

Know Yourself

IGX 2019 Class 1

Abstract

Self-awareness is a foundational skill in fencing, but it's also one that's rarely addressed in HEMA training. Drawing on modern sports science, this class will teach students tools for understanding their own body movement and analysing their own decision making. These skills will be developed through a number of solo and paired exercises.

This class is the first part in a three class series. In parts two and three we will explore how to apply these skills to analyse opponents and coach students. Attendees are recommended to take all three classes in the series for best results.

Equipment: Mask, longsword. Light/medium gloves optional.

Experience: All levels encouraged

Plan

Physical foundations - 24 mins

General proprioception exercises

- Position
- Balance
- Momentum

(7) Warmup game 1 - glove catch:

- Lead/follow
- Leader throws glove, follower steps/moves to catch it
- Then follower throws back and leader catches and throws again
- Follower's objectives: remain in balance, arms stay centered, be able to move easily/lightly.

(7) Warmup game 2 - collar and elbow:

- Take collar/elbow grip with a partner
- Step/move with them. Lead can change freely
- Feel your weight and balance. Stay stable, move them to instability or awkwardness.
- Keep it chill, no throws.

(10) Stepping exercises

- Stand neutrally.
 - Take a step forward. Then a second
 - ◆ Which leg did you step with? Why?
 - Weight on your left. Now step.
 - ◆ Which foot? Why?
- Now into fencing stance
 - Do two advances. What's changed?
 - Now two passes. What's changed?
 - Imagine a short sequence of steps/actions - do them. What's changed?
 - Repeat all three, emphasis on action in the movement (e.g. bobbing)
- Overall goal - think about:
 - Where is my body?
 - How is it moving?
 - Is this what I want?

Physical awareness - 20 mins

Drills to work on proprioception in fencing actions

- Proprioception/self-awareness
- Where we are and how we are moving constrains our options.

(10) Pattern Repetition

- Coach gives a simple feed - e.g. longpoint
- Fencer executes an appropriate counter action/sequence
 - e.g. enter distance with a bind, sperren, hit, abzug
- Repeat the sequence a few times, asking yourself/each other:
 - Where is my balance?
 - Momentum?
 - Position?
 - Line?
- Then swap roles, then try new feeds

- Advanced mode - coach gives simple combos, not just single actions.

(10) Pattern Interruption

- Exactly the same drill - to start
- Coach: watch them move. Look for the moment of maximal inconvenience
- After they've done the exercise a few times to get set into a smooth pattern, coach makes a simple change
 - e.g. Step, disengage, change guard, etc. Single simple adjustment
 - This should break the previous pattern (free a blade that was covered, remove a target, etc)
- Fencer's job is now to adapt to it. Ideally the first time, if not then the second.
- Awareness of your body and options will allow this to work.

Mental Preparation - 36 mins

Drills to work on awareness of decision making

- Self-awareness
- Adaptability under pressure
- Imposing your will on a situation

(6) Thinking/meditation exercises.

- Drift, think of nothing
- Replay some recent fencing. Focus on good hits you made
- Replay some recent fencing. Bring to mind an error and then visualise a corrected version

(10) Breadth

- Coach - pick a simple action
 - Feed it repeatedly.
 - Advanced variation - adjust distance/timing
- Fencer - try to come up with a new solution every time
 - Solutions should be 1-2 actions deep
 - For example, parry/riposte, single-time counter thrust, void/hit, etc.
- Then swap roles and change the action.

(10) Decision process

- Fence (light intensity)
- After each exchange, the person who made the hit should narrate:
 - What they saw as their opponent's action
 - Why they chose their response

(10) Preparations

- Bring back to mind the good hits that you focused on earlier. Pull out one particular move you seem to make successfully a lot
 - e.g. twer to flank
- Fencer: you are trying to set up that specific finishing move
- Coach:
 - Vary the initial situation for the fencer
 - React sensibly to their actions (e.g. parry threats)
 - React predictably (e.g. if you parry left with the hands low, do that consistently vs attacks at the same height)
- The fencer's job on each rep is to manipulate the situation until their finishing move works.
- Divers preparations with limited finishers works extremely well in practice.

Summary

Proprioception

- Where you are and how you're moving
- Sixth sense / body awareness
- Trainable. Improving this is a 'level up' multiplier for your fencing

Self-awareness

- What's happening in your mind
- This fixes decision problems
- And is used for iteratively improving your game

Ads

- This is part 1 of the workshop series
- Come to parts 2 and 3
 - Part 2 - analysing opponents
 - Part 3 - coaching clubmates
- All 3 parts go together - we'll build on and repeat similar skills from different angles.

- A lot of this material is inspired by Aladar Kogler's *The Mental Preparation of Fencers and Others*

This document may be freely shared with credit. Please borrow or adapt exercises and ideas. Feedback and questions are welcomed: send to Tea Kew on Facebook, or to tea@ringeck.net. If you would like me to come teach at your club or event, get in touch and we'll try and make it work.

Further content will be regularly published on <https://www.facebook.com/NewCrossHEMA/> and <https://facebook.com/illustratedRingeck> — like us to stay up to date.