

EMA Combat Training Guidelines

Individual Techniques are probably the most difficult subject to deal with because each individual has a different viewpoint of what's a good technique. The October 2001 committee discussed a variety of blade & pole weapons techniques and concluded the following formats would help provide a safe combat environment.

Most of what follows offers advice on safe techniques, and some encouragement to adopt some of these techniques.

However, some points are mandatory, and must be followed at all E.M.A. events. These points will be in the form of sentences containing the phrases **must** or **must not**, highlighted in bold. Sometimes this will be followed with additional detail. Advisory information will use the phrases *should* or *should not*.

Sword Weapons

Swordsmen to Swordsmen are encouraged to adopt the Fast Accurate Safe Technique (FAST). There is sufficient proven evidence relaying a very encouraging picture of dramatically reduced injuries following a switch and works on the principle of - *if you have an idea of what angle the blow/strike will come, there is less chance of being injured by it.*

Fast Accurate Safe Technique (FAST) system (for Swordsmen)

Head blows: (for those groups who use them), a vertical downward stroke to the centre of the helm (of about 12° either side of the centre line), delivered without force.

Headshots **must not** be horizontal or uppercut, these are very dangerous.

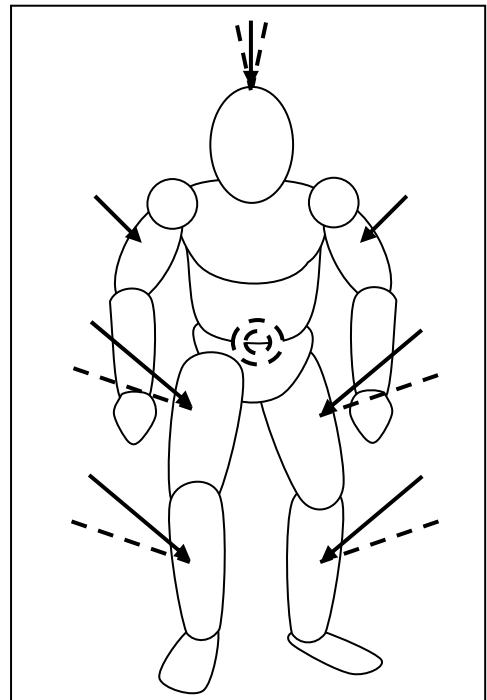
Upper torso: to the biceps/shield only, - as a downward angled blow (of about 45°). Be careful to avoid Forearms, Elbows, Neck and Shoulder joints.

Upper thigh: to the fleshiest part of the thigh, as an angled downward stroke (between 12° to 40°). Take care to avoid the Pelvis and joint bones, also the whole area of the Knee.

Calf Muscle: is the same motion as the upper thigh. Take care to avoid the area of the Knee and the Ankle.

Thrust: **must only** be delivered to the area of the belt buckle. Take great care to avoid the Groin, Pelvis and Solar Plexus.

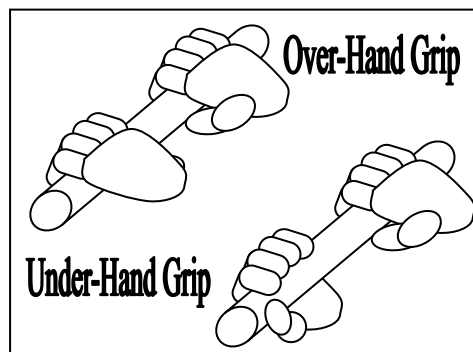
Telegraph Weapons should travel at least 1 meter to telegraph (2 metres is preferable) before impact.



Pole Weapons

There are a variety of techniques for fighting with pole weapons, but ideally they should be used in the 'conventional' way:

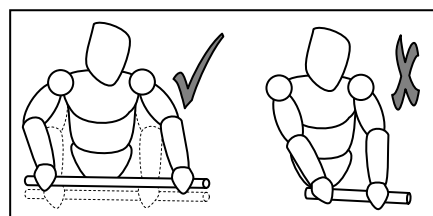
Over-Hand Grip: The preferred grip technique is the overhand grip, that is both hands holding the pole over the top, palms down. In this grip the pole cannot easily be knocked up out of the grip, only down.



The Under-Hand Grip, where the front hand cups the pole from below (back hand as above), should be aware that only the thumb prevents the pole from being knocked up, and should accordingly keep the height of the pole low.

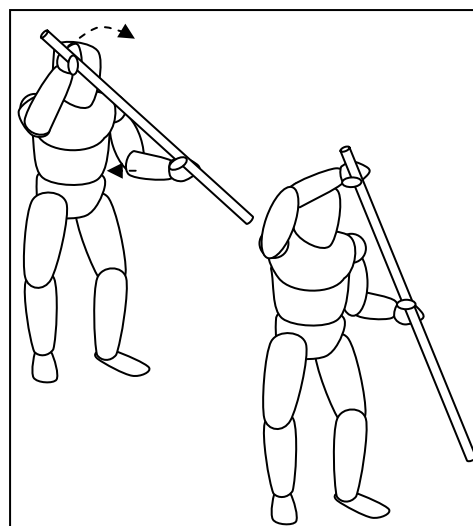
No Sliding: During a thrust, or any other movement, **both** hands **must** remain firmly gripped on the pole. Sliding the pole through the front hand during a thrust (also called sliding) or at the end of a thrust (sometimes called cueing) **must not** be used.

Changing Grip: The grip on the pole may be changed when the pole is at rest, between a broad defensive grip and shorter attacking grip. However, the grip on the pole **must** always be at least as wide apart as the user's shoulders. That is to say, the arms should be parallel or 'A' shaped, **never** 'V' shaped.



Thrusting: As well as avoiding all the usual illegal target areas all thrusts **must** be kept below the V formed by shoulders and breastbone.

Blocking: Generally the pole is held pointing diagonally downwards during a block. The front hand should be a little above waist height, back hand at head height. Against thrusts, the best defensive movement, particularly for high blows, keeps the front elbow tucked firmly against the ribs; the back hand then rolls the pole over the head, pivoting around the front elbow.



This motion may at first seem awkward, but it protects both the elbow and the face from deflected blows. It also prevents the blow being knocked up into a neighbouring combatants face. Finally it provides a strong block, which creates better opportunities for a riposte.

Other Weapons

Most *blunt force weapons*, such as Axes, Mauls or Maces, will follow similar techniques to swords, with the caveat that these weapons are not balanced and are therefore much harder to pull, and a corresponding amount of common sense and caution should be used.

Zweihanders, Bardisches, long hafted Axes and the like use a combination of techniques, some similar to sword techniques, some similar to pole techniques, some unique to that type of weapon. However these are weapons for experienced combatants who can hopefully work out which safety guidelines apply to their weapon, and what else constitutes safe technique.

Attitude

Attitude should be an important factor in our fighting. *Battle Rage (a bad temper)* or “*a want to win at any cost!*” often results in someone else paying a price with an injury. **This is not acceptable!** Only put sufficient force into your strokes to look convincing, beating people into the ground is pointless.

Taking a hit

A hit should constitute any firm blow to a combatant. A blow may be light, because the opponent was unable to make a firm hit, for instance a bill at the end of its reach, an inadequately swung sword. But consider that hits may be light because they wish to avoid potential injury. If in doubt, be graceful, and accept the hit.

All hits, regardless of location should be counted. This means that we do not artificially encourage unrealistic fighting styles, which leave *soft targets* (unarmoured or illegal target areas) particularly vulnerable. Better we encourage combatants to defend themselves properly.

Illegal Target Areas

All of that said; the following target areas should be treated as dangerous:

- Face and Neck.
- Hands and Wrists
- Elbows
- Knees
- Feet and Ankles.
- Groin

From time to time mistakes by the attacker and/or defender will mean that these areas are hit, but all combatants should remain alert, to limit the force of these blows and prevent injury. If there appears to be any danger, pull your blow early and strike lightly, or even not at all.

Deliberately or carelessly striking illegal target areas is very serious indeed. Deliberately blocking a blow with an illegal target so as to call foul is equally serious, and at least as stupid.

Group Fight Training

Members should nominate a Fight Trainer and formulate a structured training program. This should be designed to ensure each Combatant learns good skills and achieves a competent standard with any weapon they wish to use.

In addition, combatants should be encouraged to become capable in as many different weapons, used by your group, as possible.

Finally combatants should train against all the different types of weapon used by your group, and, where possible, train with other groups who use different types of weapons and fighting styles.

Structured Training Program

Ok. I'm not trying to *teach my Grandma to suck eggs*, and for most groups everything included in the next section is old hat. Certainly there are as many different methods of training as there are instructors, and many people will do things differently from the way described below.

But at some point every trainer has had to make the step from combatant to instructor. Or you may be your society's new Fight Trainer and be looking for ideas for a formalised training program. Whatever the reason, if anything in this next section helps you, then that's why its here.

Beginners

Familiarity A sword or bill is an unusual object for most beginners. Simply encouraging a beginner to hold and handle the weapon will help familiarise them with the weapon's weight, length and

balance. Don't underestimate the value of simply holding the weapon during a rest break or conversation, or simply carrying the weapon around (even at home). Beginners carrying a pole weapon should be reminded how long/high their weapon is or what follows may be like a Laurel and Hardy sketch (only less funny).

Stance Beginners have a lot to take in one go, and are probably quite keen to *have a go*, but it's worth making effort to start them off in the right stance. The position of their feet, the right amount of flex in their joints and the right balance will make the moves they learn seem more natural. This will also make motion more natural when they progress to a less static fighting style. In addition, it is vital that a beginner starts with the correct grip on the weapon.

Attack and Defence Obviously a beginner starts off with the basic attacks for their weapon, and the correct defences for these attacks. Blows (both given and received) should be obviously exaggerated (telegraphed), concentrating on controlling (including pulling) the blow, targeting the blow and providing a solid and correct defence.

Usually combatants will start stationary, but should incorporate to some sort of movement as soon as they have learnt the basic moves.

The Basics

It doesn't matter how experienced members of your group might be, there is always some value in repeating basic weapon drills. These are the equivalent of a musician's scales, and likewise are used to warm up, help re-enforce good technique and eradicate bad habits. These can often be changed to be less boring and more useful for experienced combatants. Some examples are given below.

Solo Most of us don't get to train as often as we'd like. Therefore in order to *keep your hand in*, and maintain your strength and stamina you can practice alone. Since you are alone, for safety, ensure that someone cannot approach you unnoticed (e.g. in your own garden). Practice both attacking and defensive moves, combined with footwork. Practice *ripostes*, moving from a defence to an attack.

Swordsman may find it useful to do "figures of eights", attacking to one side, then the other, at any height, making a ∞ shape. Concentrate on striking the right place on an imagined target.

Billmen may find it useful to practice moving and rolling their point in random patterns. Once this is perfected and it can be done instinctively it makes it very difficult for your opponent to knock your bill aside or predict your next attack, and it can be very hypnotic.

These exercises will help maintain strength and stamina. Setting up a target, such as marked pole, can help with accuracy and pulling blows. A cardboard box balanced on a stool (or similar) is good for judging the strength of strikes, particularly for billmen practicing thrusts.

The Fives

This sword drill may be 'sixes', or even 'sevens', depending on the exact style you use. A pair of combatants each take turns to deliver and defend all of the basic attacks. The drill should concentrate on good technique, targeting the blows, defending strongly, using the correct part of the blade and moving from one blow to the next. Advancing and retreating will usually be incorporated into this drill.

If you don't normally allow head blows this is a good place to practice your defence against them (you never know when the instinct will serve you well). In this case head blows should be stopped very short (usually just after the point at which it should be blocked).

The blows are initially performed in a set order, usually something easy to remember, such as top→down, possibly calling out each blow as it is made. This progresses, with experience, to an order in which the blows flow more naturally, and finally to random combinations of all the blows. Experienced combatants should add some pace to the drill, and try to maintain a constant rhythm, especially when switching smoothly from defence to attack.

Threes In this sword drill a pair of combatants each take turns to deliver and defend against three blows. Like *Fives* the aim isn't specifically to beat your opponent. The drill has a number of aims:

To 'train out' some combatants instinct to pause, either attacking or defending, after the second blow.

To learn and practice the strengths and weakness of different combinations of attacks.

To defend against different combinations of blows, including repeated blows to the same location.

To learn and practice the instinct of a *riposte*, not just as single blow, but as series of blows.

Both combatants should try to maintain a constant rhythm, particularly when switching from defence to attack. Experienced combatants may wish to liven up the exercise by allowing the defender to avoid rather than block the blow, forcing the attacker to continue from a "missed blow". Or rather than simply "advancing while attacking, retreating while defending", the combatants may choose their own footwork, moving side-to-side, and changing the distance between protagonists.

Quicks This billman's drill is intended to sharpen reactions, re-enforce the correct blocking instinct and build stamina. One billman is required to block a given number (say 10 or 20) fast thrusts. The billman should concentrate on blocking correctly, whilst under pressure. The defender should continue, regardless of whether a successful block is made. The thrusts should be pulled short, and have no real force, the aim being to deliver the blows quickly to different locations. Experienced billman may face thrusts from two alternating attackers.

Slows This drill, not surprisingly, is a partner to Quicks. In this drill the billman again faces an arranged number of thrusts. This time however each thrust is delivered more deliberately, and the aim is to block as firmly as possible. Unlike Quicks, where the defender remains in a defensive position, during Slows they can return to rest between each attack. The aim of this drill is to develop strong blocks, which will both turn a powerful thrust and create the openings for a riposte.

Sneakies A small group of Billman will be required for this drill. In turn each member of the group stands in front of the others. He (or she) defends against an attack, of not more than three blows, from each member of the group in turn. This is normally repeated three times, on the first two rounds the defender is unable to respond, but on the third round the defender may retaliate after the final blow is delivered. As well as allowing the defender to practice against a genuine combination of attacks, this allows the attackers to develop combinations of blows, feints and recoveries, and exposes any weakness in their favourite 'sneaky' move.

Training Games

Obviously simple one-on-one combat is the basis of any training, and extended from that simple group combat. However a number of simple 'games' can help liven things up, and develop additional skills.

Circles The Circle of Treachery is so well known I hesitate to put it in, but for completeness here it is. Briefly, everybody forms a circle. When signalled to start, anyone can engage anyone, defeated opponents retiring from the circle, until only one person remains. Usually this is played without any honour, and opponents can be attacked from any angle, without warning. Usually alliances are allowed, but they need not be kept. Sometimes a measure of honour is required, and although single combat is not required and opponent cannot be attacked unawares. Finally some circles, sometimes called "Circle of Sword" or "Circle of Chivalry", allow only single combat, where any challenge given must be answered.

Winner Stays On Everyone forms a large circle, and two combatants enter the ring. The winner of the combat remains in the ring, facing any challengers until defeated. This simple game can be used to broaden experience with a range of weapons. In each round the Challenger and/or

Champion must use a different weapon, until all the weapons they are trained in have been used. Alternatively the Champion may choose his weapons based on the choice of the Challenger, or vice versa. Or the Champion may be forced to defend his title with weapons he won with, whilst Challengers have a free choice.

Skirmish This is not so much a game as an exercise, but it is valuable nevertheless. It is really aimed to help groups who skirmish. It trains awareness, confidence and safety for that sort of loose order fighting. It requires a large open space.

A member of the group volunteers and takes to one knee. Others in the group, up to 10 or more people will be the opposition. Once the volunteer gets to the feet he can be attacked by any of the others. He must keep moving, striking quickly, try to avoid being outflanked, defending himself as best he can (almost certainly he will be hit). At any point he can stop (or pause) the exercise by taking to his knee again.

The aim of the opposition is not to crush the volunteer, which would be easy, but to push him, trying to trap or blind-side him, testing his defences.

Thin Red Line In this game as many people as possible are split into two teams. One side will defend, the other attack. A line is marked a short distance (a few paces) behind the defending side. If any (active) combatant (including the defenders) crosses this line the defending side has lost. Attacking combatants cannot pass round the ends of the defending line, (but can go through a gap if one appears!).

A number of rules can apply when a combatant is hit, and these can be different for either side. When hit a combatant could be forced to give ground, and pause for a few seconds before re-entering the fray. Alternatively they could be forced to leave their place and re-enter the line elsewhere, or they could be forced to leave the game after a set number of hits.

Obviously some these combinations mean that the attackers cannot be defeated, in which case the aim is to hold for as long as possible.

Life Isn't Fair Generally speaking during mass battles engagements are uneven, so the aim of this game is to represent that unfairness. Although one side is almost certain to be beaten, the longer it can last or the more casualties it can inflict the better it has done. At its simplest the two sides of an engagement will be unbalanced, either in numbers or weaponry. Alternatively the rules can be unfair, for instance one side takes casualties in the normal way, while the other is invulnerable, or can rejoin after a short break.