

# Learning to Train

FNY 2018, Saturday

It is very common for people to study techniques in simple drills and then struggle to apply them in free fencing. This workshop will look at how to train in order to bridge this gap, by teaching the play of 'twer unter twer' using drills drawn from Understanding Fencing. We will work through a series of intermediate exercises that progressively build the ability to recognise a situation, select an appropriate response and apply that response under pressure.

By the end of the class participants will be using the 'twer unter twer' in free fencing. More importantly, they will also have acquired a toolbox they can use for training other plays at their own clubs.

Gear: Mask and longsword minimum, full sparring gear recommended for some exercises.

## Theory & warmup

Quick theory lecture

- Techniques exist as solutions to problems
- Effective use of techniques requires accurate and quick decision making.
- This hinges on good recognition and extensive practice.
- Mechanical efficiency is also important, but in general an ounce of good decision making will outweigh a pound of perfect mechanics.
- Training is best constructed to move from simple to complex, from choreographed to open, from compliant to competitive.
- Students should be challenged but mostly successful (approx 70% success rate). Coach's job is to ensure that's true.

*Warmup:* gentle practice of twer around.

## Choreographed drill

- Purpose - to learn the situation and technique
- Read out text:

*Here note the break against the upper thwart-cut*

*Item. Note, when you bind him from your right side with an over-cut (or otherwise on his sword), if he then strikes-around with the thwart to the other side, so come forward as well with the thwart-cut under his sword on his neck (as stands pictured hereafter next to this), such that he strikes himself the same with your sword.*

- Demonstrate
  - Emphasise position of sword and forward movement of the body
- Practice via 3 step drill - in order to maintain really good connection between the technique and its situation (they twer round high from the bind)
- Oberhaw, parry & twer round, untertwer

## **Stimulus/response**

- Purpose - to hardwire the technique into muscle memory as a reaction to the situation
  - Note: start this slower and build up the speed. What you need to do in slower ones is keep *decision making* fast but do the *action* slower
  - Error rate: about 20%
- Go from the bind we've already reached. Doesn't matter how you get there
- Fencer holds firm, coach twers, fencer reacts instantly.
  - Extend the complexity by building movement etc into the situation.

## **Competitive**

- Purpose - increase the difficulty and require sharper execution and reflexes, without increasing the complexity
- The drill is simply exactly the same prescribed actions as before, but now all actions are aimed **to hit**.
  - If they miss their parry, lamp them one!
  - If you hit on your step, abzug properly before going again.
- Success rate should be about even, ideally.

## Choice exercise

- Purpose - learn to recognise different stimuli and execute an appropriate response to each.
- Having worked on a *choreographed* exercise from maximum to minimum *compliance*, we now start to expand the options.
- Same beginning. Coach now has a second option - just shove the blade down after their parry and then strike at the head.
  - Fencer breaks this with schnappen.
  - Again, we practice this starting slower and building speed over reps, emphasising quick decision making.
  - Ideally we would also look at the technical execution of this second option, but no time in this class for that.
- Drill: Fencer oberhaw, coach parry and twer **or** press blade, fencer untertwer **or** schnappen

## Dynamic choice

- Now we're going to put some of the noncompliance and freedom back in.
- Increase movement around when fencing.
- Coach is trying to land their hits, within the constraints of the drill's rules about their actions (e.g. no feints etc)
- The success rate for the fencer should still be pretty good, coach's job is to manage intensity/speed to achieve that.
- Drill is as before, but now more competitive.

## Sparring Game

- A good next step after dynamic choice exercises are focused sparring games.
- Here we prescribe specific ranges of actions for each fencer, and set them to it.
- Coach: you can only bind, twer (or press the blade down and strike up)
- Fencer: you can only bind, parry and do the untertwer (or schnappen)
- This game is a competition.

## Focused sparring

- The last step before completely free play is focused sparring
- This is essentially normal sparring, but with the understanding that one partner is taking the role of *coach* and the other is taking the role of *fencer*.
  - It has an advantage over free sparring because it generates a high number of repetitions for the thing you are focusing on learning.
  - It has an advantage over prescribed drills that the situation is generally open, so the fencer learns to identify situations and execute the technique under varying conditions of the bout.
- Coach: twer round a lot.
- Nathan Weston (Athena School of Arms) mentioned that the fencer should also aim to bind strongly during this exercises, so the coach can sensibly do the twer around.
  - This helps the fencer learn to encourage the opponent to act in a way they can exploit.

## Summary and Questions

- Recap theory points
- This class is not really about learning a specific technique, it's about learning how to use these stages to teach any technique
- As an instructor, you can update all of the exercises and games to teach whatever specific thing you need.
- As a fencer, you can use exercises from the end of this list (in consultation with your instructor) to make better use of "end of class sparring time" and similar opportunities.

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