

Grips for the Longsword

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FOREWORD

When talking about the dominant hand (usually the right hand), there are basically 3 main types of Grip when using a Longsword (or a Federschwert, or some kind of Longsword simulator):

1. The Hammer Grip
2. The Handshake Grip
3. The Full Thumb Grip

Each of these main types have 1 variation:

4. The Side Thumb Grip
5. The Pistol Grip
6. The Laser // The Button Grip

So, in total, we have 6 different ways of gripping the hilt of a Longsword, with the dominant hand.

Each Grip has pros and cons, and I'll proceed to discuss these while presenting each Grip, below.

But before we go on, I must make a mention regarding the names.

Though Hammer Grip, Handshake Grip and Full Thumb Grip are very well known in the HEMA community with regard to their shape and function, these exact names might be interpreted differently depending on club or instructor.

Also, in my experience, people refer to the Full Thumb Grip as simply "Thumb Grip", but I felt being more precise with the name was important, to differentiate it from what I call the Side Thumb Grip.

As for the variations for the main types, the Pistol Grip is also well known in the community (though perhaps the name is used interchangeably to describe the shape that I call the Handshake Grip, which makes things a bit confusing...).

But the Side Thumb Grip and The Laser // The Button Grip might seem strange and alien to you. Probably because I made those names up. :)

In short, all of the grips themselves are used in the community, but the names given to the various grips are my "labels" to describe their shape and function, according to my current interpretation and HEMA framework. These might be liable to change in the future. Or not. Just keep in mind that the point is for them to be descriptors of an objectively measurable entity (a particular grip). It doesn't really matter what we call them, as long as we understand what they look like and how to use them (what their function is).

Important note: Going forward, throughout the article I will assume you are a Righty and refer to your dominant hand as "the right hand". If you're a Lefty, just switch everything.

I. Hammer Grip



View from the side (inside of right hand)



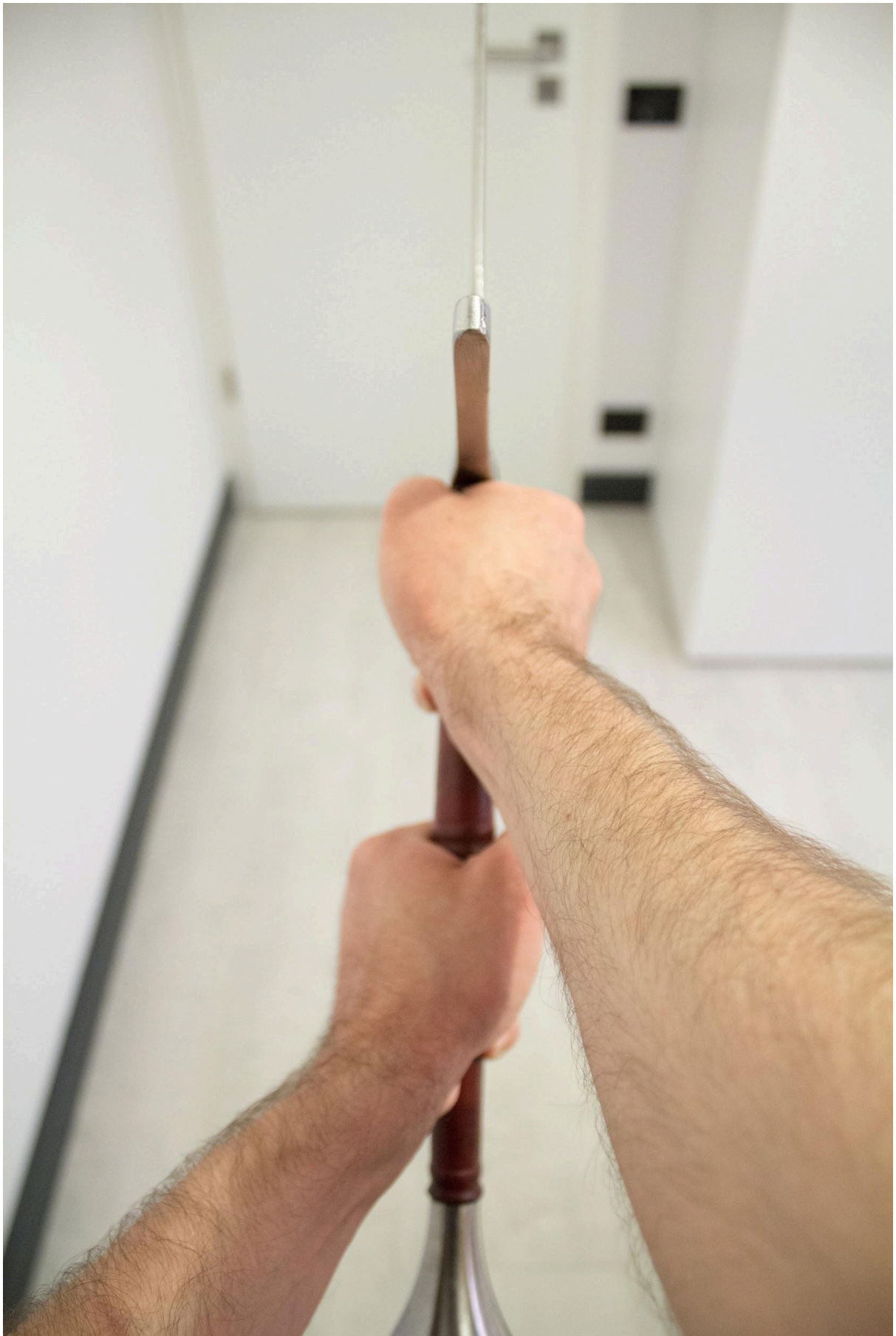
View from the side (outside of right hand)



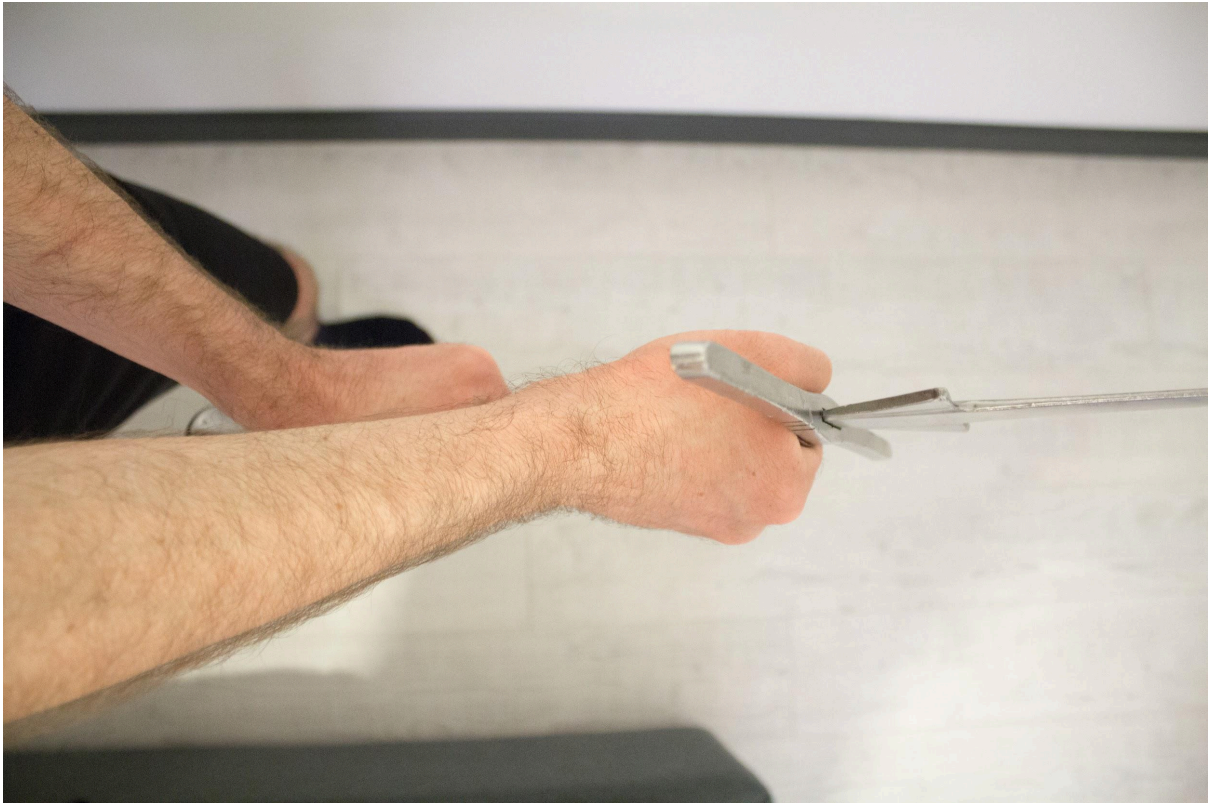
View from the front



View from front and below



View from the fencer's POV



View from the top and side



View from the side and afar

I.1. How to Make the Hammer Grip:

All longsword (simulator) // federschwert hilts have a wider part and a narrower part (or they should).

Grab the hilt with your LEFT hand on the lower half of the hilt (the one with the pommel) and place the upper half of the hilt (near the crossguard) on your OPEN right hand. Your thumb should be above the crossguard and behind it, not below it. It should also be pointing upwards, to the sky. The hilt should be placed in your right hand as close as possible to the crossguard. This right hand should be parallel with the ground with the inside pointing at the sky, the back of the hand pointing at the ground and your fingers pointing forward.

The position of the hilt as you placed it in your open right hand should be so that the wider part of the hilt is placed flat on the inside of your palm (the wider part is facing to the sky and to the inside of your palm respectively, while the narrower part is facing forward and backward, respectively). Also, the hilt is perpendicular (forms a 90 degree angle) to the 4 fingers that are pointing forward.

The wider part of your hilt should rest smack in the middle of your palm. If you need a visual cue, it's that distinct area and line on your palm that creases when you close your palm. This means that the wider part of the hilt is NOT resting exactly at the base of your 4 fingers, but is 1-2 centimeters below that (depending on your anatomy) and aligned on this line that creases. In any case, right in the middle of the inside of your right hand palm.

Now curl all the fingers, including the thumb, over the hilt. Don't clench! Just curl. That's the Hammer Grip. Orient the weapon to adopt whatever guard needed or perform whatever Longsword action desired, while keeping the grip on the hilt the same.

I.2. VIDEO Tutorial:

<https://youtu.be/2DDuPyvxTik>

I.3. PROS of Hammer Grip:

- easy to adopt; intuitive;
- very stable grip; hard to be disarmed
- very good for static parrying (direct force blocks)
- fairly good for big powerful full cut swings (though shorter range!)

I.4. CONS of Hammer Grip:

- high chance of damaging your wrist due to less wrist mobility; this is the grip most prone to lead to a "Broken Wrist" shape;
- less total range (reach) than other more flexible grips
- higher chance of bad edge alignment
- makes Fühlen ("Feeling") more difficult
- techniques that require wrist flexibility are much more difficult (if not impossible) with this grip

I.5. Overall Description and Function of the Hammer Grip:

It is the Beginner's Grip (<- though instructors might prefer to teach their beginner level students other, better grips, from the start). It works for a simple style of fighting that emphasizes simple static parries (blocks) and full cuts. No finesse or advanced techniques. And no adaptability in the moment. The "Buffel"s grip. Long term wrist damage is a considerable risk.

II. Side Thumb Grip



View from the side (inside of right hand)



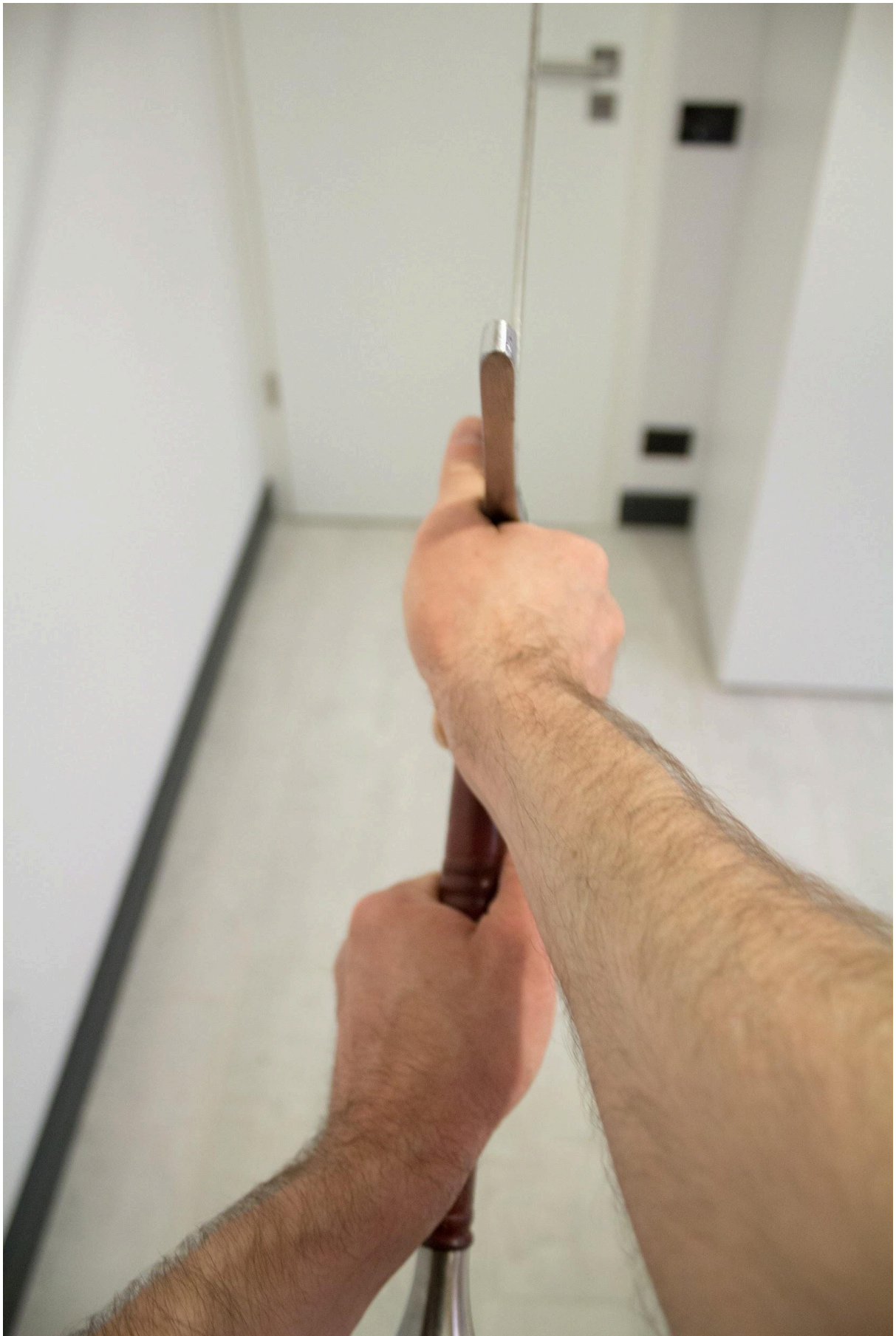
View from the side (outside of right hand)



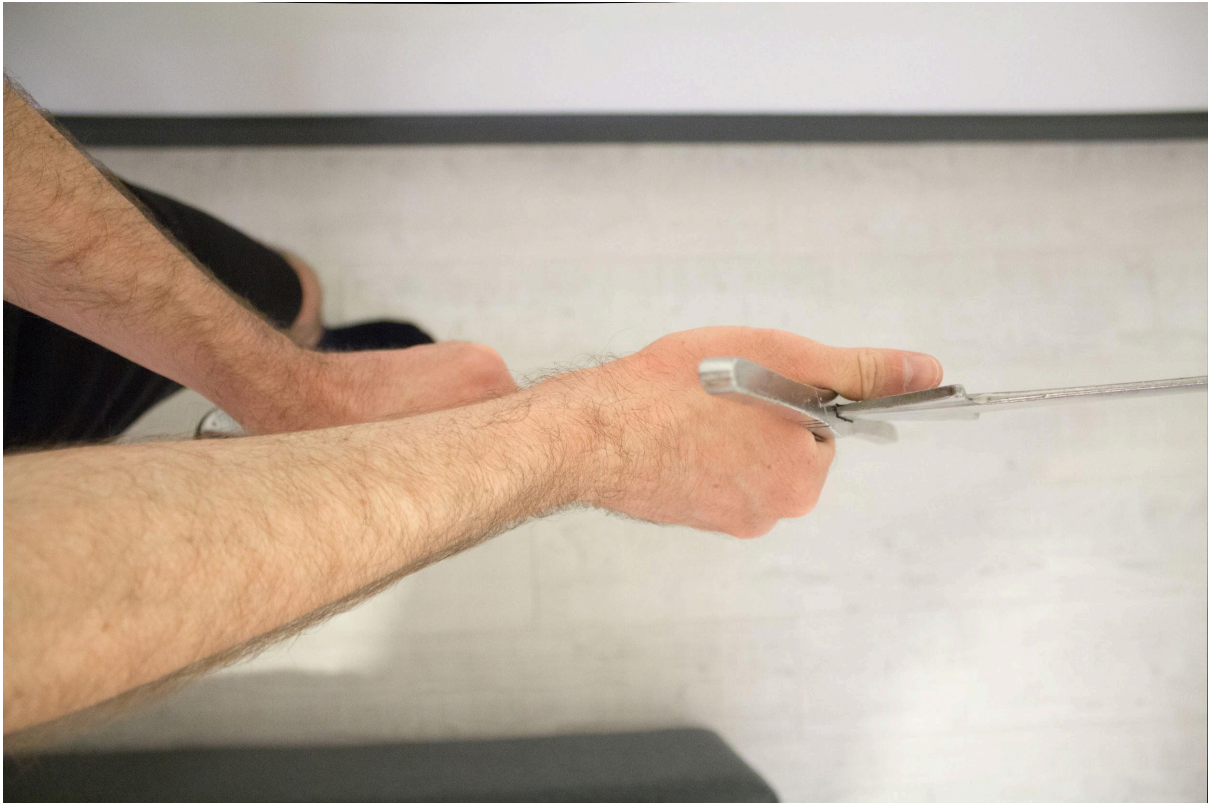
View from front and below



View from directly below



View from the fencer's POV



View from the top and side



View from the side and afar

II.1. How to Make the Side Thumb Grip:

See how to make the Hammer Grip above. Everything stays exactly the same. Except when you're done curling your fingers around the hilt, uncurl your thumb (it should go to the right, not up, at the sky), so that it is resting over the crossguard and over the flat of your blade, the thumb pressing on the crossguard and the flat of the blade with the right side of your thumb. Meaning that the underbelly of the thumb is pointing diagonally towards the pommel side of your weapon, while the nail of your thumb is pointing diagonally towards the tip of your weapon.

That's the Side Thumb Grip. Orient the weapon to adopt whatever guard needed or perform whatever Longsword action desired, while keeping the grip on the hilt the same.

II.2. VIDEO Tutorial:

<https://youtu.be/j-O9V81PIN4>

II.3. PROS of Side Thumb Grip:

[same as those of Hammer Grip +]

- better edge alignment due to the thumb stabilizing the blade's sideways tilt (you can also use your thumb as a visual aid for the cutting plane)
- Fühlen ("Feeling") is a bit easier than in Hammer Grip, due to the thumb no longer being curled on the hilt (but still poor)
- some techniques that are most easily executed with the Full Thumb Grip are more comfortable in Side Thumb Grip than in Hammer Grip

II.4. CONS of Side Thumb Grip:

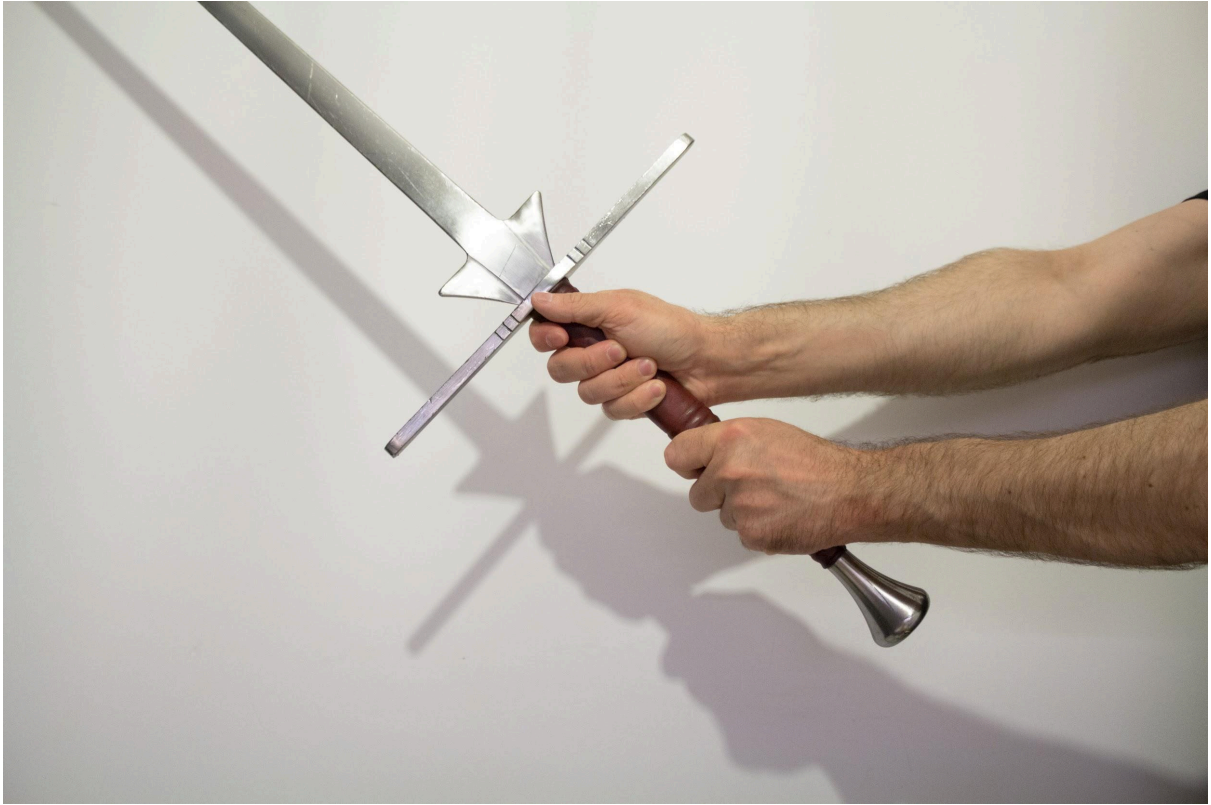
[same as those of Hammer Grip +]

- a bit higher chance of disarm than in Hammer Grip;

II.5. Overall Description and Function of the Side Thumb Grip:

It is the Noob's Grip++. Meaning that it has the same strengths and weaknesses as the Hammer Grip, and the same function. And it serves the same fighting style, but allows for just a bit more control, finesse and edge alignment.

III. Handshake Grip



View from the side (inside of right hand)



View from the side (outside of right hand)



View from front and below



View from directly below



View from the fencer's POV



View from the top and side



View from the side and afar

III.1. How to Make the Handshake Grip:

All longsword (simulator) // federschwert hilts have a wider part and a narrower part (or they should).

Grab the hilt with your LEFT hand on the lower half of the hilt (the one with the pommel) and place the upper half of the hilt (near the crossguard) on your OPEN right hand. Your thumb should be above the crossguard and behind it, not below it. It should also be pointing upwards, to the sky. The hilt should be placed in your right hand as close as possible to the crossguard. This right hand should be parallel with the ground with the inside pointing at the sky, the back of the hand pointing at the ground and your fingers pointing forward.

The position of the hilt as you placed it in your open right hand should be so that the wider part of the hilt is placed flat on the inside of your palm (the wider part is facing to the sky and to the inside of your palm respectively, while the narrower part is facing forward and backward, respectively).

But unlike for the Hammer grip, this time the hilt is NOT perpendicular (does NOT form a 90 degree angle) to the 4 fingers that are pointing forward. Instead, it is tilted so that it rests skewed on the inside of your palm, with the part of the hilt that is closest to the left side of your crossguard (as you are looking at your palm from above) making contact with the meat of your palm immediately below your index finger (so NOT at the base of the index finger, where it flexes, just a bit below that). While the part of the hilt that is towards the right side of your crossguard (as you are looking at your palm from above) makes contact JUST BEFORE the BIG meaty part under your thumb. Again, NOT at the base of your thumb, where it flexes, NOT the big meaty part under the base of your thumb, which also flexes, but right under this second part, where the palm no longer flexes.

If you need a visual cue, try to get your thumb to touch your little finger (or as close as possible as you can make it), with your palm facing up. You see that a different “crease line” forms than the one that forms when you just close your entire palm. For the Handshake Grip, we want the right side of the hilt, as you are looking down, to make contact with this distinct line on your palm, that creases when you move your thumb towards your little finger. But remember that the hilt STILL makes contact on the inside of your palm with the WIDER part of the hilt. It's the NARROW part of the hilt that makes contact with this meaty area under your thumb. Don't orient the hilt so that the narrow part of it makes contact with the inside of your palm for this Grip!

Now curl all the fingers, including the thumb, over the hilt. Don't clench! Just curl. **An important note** here is that the most “grip” you apply in the Handshake grip takes place with the pinky, ring finger and middle finger on your right hand. The index and thumb are there for fine control and adjustments in the various techniques.

That's the Handshake Grip. Orient the weapon to adopt whatever guard needed or perform whatever Longsword action desired, while keeping the grip on the hilt the same.

III.2. VIDEO Tutorial:

<https://youtu.be/OUWPz9pnbhY>

III.3. PROS of Handshake Grip:

- best grip for adaptability and Fuhlen ("Feeling"); you can perform all of the Liechtenauer techniques with this Grip (some more comfortable than others, but still, all are accessible)
- best grip for cutting and edge alignment
- best grip for dynamic parries (deflections)
- a grip that offers a good balance between range and control (the extra range gained by the weapon being properly aligned with the wrist might be relatively small, but it is NON-negligible; 5-10 cm make a world of difference in fencing)
- best grip for having anatomical alignment, good biomechanics and lowering the risk of long-term injury; the proper alignment of wrist and weapon does not only gain you more range, but also lowers your point more inline with the adversary's neck//chest, which is a great advantage in setting up thrusts
- good balance between thrusting, cutting and other more specialized techniques

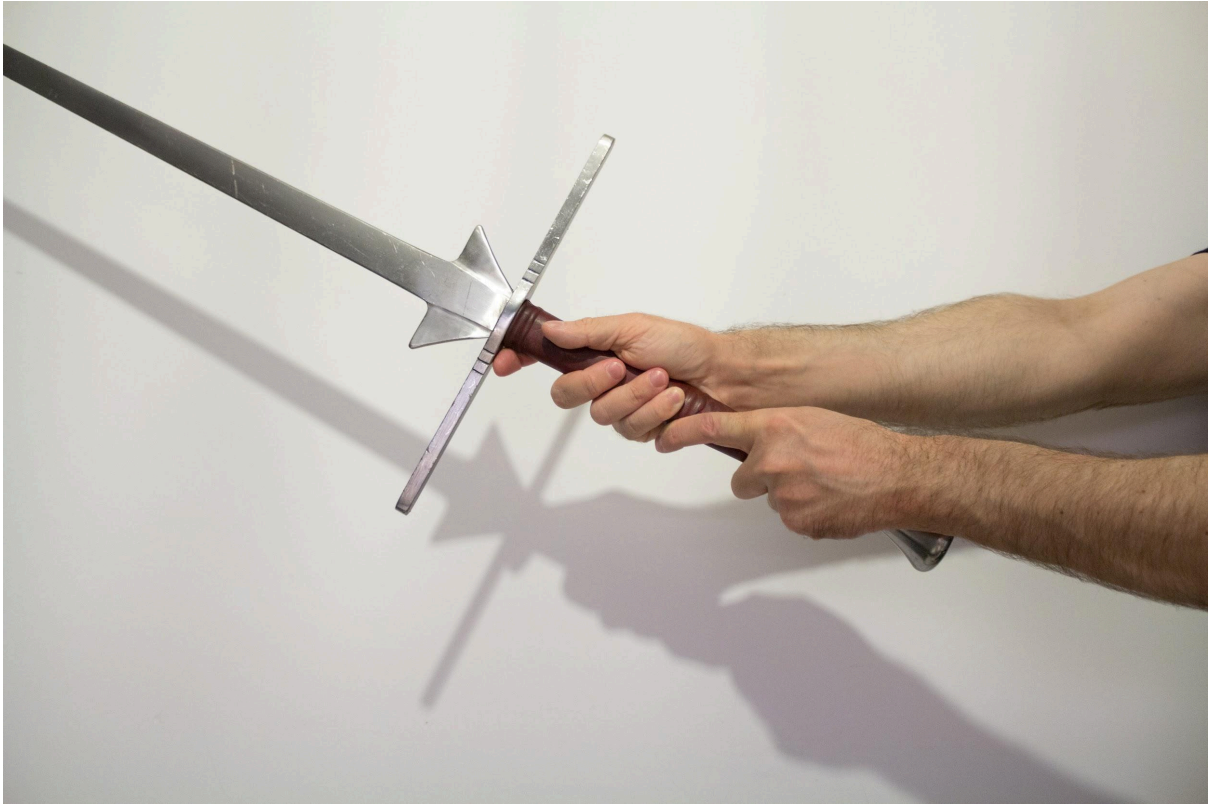
III.4. CONS of Handshake Grip:

- a bit counter-intuitive at first (especially with regard to full cuts)
- a higher chance of being disarmed than with Hammer Grip, IF you are not adaptable enough to feel when you should tense your grip, depending on context and stimulus (as opposed to the relaxed grip and low tension you should be utilizing with this shape most of the time);

III.5. Overall Description and Function of the Handshake Grip:

It is in my opinion the best grip to learn (and teach students). Because it is the most well-rounded grip. If you only know this one grip you can perform all the techniques (both common fencer and Liechtenauer) and have a very robust, adaptable, diverse fighting style. The range (reach) you get with this grip is almost the biggest (see Pistol Grip). And the biomechanical efficiency this grip offers gives you tactical advantages that are lost with other grips. Good cutting power. Great thrusting. Great Fuhlen ("Feeling") and adaptability. What's not to like?!

IV. Pistol Grip



View from the side (inside of right hand)



View from the side (outside of right hand)



View from front and below



View from directly below



View from the fencer's POV



View from the top and side



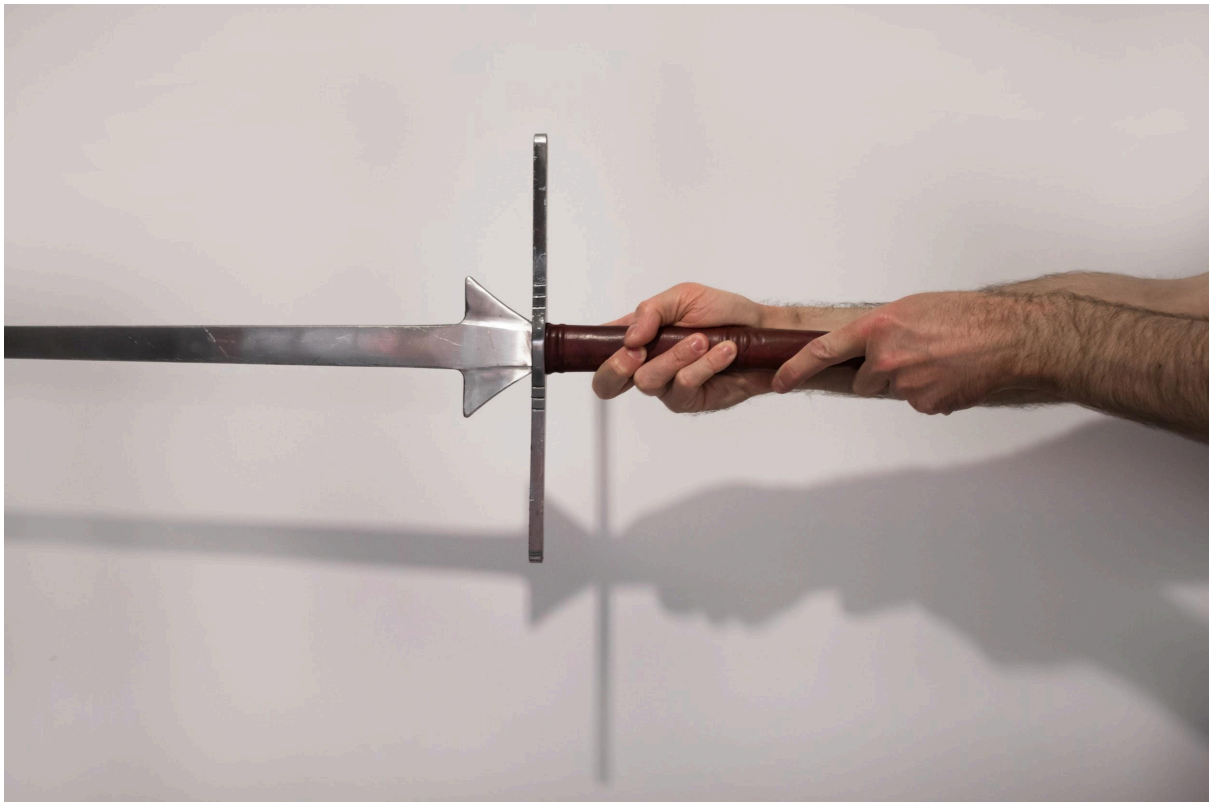
View from the side and afar

IV.1. How to Make the Pistol Grip:

Everything stays the same as it was for the Handshake Grip, except when you place the hilt on the inside of your right hand, place it so that it is now completely diagonal in your palm. More details would be that the side of the hilt closest to the crossguard passes between your index and your middle finger as you look down at your open palm, with the wide part of the hilt that is facing the inside of your palm passing directly over your index finger, as this index finger curls under and around it to the left (as you are looking from above). But just focus on placing the hilt as diagonally as possible on the inside of your palm and curl your fingers around it.

That's the Pistol Grip. Orient the weapon to adopt whatever guard needed or perform whatever Longsword action desired, while keeping the grip on the hilt the same.

NOTE: If you want to, you can exaggerate this grip, for Long Point (Langenort) so that your index finger is no longer curled under the hilt (instead resting on the side of the hilt or rather UNDER it, as you are looking from above). This allows you to end up with your blade completely in line with your wrists and extended arms, with the maximum range (reach) that you can anatomically have. BUT, this requires that you stabilize your now much more unstable grip by pushing your left hand, with the pommel, firmly against the inside of your right forearm. Here are 3 pictures of this Pistol Grip variation.



View from the side (inside of right hand)



View from the top and side



View from the side and afar

IV.2. VIDEO Tutorial:

<https://youtu.be/mPFsFvw9TeQ>

IV.3. PROS of Pistol Grip:

- best grip for max range (reach), especially if you use Langenort a lot

IV.4. CONS of Pistol Grip:

- very counter intuitive
- really really bad for cutting and edge alignment
- difficult to parry (both static and dynamic)
- bad control of your weapon and low adaptability overall; very difficult to use Fühlen ("Feeling")
- paradoxically using this grip makes Durchwechseln ("Changing Through") MORE difficult and slow, not less; instead of performing it with Handshake Grip, for example, with a looser, more responsive grip...
- highest chance of being disarmed than with any other grip; this may be mitigated by using your LEFT hand to lock the pommel into the inside of your forearm; but be aware that this lowers your mobility and adaptability even more (including for cutting and parrying)
- high risk of wrist // forearm injury if the other fencer makes powerful swings at your blade (like, say, someone who uses Hammer Grip a lot)

IV.5. Overall Description and Function of the Pistol Grip:

In my opinion this grip's only function is to keep your adversary at a distance, IF your adversary doesn't know how to deal with Langenort and Durchwechsel and IF you yourself are very proficient in these techniques. Apart from this, I see no good reason to adopt this grip in fighting for more than the occasional surprise or experiment.

V. Full Thumb Grip



View from the side (inside of right hand)



View from the side (outside of right hand)



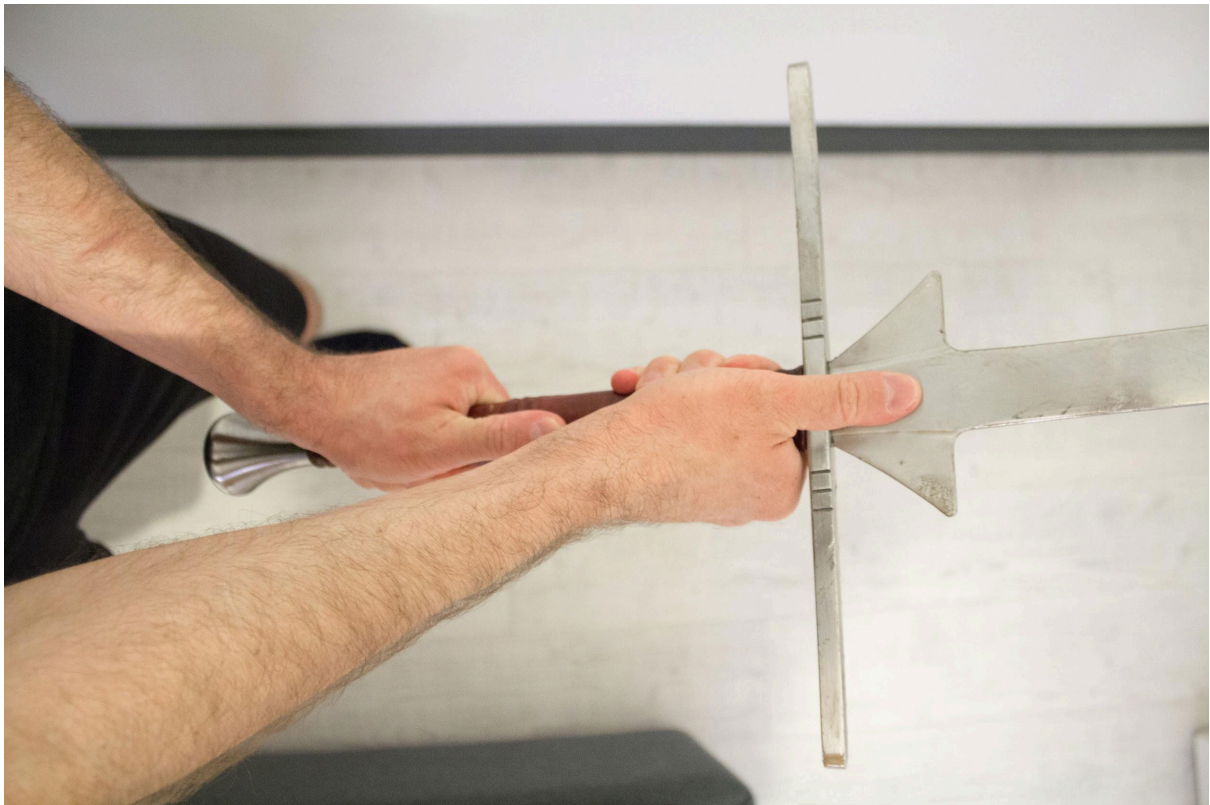
View from front and below



View from directly below



View from the fencer's POV



View from the top and side



View from the side and afar

V.1. How to Make the Full Thumb Grip:

All longsword (simulator) // federschwert hilts have a wider part and a narrower part (or they should).

Grab the hilt with your LEFT hand on the lower half of the hilt (the one with the pommel) and place the upper half of the hilt (near the crossguard) on your OPEN right hand. Your thumb should be above the crossguard and behind it, not below it. It should also be pointing upwards, to the sky. The hilt should be placed in your right hand as close as possible to the crossguard. This right hand should be parallel with the ground with the inside pointing at the sky, the back of the hand pointing at the ground and your fingers pointing forward.

NOW ROTATE the hilt you placed in your open right hand so that the NARROWER part of the hilt is placed snug on the inside of your palm (the NARROW part is facing to the sky and to the inside of your palm respectively, while the wide part is facing forward and backward, respectively). Also, the hilt is perpendicular (forms a 90 degree angle) to the 4 fingers that are pointing forward.

The NARROW part of your hilt should rest smack in the middle of your palm. If you need a visual cue, it's that distinct area and line on your palm that creases when you close your palm. This means that the narrow part of the hilt is NOT resting exactly at the base of your 4 fingers, but is 1-2 centimeters below that (depending on your anatomy) and aligned on this line that creases. In any case, right in the middle of the inside of your right hand palm.

Now curl all the fingers, over the hilt. Don't clench! Just curl. You'll notice that although you can anatomically curl your thumb over the hilt (as you would for a Hammer Grip), with the hilt resting in your palm with the narrow side as described, this would be very uncomfortable and impractical. And (hopefully) you'll have naturally placed it flat on the flat of your blade. If not, do so now. When you look at your thumb now (if you bring the weapon in front of you), your thumb should be resting smack in the middle of your flat, not to any side. and not angled in any way. You are just pressing down with the underbelly of your thumb on the flat of your blade, while the nail of your thumb points up, away from the flat of your blade.

That's the Full Thumb Grip. Orient the weapon to adopt whatever guard needed or perform whatever Longsword action desired, while keeping the grip on the hilt the same.

V.2. VIDEO Tutorial:

<https://youtu.be/PHv1-R-wngs>

V.3. PROS of Full Thumb Grip:

- best grip for horizontal cuts and the most common interpretations of Zwerchhau, Krumphau and Schielhau; (as well as for turning any forward motion like a thrust into a Zwerchhau)
- best grip for making HALF-cuts with both edges of the weapon from both sides of the body, including cutting "across" from the starting guard you are in (for example, an Oberhau that descends - as you are looking - from the top left side to the bottom right side, but performed from your Right Vom Tag over the shoulder); this allows easy and

fast access to all of your opponent's Blossen ("Openings"), via easily performed combos with both edges

- best grip for dynamic parrying by "sweeping with the tip" in an Arch that uses the guards Schrankhut - Mittelhut (modified) - Einhorn - High Vom Tag, on both sides of your body;
- good stability, good grip on your weapon (like Hammer Grip); low chance of disarm
- good for thrusting; as your blade is now wobbling up-down (instead of left-right as it does with all the other grips, except for The Laser // The Button) and your thumb on the flat gives you an instinctive feel of the blade and good tip control
- pretty good Fuhlen ("Feeling") for the reason mentioned at the line above

V.4. CONS of Full Thumb Grip:

- counter intuitive for beginners;
- makes full cuts nearly impossible (anatomically); impossible if you care about not breaking or injuring your wrist
- your wrist is now aligned with the flat of the blade; if you just extend your arms to cut (<- the natural, direct way), you will hit with the flat; in order to hit with the edge, you must perform a wrist rotation one way or the other and make a half-cut
- the cuts you can make (half-cuts) are weaker compared to Hammer Grip, Side Thumb Grip, or Handshake Grip cuts (both full and half-cuts)
- the edge alignment for the half-cuts you can make requires far more finesse and skill than if you were using another grip more suited for cutting (Hammer, Side Thumb or Handshake)
- this grip, by its nature, forces you to make static parries (blocks) with the flat; if you use static parrying a lot you might not enjoy this as it's very inefficient AND you can get hit in all the fingers except the thumb; this disadvantage is mitigated by the dynamic parries (deflections) you can make with the point, that I mentioned above at the PROS part
- there is a risk of thumb or wrist injury if you block an attack statically and take its force entirely head on, on the flat (either pushing to the side against it, but especially UP against it)
- reduced range when thrusting (the Full Thumb Grip is basically equivalent with the Hammer Grip from this point of view; you end up with a broken wrist if you try to drop the point and go for max Langenort range...)

V.5. Overall Description and Function of the Full Thumb Grip:

The Full Thumb Grip is great if you want to simplify your fighting style to just a set of techniques that work well in synergy ("mini-Krumps" to deflect attacks with your tip, until you can thrust; if the thrust then misses you can keep advancing and turn it into a series of half-cuts, an unpredictable combo). It's an "ok" grip for thrusting (but less range). And a great grip for half-cuts (any angle), horizontal cuts (especially the Zwerchhau) and Krumphau and Schielhau. But remember you are severely limited with regard to full cuts and the half-cuts you can pull off are weak. And you also can't make static parries.

VI. Laser // Button Grip



View from the side (inside of right hand)



View from the side (outside of right hand)



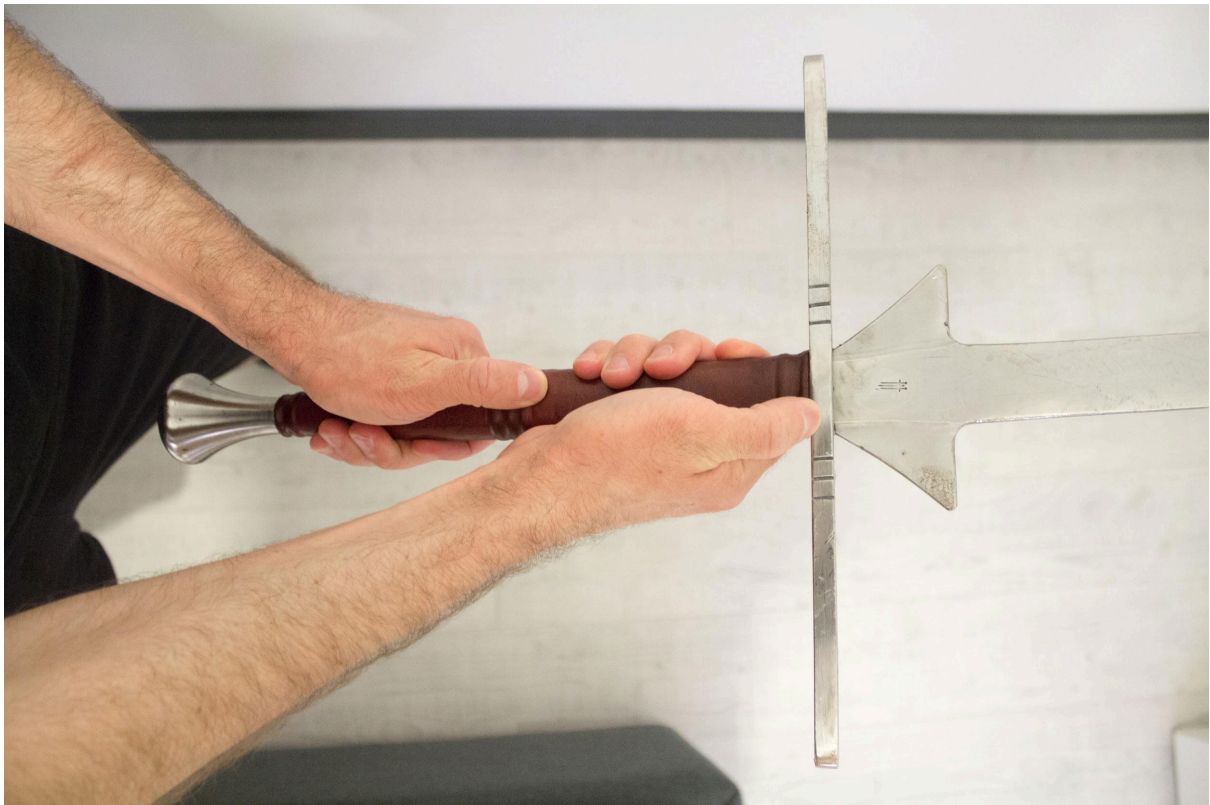
View from front and below



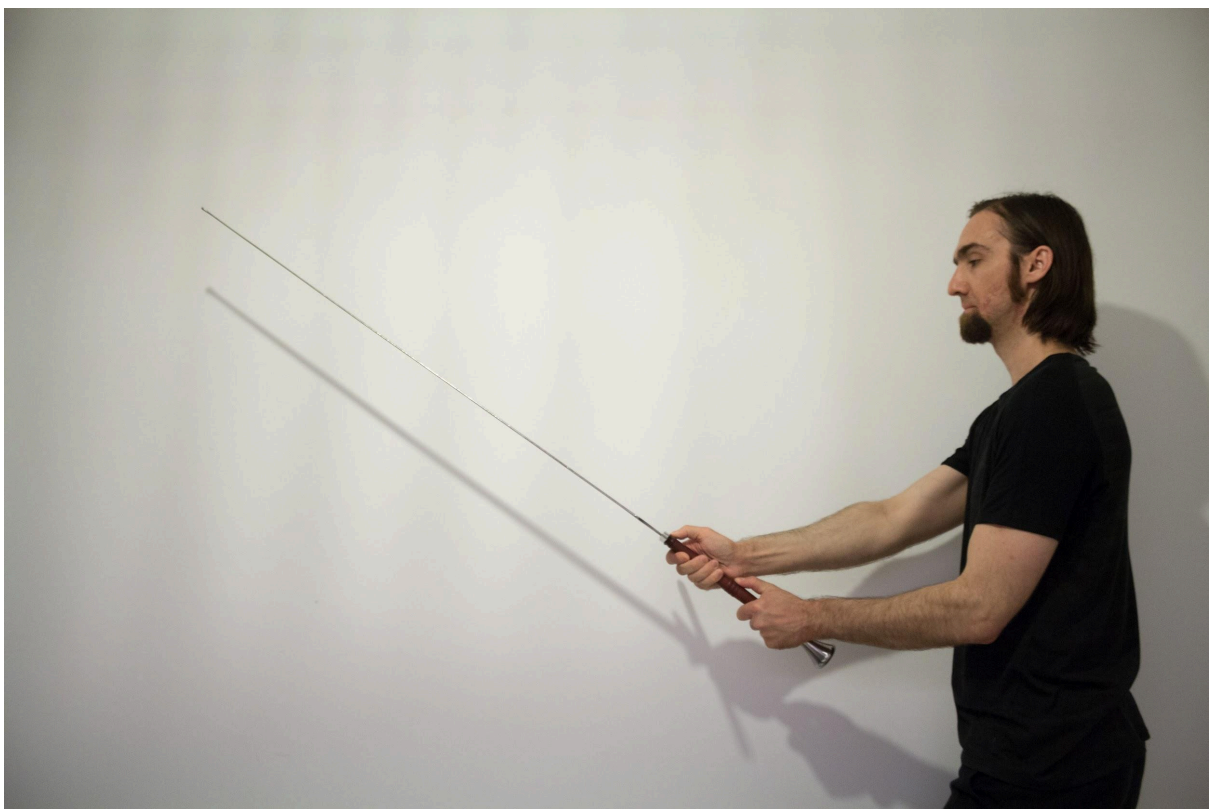
View from directly below



View from the fencer's POV



View from the top and side



View from the side and afar

VI.1. How to Make the Laser // the Button Grip:

Do everything you did to adopt the Handshake Grip, except after placing the hilt on the inside of your palm in the correct, skewed position described there, ROTATE it so that the NARROW part of your hilt is making contact with the inside of your palm a bit under the base of your index finger and a bit under that big meaty part under your thumb that moves and creates a crease line when you try to touch your pinky with your thumb. If you put the hilt on this particular “crease line” but with the narrow part making contact with the inside of your palm, you’ll see that you can now curl your thumb so that it ends up as if you are pressing a button right under the right side of your crossguard, where the hilt and crossguard meet (usually to form a 90 degree angle, for most crossguards). Do so now. You’ll end up holding your sword like a laser pointer, with your thumb on the button.

That’s the Laser // Button Grip. Orient the weapon to adopt whatever guard needed or perform whatever Longsword action desired, while keeping the grip on the hilt the same.

VI.2. VIDEO Tutorial:

<https://youtu.be/QFIQh5POcsU>

VI.3. PROS of the Laser // the Button Grip:

[same as those of Full Thumb Grip +]

- better thrusting capability; and more range (reach) due to the thumb no longer being stuck on the flat, but rather pressing down and allowing you extend the tip even more and control it better, without breaking your wrist
- a bit better Fuhlen (“Feeling”), this grip allows for more loose-tense play than the Full Thumb Grip
- the other fingers apart from the thumb are a bit more protected and protectable than they were in the Full Thumb Grip

VI.4. CONS of the Laser // the Button Grip:

[same as those of Full Thumb Grip +]

- even more difficult and counter intuitive for beginners; requires more study and skill than other Grips to use efficiently
- the risk of being disarmed is a bit bigger
- the half-cuts you could do with the Full Thumb Grip, as well as the Zwerchhau, Krumphau and Schielhau are now just a bit more difficult to perform, due to your grip being more complex and less stable
- even weaker cuts than those performed with the Full Thumb Grip
- edge alignment with cuts becomes even more difficult
- the risk of thumb or wrist injury if you static block, badly, is a bit greater than in Full Thumb Grip

VI.5. Overall Description and Function of the Laser // the Button Grip:

The Laser Grip // The Button Grip is a finer, more skillful version of the Full Thumb Grip, more optimized for thrusting, while making the (already difficult) cuts and parries you could pull off even more difficult. But if you really really like the style of “thrust + Zwerch” (especially if the thrust is Schiessen!), this baby’s for you.

VII. Advice for the Right Hand

I advocate using the **Handshake Grip** as the primary grip in a fight, as it allows you to perform the most techniques very well.

And switching to the **Full Thumb Grip** and **The Laser // The Button Grip** occasionally, to surprise your opponent.

I'm not a fan of the **Hammer Grip**, because its cons outweigh its pros and I find it clumsy and too limitative. The same applies to the **Side Thumb Grip**, which is barely marginally better in my opinion.

As for the **Pistol Grip**, I do recommend experimenting with it a lot (to get skilled with it), but then using it in sparring only rarely, when you're sure you can pull off a max range thrust, OR desperately need to keep an aggressive opponent at bay.

Read below on the start of the next page for some information about the LEFT hand.

VIII. Relation of the Left Hand to the Right Hand, on the Hilt

When talking about the left hand, you can use the same grip that you use for the right hand (or combine 2 different types of grips between your hands). It's not important.

What is important is **the distance between the right hand and the left hand, on the hilt**.

There are 3 options here:

- A. left hand grips the hilt, just like the right hand
- B. left hand grips the lowest part of the hilt (furthest from the cross) AND the pommel
- C. left grips only the pommel

Option A (left hand grips the hilt)

This option is the best in my opinion. You have the most control and can generate the most force. It also ensures that it's easier to obey the Hilt In VPPCC principle and push with both hands equally (see my "[Basic Biomechanics for the Longsword](#)" article for details on this principle). Which is of critical importance when fighting with the Longsword as a two-handed weapon.

Note that this option is also recommended in the (pseudo)Dobringer codex. The only one of the early sources that insists on this grip as being the most efficient. (It's why I call it **the "Dobringer Grip"**).

The recommended distance is for your left hand to grip the hilt about 3-5 cm away from where your right hand is gripping the hilt.

Option C

Gives you a few advantages. Like a bit more weapon control in binds, especially tip control.

BUT, I believe they are not worth it for the structural faults they are probably going to introduce in your fencing.

And in any case, these advantages can be mitigated by training more (and consistently) in the Dobringer Grip (option A).

Option B

Gives you a mix between A and C.

And consequently, the worst of both worlds. ;)

I highly recommend using the Dobringer Grip for your right hand-left hand relation on the hilt.

Now, let's look at some photos for the three options mentioned above.

Option A - The Dobringer Grip (left hand grips the hilt)



View from the side (inside of right hand)



View from the side (outside of right hand)



View from front and below



View from directly below



View from the fencer's POV



View from the top and side



View from the side and afar

Option B (left hand grips both the hilt AND the pommel)



View from the side (inside of right hand)



View from the side (outside of right hand)



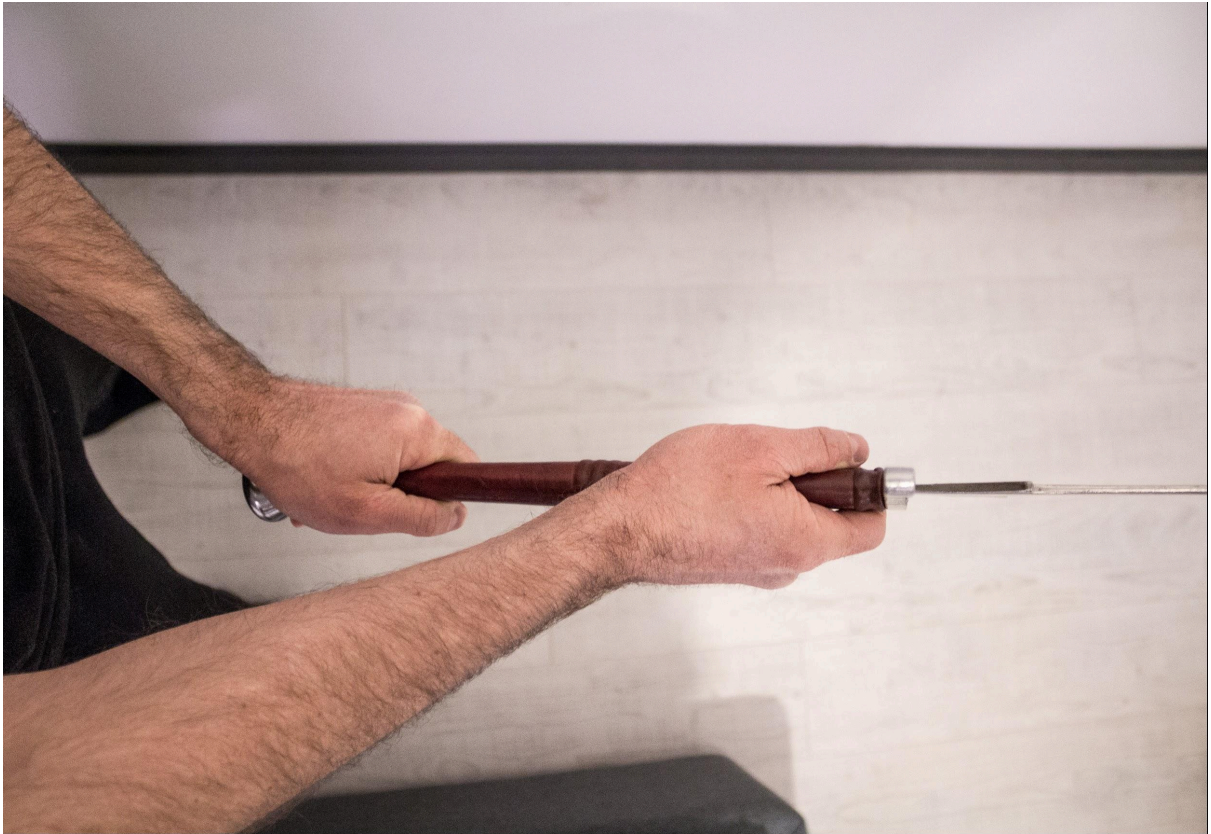
View from front and below



View from directly below



View from the fencer's POV



View from the top and side



View from the side and afar

Option C (left hand grips ONLY the pommel)



View from the side (inside of right hand)



View from the side (outside of right hand)



View from front and below



View from directly below



View from the fencer's POV



View from the top and side



View from the side and afar

VIDEO Tutorial:

<https://youtu.be/DfQ9iwGOoMQ>

Good luck with your training!

Cheers.

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