



Destreza  
Nova



**Rapier Gear Safety Guidelines:  
A Valuable Information  
for Clubs and Associations**



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Last Update: 15<sup>th</sup> April 2022

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## INTRODUCTION

This document aims to provide a general guideline regarding gear for achieving a safe practice during the exercise of Rapier Swordsmanship. This text started as a draft in request for a National Federation of Fencing and I believe that nowadays it can be useful for many HEMA or Historical Fencing instructors as well as many clubs. Creating a sort of consistency in safety guidelines can only lead to a healthy practice, which is what we all want from the beginning.

All the information displayed in this document comes from personal experience, it's biased and it can differ partial or totally from any existing protocol from any club, event or organization. In any case I have been many years practicing the art and I was fortunate enough to participate in many events. I have been co-organizer of the Barcelona Halbschwert in which I participated as judge in one of their events. Also, I am a promoter of the Montreal Sword Meisters, the biggest HEMA event in the East of Canada for the moment. In the MSM I have, among many other things, the role to examine the equipment, gear and swords, of all the fencers that would participate in the tournaments. Also, I am one of the central judges who determine sanctions, if needed, to all of those who violate any of the sportsmanship rules during the event. Considering all that mentioned (and also what I don't mention) I believe you will find good wisdom in this document.

This text describes, firstly, certain levels of practice that would put in perspective the kind of activity taking place, always in a context of Rapier Swordsmanship. Afterwards you will find the required described features of the items used for such Martial Art / Sport. The mentioned gear is: Swords or Trainers, Clothes, Jackets, Gloves, Masks and Shoes. Inside each detailed explanation there might be examples of correct material and non-recommended ones existing in the market. The mention of any model or brand is to lead the newcomers, there is no commercial intended purpose and the writer of this text did not receive (sadly) any especial treatment from any market brand. In any case, another document displayed also in [destrezanova.ca](http://destrezanova.ca) would give a more detailed list of recommended models and brands for some items relevant to the practice of Rapier Swordsmanship. Such document called [\*Fantastic Gear Recommendations and Where to Find Them\*](#) includes as well all the links guiding the fencers to do their choice.

Included inside the description of the gear, one might find description of probably injures or lesions occurring for the wrong completion of such standards. This is not just theoretical, but it means that, direct or indirectly, I witnessed such incidents.

If you ever have any request to implement or improve this guideline do not hesitate to contact me in [here](#), I would gladly share the credit with anyone who can give me valuable information to be used for this purpose. After all we are a community, something that is made of links.

**Finally...** I dedicate many hours of my life in the fencing field, teaching and making clubs and events bigger with little or no reward on the way. If you think that my spent time has been helpful to you, in any way, feel humble to get me a coffee in the following link:

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/destreznova>



destreznova.ca

## LEVELS OF PRACTICE

In order to identify, define, clarify and standardize certain materials and procedures during our practice, we establish different levels inside of it. This level will determine the context in which the fencers are practicing Rapier Swordsmanship. The levels are the following:

- ‡ **Level 0:** The person does the exercises alone, having no interaction with other fencers. To achieve such practice, this person is at least 2 meters away of any other individual.
- ‡ **Level 1:** A fencer practices movements with a partner. The movements are very slow and controlled, in order to establish understanding of certain mechanics. All actions between partners are predictable and easy to read and, therefore, responded easily by the partner. They suppose no danger among them. Any increase of velocity in their movements would automatically pass them to **level 2**.
- ‡ **Level 2:** The students practice movements with a partner at a higher speed and power than in level 1. Many actions are too fast or powerful to be read by the partner. At this level the fencers put their technique on practice, challenging their reflexes, speed and power, many hits and impacts are expected in this context.
- ‡ **Level 3:** Soft sparring. In here the fighters do movements controlling the sword of the opponent, find openings and challenge their technique and reflexes. Hits might happen but the fencers will try to avoid any impact rather than a soft touch.
- ‡ **Level 4:** High intensity sparring. The fencers seek to find the safest way to hit the opponent without being hit. In some occasions the heist to hit the opponent overwhelms the fencer to have control of his movements or defence. Even though such loss of control is not excused it is understood in some degree. Tournaments of high ranked fencers would enter in this category.

In any level the force and power of the movements should be done with control and accuracy, no brute force is ever tolerated. Rapier Swordsmanship is intended to simulate duels, not the heat of the battlefield, something that is an entirely different dimension. The fencers should foresee their attacks having place and restrain as much as possible the kinetic energy behind it: yes, even in competition. There are several ways to manage the later and all instructors should know and teach those to their students if they expect to be good coaches.

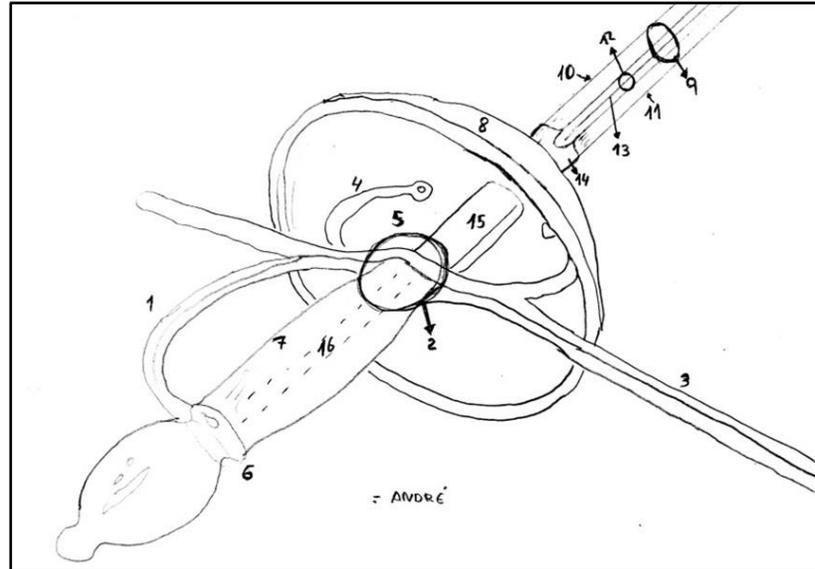
*Rapier fencers sparring in an exhibition during the World Junior Final Cup of epee-fencing. Spain 2014*  
Photo Credit: AEACC facebook (Public)



## RAPIER

Before discussing the features and considerations of a rapier beware to take a look to the parts of the sword and its terminology. Since I am my own executive producer, author, editor, corrector and drawing artist, you must content with such poor, but useful, art.

1. Knuckle Bow
2. Quillon button
3. Quillon or cross
4. Forward arm
5. Inside face of the cup
6. Pommel
7. Grip or Hand
8. External side of the cup.
9. Blade
10. Front edge, or true edge
11. Falso or false edge.
12. Fuller
13. Bottom of the fuller
14. External ricasso
15. Internal ricasso
16. Blade tang



### **Considerations:**

The overall of the weapon should be among 700g and 1.2 kg, being 1 kg the most suitable one. The rapier should not have red oxidized parts affecting the internal structure (dark oxidized external shade is accepted as far as it is taken care, polished and greased). None of the components of the sword should have any metal shards, if that is the case, it should be reduced/smoothed with a sharpening stone or a file, as well as any indentation on the blade edge. None of the parts of the sword should be loose.

### **The Blade:**

A rapier blade has among 1-4 cm wide in the flat of the ricasso. The total length can be comprised among 30 to 45 inches, counting the blade length from the cup, but a proper blade length should be between 38 and 44 inches counting from the cup to the point, adding the tip-cover. Longer blades would be uncontrollable for a adequate practice, whereas shorter blades would enter in another weapon category.

The blade should have some degree of flexibility, thus, no stainless steel is accepted, but carbon steel or spring steel. Holding it by the external ricasso, and applying a weigh of 1 pound at the last inch of the blade should give a flexion of 5 to 15 cm. 8 cm is a good accepted value.

The use of triangular blades should follow the same characteristics than the before mentioned. However those sorts of blades are not recommended for higher levels of practice for not behaving as “real historical blades”.

Examples of not accepted blades for Rapier:

- ‡ Due to excess of flexibility: Hanwei model SOH 2255 of 42”. However, the shorter model of the same brand (37”) is a perfect adequate one.
- ‡ Due to material: SZCO swords.

### Tip of the Blade:

- ‡ **No** blade for practice should have a pointy or sharp end. If it does, it should be blunted and rounded. Also, it might be possible to have it professionally filed by the manufacturer in case the blade in stock does not comply with this guideline.
- ‡ All blades should have a second layer of protection, a *tip-cover* from now on. The tip-cover has 2 functions:
  1. It is an easy way to observe if the blade has been broken during the practice. A broken blade can have serious fatal consequences during practice. Thus, the material put in at the end should be taped with a colourful tape.
  2. Protection.
- ‡ Examples of acceptable tip-covers, organized from most recommended to less recommended are:
  - a. Bullet shell: unbreakable and durable. A .38 special is the most recommended. Observe the picture from [@andre\\_destreza](#) Instagram.
  - b. Leather: It tears it after some use and it adds some weight.
  - c. Thermoplastic rubber: this one tends to break easily as well as giving higher weight than the others.
- ‡ Forbidden tip-covers are:
  - a. Only tape
  - b. Cork
  - c. Generally any material that is not resistant to penetration.
- ‡ Good tapes for the occasion are hockey, duck-tape or electric tape.



### The hilts

The hilts must be complex enough to cover the hand, with a swept hilt, cup (the most recommended), shells or in between, such Pappenheimer designs are adequate hilts. Simpler rapiers with no protection of the fingers or only a ring would enter in another category that we would call *side-swords*. Be in mind that a good consistency might not follow by the letter some

historic findings, but it is indeed needed in order to meet safety guidelines. Thus, we will ignore the existing overlapping between the two (or more) weapons in their historical context and etymology.

The hilt should include quillons, of at least 3 cm outside of the cup, or shell. A lack of quillons puts the sword in another category, as well as putting the hands of the user in danger in the context of duelling. The end of the quillons should not be sharp or have a pointy end. Quillons that end with a hook are forbidden, since they are hazardous for the own user and other fencers.

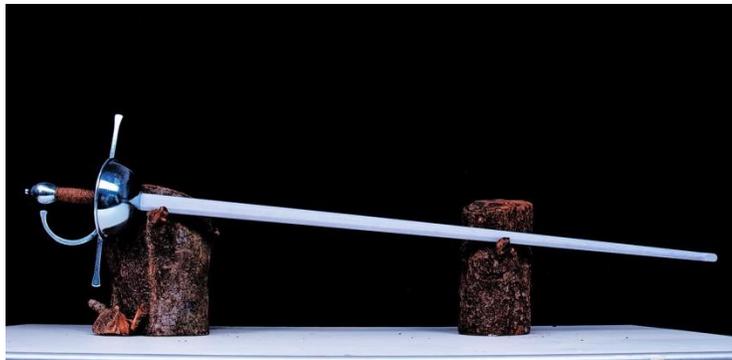
The hilt should include a knuckle bow to protect the fingers in the front part. Extra knuckle bows are accepted and well considered. The lack of knuckle bows can lead to injuries in the knuckle area, such tendon displacement and fractures.

The pommel should not be sharp at the end or have any pointy extreme that can injure the opponent or the handler.

An example of a non-accepted rapier due to the simplicity of the hilt would be the “sidesword Meyer” by [Regenyei](#), despite of its name, many fencers use it as a rapier. However, the same brand has a sword well called “standard rapier” which is accepted in the mentioned terms.

### Use of simulators

Simulator can be any instrument that can do the functions of a sword in order to learn the movements. Any home-made instrument lacking of a hazardous point or edge and simulates the weight and height proportions of a rapier can be used for the practice of exercises in a level 0 or 1. Nylon, rattan and PVC pipes are acceptable materials for it. Some brands offer “professional simulators” that include the same hilt as a rapier and a blade made of nylon. See in the picture a nylon simulator from [blackfencer.com](#).



Thrusting attacks in level 2 sparring should be avoided if the simulator is not flexible. Nylon, rattan and PVC are acceptable materials for it. It is strongly recommended **avoiding** the use of simulators for level 4 practice. The kinetic energy behind them is higher than steel swords and many protective gear suitable for steel swords do not well protect against strong bludgeoning impacts.

Simulators should be used under the advice and guidance of an instructor in case of level 3 or 4. A special caution must be set, since inexperienced fencers tend to underestimate the harm capacity of such instruments. To avoid such hazardous level of practice it is always advised to use steel trainers rather than nylon ones.

## CLOTHES

Fencers of all levels should wear **sport** comfortable gear to allow the movements in a safe way. Martial arts is a serious activity, no person should use the same clothes they use in daily routine for Historical Fencing, the same way you would not use those in a gym.

- **Shoes:** They should be comfortable and allow mobility. Therefore it is not advised wearing long heels or rigid boots. Also the place we train may be sometimes slippery due to dust (not everyone has the luxury of a suitable training place), therefore plain shoe soles, like the one for gymnastics or dance, are not recommended. Bare-foot should only be considered if there is a safe surface, such as a tatami or a clean parquetted floor.



- **Best Shoes:** Jogging Sneakers for Outside areas (picture from decathlon.ca).
- **Socks:** Wearing socks inside their shoes for a sport practice should be unarguable. You want to protect your shoes from your sweat to avoid fungal infections. You should learn that from home.
- **Pants:** They should adjust well and not impede any movement. Therefore jeans should not be allowed, they can cause injuries to the users (image from <https://www.thecut.com/>). Also use clothes that let the sweat transpire. There are many brands in the Historical Fencing market that sell specialized pants for the practicing the art, the protection they offer makes them highly recommended. In case someone does not want to invest too much it is possible to use thick sweatpants. Shorts should not be allowed, as any other cloth that does not cover completely the skin of the fencer.



- **Torso:** Same as the other parts, comfortable and suitable for sport. A sport or normal T-shirt would do under the fencing jacket.
- **Bandana:** Or anything to hold your hair is a very recommendable item. During the fight or the practice you don't want hair obstructing your view. Also, even if you don't have long hair it is still recommended to use some kind of tissue over the head in order to absorb the sweat. That way you will not have drops of sweat going over your eyes, but also it will protect the protective mask from the acidity of your transpiration.
- **AVOID JEWELRY and other extra items:** Fingers can get injured and the inflammation can cause a ring to be a blood obstructive item. In some incidents the gold rings had to be cut to preserve the finger of the person, but tungsten rings (such the one I have) cannot be easily cut, and may lead to the amputation of your finger if they cannot be removed. In those situations rings can be placed as necklace with a chain. Regarding the earrings and piercings: be advised that they may be incidentally attached to the fencing mask during the practice.

## PROTECTIVE GEAR

### **Fencing Mask:**

The fencing mask is mandatory for practice level 2 and over. They should be FIE approved or have, exceptionally, the recognition of a national sport institution, federation or association. The mask should have a front bib which a minimum requiring a minimum resistance of 350 N. FIE type 2 and 1600 N are strongly recommended for all levels and mandatory for level 4.

As well, for Level 3 and 4, all masks should have occipital protection, which can be bought apart or made under an experienced instructor's advice. Find in the image an occipital protection from [SPES](#).



### **Fencing Jacket:**

In level 3 and 4 it is mandatory to have a padded historical fencing jacket. A sport fencing FIE fencing jacket with an extra padding in the torso area, arms and shoulders can be accepted but it is not recommended.

Examples of correct jackets for use:

- ‡ AP SPES jacket
- ‡ Red Dragon heavy HEMA jacket
- ‡ SF HEMA jacket

Example of jackets that require extra protection:

- ‡ JF SPES jacket
- ‡ Leon Paul Unisex Padded Jacket

Example of not accepted jackets:

- ‡ LARP jackets/gambesons

### **Gloves:**

The use of gloves is compulsory at any point from level 1 and over, in order to avoid blisters or scratches in the hand and the transmission of germs. For the last mentioned reason gloves should not be shared among students, it is nasty. Gloves are also a way to prevent the oxidation of the fencing material made of steel, not wearing them can only show a lack of respect to the fencing material.

Gardening or mechanic gloves are cheap and suitable examples for low levels of practice. Any bulky glove that does not allow a good mobility of the hand should NOT be allowed. Such gloves can produce the blockage of the fingers inside the rings of the sword and be dangerous on the use, as well as lose control of the blade and be harmful for other fencers. For this same reason, the Red Dragon or HEMA Sparring Gloves can be tolerated for simulators but are not accepted for the steel swords.



For level 3 and 4 it is compulsory wearing comfortable padded gloves designed for the use of historical fencing rapier. Examples of them could be:

- ‡ Red Dragon Padded Swordsman's glove (picture from [thehemashop.com](http://thehemashop.com))
- ‡ Purpleheart Rapier and singlestick glove

## OTHER PROTECTIONS:

### **Groin protector:**

Compulsory for level 3 and 4, recommended from level 1 and 2. They should be comfortable enough to allow movement. The fencers must be encouraged to bring them set from home. There are many good protectors in the market and there is no need of *special HEMA groin protectors*. Any for hockey or baseball might do well.

### **Elbow protectors:**

Compulsory for level 4. Recommended in level 3. It is recommended as well to use forearm protectors, since that part of the arm is a very common target for highly skilled fencers.

### **Knee protectors:**

They must be compulsory for level 4, but it might depend on the rule systems used among the fencers. It would be recommendable to have shin protectors.

### **Breast plastrons:**

They are recommended items for 3 or 4<sup>th</sup> level. Their use and need may depend a lot in the type/quality of the protective jacket. Some users prefer not having plastrons at all for rapier and encountered no problems after receiving powerful strikes onto the chest.

## MAINTENANCE & BEST PRACTICES

Taking care of your material is as important as the mere fact of having it. Find in here some advice to take good care of your gear items.

### **Transport**

You might think there is no need of advice in order to move your gear from point A to point B, but that thought comes from the ignorant imprudence of the new fencers. Veterans know so well all the issues of an inadequate transport of their items and they would have loved to have the following points before they started in this hobby.

- ‡ You always need at least 2 bags. One for carrying the swords and another one to carry your clothes (and protective gear). You don't want your sweat causing your steel to rust.
- ‡ For your swords, trying to use a big enough bag, so there are no blades coming out of the zipper.

- ‡ Find a bag with wheels for your sword. A golf transporting bag is a really good option.
- ‡ When placing your swords inside a bag protect the blades by placing a PVC pipe around (something you can find in any home-depot). The quillons must be protected by a blanket or a towel, to avoid perforating the bag eventually.
- ‡ Do not leave your gear in the car, the humidity of the night can cause rust to the metal of the swords. Not to mention the possibility of having it stolen.
- ‡ It is dangerous to travel with many swords in the car, be sure they will not move around in case of accident. They can become a stabbing object in the middle of the chaos.
- ‡ When traveling by plane, try to use a hard case. If you cannot afford it, you can always add more wrapping around your swords. For instance, I use my fighting cape.
- ‡ When questioned by a reinforcement officer, avoid saying: *weapons*, *swords* or even *martial arts*. Instead use: *sport equipment/gear/tools/items*. If the pressure of the officer demands more explanations, use words like *fencing*, always *sport*, never *martial*. Don't use complicated words with border agents, they don't understand long words and that makes them angry.
- ‡ Have with you always data from the place you are traveling to, a phone number of instructor or any member who can certify you are moving with swords to do a certain activity in a certain place. This last point is particularly important when you travel to foreign countries.
- ‡ Do not carry too many swords, just the ones you believe you will use and some extra. I oblige myself to hear this own advice myself, and every time I fail to follow it.

## Care

- ‡ Remember to oil the swords at home when you don't use them and pass a file softly to the edges in order to remove pointy edges.
- ‡ Don't place your swords in a room next to the window, humidity will cause rust to the steel.
- ‡ Beware mixing cats and sweaty masks, it's not a joke.
- ‡ Don't let children play with swords. If you can, find a place to lock them, the swords.

## Final Considerations

All the information in this document is subjected to changes in the future. Everyday new accessories arrive to the market. Moreover, the Art changes along time, as it does the culture around it. Stay tuned in the website of [Destreza Nova](#) for new updates.

*Be always kind.*

André Hajjar Sesé