to the ground are **not** to be done unless either your fencing partner explicitly agrees to them or it is part of a drill. Throws in particular are not advised due to the hard surfaces we train on.
- **If someone taps , verbally or physically, let them go gently.** This includes saying “Tap”, “Uncle”, or “Let go”. If someone physically taps you in a hold, then let them go. If you notice them tapping themselves, let them go. However, we do not recommend tapping yourself because it can be missed by your partner, but if you do notice someone doing it, let them go regardless.
- **Grappling is always optional and consent based.**

Guidelines for Sparring

- **All Sparring is consent based.** You are not obligated to spar, nor do you have to spar with anyone or under any conditions in which you feel uncomfortable. The following (non-exhaustive) list is a series of examples to turn down sparring:
 - “I’m not feeling up to it at this moment.”
 - “I’m feeling tired and don’t want to train further today”

- “Unfortunately I have an injury, and don’t want risk hurting myself”
- “I’m new here, and just want to watch for now”
- Sparring is a game, intended as a means to try and test out your skills. **It is not a real fight and should not be treated as such.** People have varying standards on how hard they are okay with being hit and should discuss this before sparring. Ideally, hits should aim to be sufficiently hard that your opponent can feel when they have been hit and no harder. In the case that you feel your opponent is hitting too hard, you have every right to call a halt and either ask them to hit lighter or to stop sparring completely. Remember, **if you injure your fencing partners, they will not want to train with you, and your training will be worse in the long run.**
- Generally the entire body is regarded as a valid target but there are a few exceptions. **Forbidden targets include: the back of the head, the neck, the spine, and the groin.** This should also include anywhere that a fencing partner is not wearing sufficient protective kit.

Pre-Sparring Guidelines

- **It is your responsibility to check your gear and weapons are safe.** If you are borrowing club kit and find something that is not safe to use, you must let a member of the committee know.
- **Talk to your partner** about any injuries, kit deficiencies, or personal boundaries you may have. Talk about the intensity you would like to spar at and whether or not you’d like to grapple. Examples of points of discussion and what to note include:
 - “I’ve got a bit of dodgy shoulder, I’d like you to avoid hitting that region”
 - “I’m not comfortable with grappling”
 - “I don’t have any knee guards, would you mind keeping it above the waist?”
 - “I want to work on defending against bladework today, can you avoid striking with the pommel?”

- **Make sure you have adequate space to spar with the weapon set you are using.** Larger weapons require more space, so bear that in mind. If all the floor space is being used, wait until more is free or consider using smaller weapons. Vertical space must be included in this assessment, ensuring that you do not hit the ceiling.

During the Sparring Guidelines

- **Anyone can call Halt at any time, including spectators or those involved in other bouts.** Halt should be called before or in case of injury or if gear fails (I.E elbow cup comes off, sword tip breaks). If your partner is about to back themselves against a wall or out of bounds, call a quick halt and reset to a position where you both have space to manoeuvre.
- **Intensity of the bout should aim to be at the levels specified in the pre-bout chat.** With the competitive nature of fencing, fencers may end up pushing harder as the bout progresses. If this happens, fencers should call a halt and take a moment to discuss bringing the intensity back down.
- **If your partner looks uncomfortable, call a halt and ask if they are okay.**
- **Partners may engage under any ruleset they choose and agree upon in the pre-bout conversation but standard convention for how sparring works like this:**
 - Each Partner is attempting to avoid being hit and, if possible, trying to hit their opponent or get to a position of dominance.
 - A position of dominance is defined as when a fencer has a clear way to hit their opponent without fear of reprisal but has not yet done so. An example would be if an opponent was disarmed and the fencer was in sufficient striking distance.
 - Because being hit with a sharp sword is known to result in pretty serious injuries, Fencers fight until one or both are hit.

At this point, the fencers pause, indicate where they got hit, generally by tapping the part of the body that was hit, get back out of distance and then restart the bout. **Make sure your partner is ready before starting again.** During the pause, fencers may discuss the hits given or received, the quality, and the potential implications of the hits. If discussion happens, be polite and aim to give your partner credit for the quality of their fencing.

- The case that both partners hit each other at the same time is known as a double. Generally this is not seen as a win for either party, because if the blades were sharp, you would both be injured.
- In the case that one of the fencers hits the other first, the fencer who was hit has one tempo to respond. If they manage to do so, this is regarded as an afterblow. The word tempo means lots of different things in various systems, but in this context means the time taken to do one action with the body and sword. For instance, if Fencer A hits Fencer B first, but Fencer B was already moving to hit Fencer A, then that would be an afterblow. However, if Fencer A hits Fencer B first, and Fencer B makes a failed attempt to defend in that moment, and then afterwards attempts to hit Fencer A, this would be counted as the exchange being won by Fencer A.

Post-Sparring Guidelines

- **Check yourself for any injuries or gear failures.**
- **Check in with your partner to make sure they are ok** and that you stayed at an intensity boundary they were comfortable with.
- **Do not give feedback, unless asked to do so.** When giving feedback, be complementary and aim to focus criticism on what they were consistently hit by. If someone got hit by something once

and then never again, they probably learned that lesson. Asking for feedback is encouraged, and will improve your fencing!

- In Case of Injury, the following procedure is to be followed:

 In case of casualty

Reminder:

If another member's behaviour makes you feel unsafe and you do not feel comfortable speaking to them about it, reach out to a committee member who will speak to them **without** mentioning your name. If someone exhibits consistent unsafe behaviour despite discussions, they may be suspended from club activities.