

Ways to Train

FSV Workshop

Summary

This workshop explores "how to structure training" - what goes in-between 'learning a technique' and applying it in sparring. Lots of time doing tactical and contextual drills, fencing games etc to build up recognising when to apply something and learn how to make decisions in fencing. It's stuff that's useful to fencers and also particularly useful to teachers/club organisers. I've tried to add notes about asides and extra discussions at sensible points, since the way we did stuff in practice was a bit different to the way I wrote the plans in some cases.

One of the big things to call out here is that you don't need many exercises to make effective training structures. I think about things in terms of 'exercise templates', which you can then plug specific techniques into in order to create drills for a class. Saturday in particular was basically an extended exploration of two exercise templates, and there are some others in my FotS classes:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/lyeft64tcvhabni/FotS%20-%20Applying%20the%20Verkehrler.pdf?dl=0>

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/p8f6vl2ot97sz1i/FotS%20-%20Fencing%20from%20the%20sweeps.pdf?dl=0>

Plan

Stimulus response drills - Sat AM

- Used to build muscle memory habits/develop ability to do things 'automatically'
- Hand fencing variants for initial concepts and general structure
- Guided, pressure, distance, entry, etc
- Self-focused - understand cues

Decision exercises - Sat PM

- Used to practice recognising situations and choosing appropriate techniques.
- Hand fencing variants
- Guided, hard/soft, near/far, advance/retreat, go/stop, etc
- Self-focused - analyse problems, implement solutions

Focused games - Sun AM

- Used to get lots of repetitions with a higher 'aliveness'
- Hand based games
- Directed sparring games

Coaching and strategy - Sun PM

- Using external feedback to support your fencing and help you stay on target.
- Task-based fencing
- Remote control fencers
- Good/bad/goal

Stimulus-Response

Theory

- These are about sharpening reaction times and creating a direct mapping from stimulus to action.
- Work at a pace that means you can begin to react within their action
- Progressively increase intensity to create improvement.
- When giving feedback, you're focusing on the reaction and speed thereof.
 - **Do not give technical corrections**
 - Incorporating technical feedback requires going slower and thinking consciously in a way that undermines the entire purpose of a drill like this.
- An advanced variant can be to add a consequence and make it a competition between coach and fencer.

Technical note: a lot of these example drills take quite large simple actions in response to quite small tempos. This is obviously something which can be tricky to do in fencing. In practice, it's important to take appropriate actions - you may not be able to go directly to a hit from a given opportunity, but you can probably get to a better position.

For example, instead of durchwechseln/thrust in response to overpressure in the bind, you can durchwechsel and overbind - that's a much faster movement that gets you to a new and better position, then you can work to the thrust.

Hand fencing (30 mins)

- Why use hand-fencing drills? They're very simple to get used to and they don't really require any technical teaching, so you can jump instantly to the stimulus/tactics aspect of something.
- That makes them a great way to introduce an idea that you're going to come back to later in the class.
- Also, people tend to get distracted and confused by holding swords - taking them away helps them focus on the body and feet more.

From a bind

They leave, you hit

They push, you leave and hit

From wide measure

You enter distance, they don't act, you hit

They enter distance, you hit first

You enter distance, they hit first, you parry/riposte

They change guard, you hit

Preset drills (90 mins)

Vor/Nach

- They change guard, you hit
- They enter distance, you hit
- You enter distance, they attack - streychen/riposte
- You enter distance, they chase your sword - disengage to hit
- You enter distance, they give point - zornhaw (or schielhaw, to taste)
- You enter distance, they chase the leg - schaitler

Weak/Strong

- They go soft/leave, you hit
- They go hard, you duplir
- They threaten, mutir

Fencer created drills (30 mins)

Each of you, pick a technique that you know how to do but struggle to apply in practice.

- Think for a couple of minutes about what the key setup situation for that is - what is the stimulus your technique is a response to?
- Describe to your partner what you need them to provide
- Go!
- Switch roles after 10 reps or so, alternate for a while.
- Don't be afraid to start from the middle of an action - beginning from a bind, for example.

Decision exercises

Theory

- These are about tightening decision making skills
- Recognising varied incoming situations and making appropriate responses.
- Good drill design here gives natural feedback - if someone makes the wrong decision, it should be self-evident that they've fucked up.
 - The coach should try and make sure that feedback is delivered.
 - Again, though, don't try and correct technical aspects here.
- Note that 'feint vs true' is one decision axis - the coach shouldn't also try and feint it up. Drills like this are hard enough anyway!

Hand-fencing (30 mins)

Enter a bind

- Weak - hit
- Strong - disengage to hit

Enter distance

- They go - parry riposte
- They change guard - you go

Enter with an attack

- They hesitate - you hit
- They parry - you disengage to hit

Enter distance

- They attack high - parry riposte
- They attack low - overrun

Preset drills (90 mins)

Vor/Nach 50 mins

(Aside: games like these work really well played by walking in from a very wide distance, creating continuous pressure by advancing with determination. This is also very effective in fencing)

Enter distance

- They hesitate - attack
- They attack - parry/riposte

They enter distance

- Without attacking - instantly attack
- With an attack - parry/riposte

Enter with the point

- They parry - go to new opening
- They hesitate - hit directly

Enter distance

- They attack high - parry/riposte
- They attack low - hit directly high

Enter distance

- They change guard - attack directly
- They attack - parry/riposte

Weak/Strong 40 mins

Bind

- pressure or shoot
- Durchwechsel or thrust
- Mutier or duplir
- Zucken same side or other

Fencer created drills (30 mins)

- Now you're picking a pair of techniques. They should require **almost** the same setup, differing only in **one** respect. Here are two examples:
 - Vor/nach - streychen pair
 - Weak/strong - bind pair
- These are your models. The goal is to learn to recognise this one axis of difference.
 - You want to be working until you can do that quickly/correctly
 - In the long run, you can design still more complex decisions, but training them effectively is very hard
- So pick your pair of alternatives and set to it.
- Starting from the middle of a situation (e.g. bind) works great.

Focused Games

Theory

- Fencing/sparring games are a great way to get a lot of reps of something in reasonably alive conditions.
- Design your games to create a situation where the thing you want to train will come up a lot. For example, if you want to emphasise closing in, you can write a game that gives a win condition for getting to body contact.
 - If you want to emphasise stopping someone from getting in and wrestling, you can use the same game.
 - Now the win condition is creating an incentive for people to set up the situation you want students to practice against.
- Asymmetric roles can be really useful for sparring game design - consider them and use them whenever appropriate.
- I have a whole class about these with even more examples:
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ll1l8dzq2o6512j/Dijon%20-%20Sparring%20games.pdf?dl=0>

Hand fencing (30 mins or so)

Soviet foil - no parrying, touch and evade. All touches made from high and sweeping all the way through

Sword and buckler

Preset drills (90 mins or so)

Soviet foil

- Only permitted blade action is a cut from high vom tag and all the way through.

Kristian one-hit game

- Attacker strikes
- Defender wins if they parry, otherwise loses
- No voiding, no feints, etc

Starting from the bind

- Begin fencing bound at the mids of the blades

Defend the wall, easy mode

- DTW
- Add an attack on prep if needed to keep the coach honest

DTW hard mode

- As before
- But now as soon as the 'attacker' steps back, the roles swap.
- Play in 20-30s bursts.

Ten second game

- Every 10s, new attacker joins the fray.
- Two groups, probably.

Coaching and strategy

Theory

Watch your fencer. Take note of

- When do they land hits?
- When do they get hit?
- Do they attack first?
- Do they control distance?
- Which actions tend to be high percentage for them?

Tell them, based on this:

1. Something they're doing which is working well - good management of distance, nice thrusts, effective first parries, etc
2. Something they're doing which is causing problems - making a second parry with bad mechanics, freezing after attack parried.
3. Something they should try doing to help themselves - use these mechanics for your second parry, cut round with this technique if your first one is blocked.

Exercises

Rensen game as a warmup drill

- Designate fencer and coach
- Coach gives reasonably easy problems
- Fencer solves them
- Switch roles after a bit

Three attacks then do your thing

- Coach feeds three basic attacks
- Fencer parries all three then executes a play
- What plays? Look at the examples from earlier

Coaching practice - watch for mistakes game

- Fencer picks a consistent mistake, makes it while fencing
- Coach watches and tries to diagnose

Diagnostic fencing

- Coach experiments
- Looking for what the fencer has tools to solve and what they can't deal with
- Discuss analysis/feedback

Focused fencing

- Fencer picks a thing
- Discuss context with coach for a bit
- Coach aims to give opportunities for that thing in fencing
 - If they want to train duplieren, give them strong binds.
- And fencer thinks about how to make it happen
 - If you want to work duplieren and you never give the coach a bind, you can't train it.

Remote control

- Fencers fence
- Coach watches
- 30s feedback - when I cue, you do this
- Fencers fence again
- Minimum group four, two fencers plus two coaches.

Free fencing (self-directed)

- Have a coach/observer
- Just play, get and give feedback

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