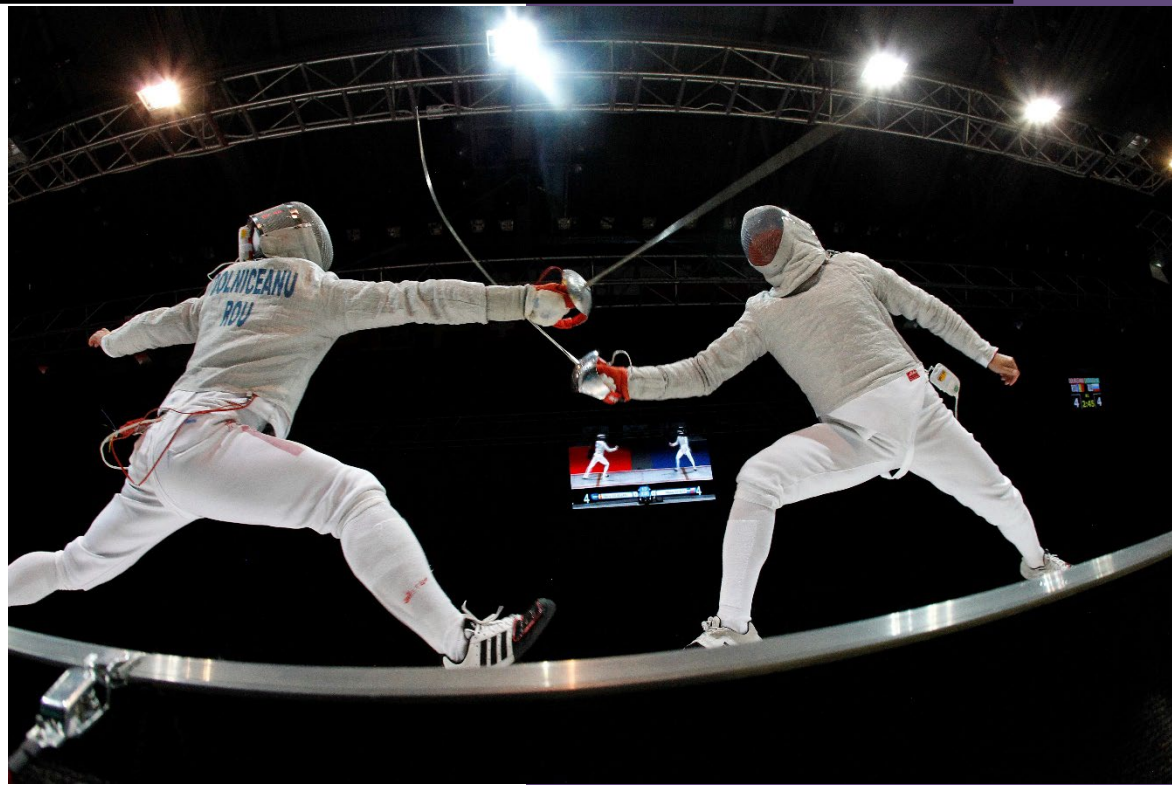


2022

# FENCING PARENT GUIDE



Salt City Swords Fencing Club  
[www.saltcityswords.com](http://www.saltcityswords.com)

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## Introduction

We created this beginner parent guide to help parents better understand the rather complex sport of fencing. This guide covers the basic elements of fencing, competition, and equipment. This guide will give you the information you need to support your fencer in their discovery of this wonderful sport. We have also listed additional resources which you can use to get more detailed information about all aspects of the sport. If you still have questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Our club administrators, coaches, and experienced parents would be more than happy to explain anything you wish to know.

## Basics of Fencing

What is fencing? The Olympic sport of fencing means to fight with one of three weapons: foil, epee, or sabre. The fencer tries to “touch” the opponent while not allowing the opponent to “touch” him or her. A touch means contacting your opponent with your weapon. Depending on the type of weapon, only certain parts of the body are considered valid touches. Portions of the weapons and of the fencing gear are conductive to detect touches.

### Object of the Bout

The object of a fencing bout is to effectively score 15 points (in direct elimination play) or five points (in preliminary pool play) before your opponent or have a higher score than your opponent when the time limit expires.

Points are received by making a touch in the opponent’s target area. Direct elimination matches consist of three three-minute periods with a one-minute break between each in epee and foil. In saber, the first period lasts for eight touches and the second period ends when the first fencer scores 15 points.

### Saber – Hack and Slash

The saber is the modern version of the slashing cavalry sword and is similar in length and weight to the foil. The major difference is the use of the blade. The saber is a cutting weapon as well as a thrusting weapon; therefore, saberists can score with the edge of their blade as well as their point. The target area is from the bend of the hips (both front and back), to the top of the head. This simulates the cavalry rider on a horse. The saber fencers’ uniform includes a metallic jacket (lamé), which fully covers the target area to register a valid touch on the scoring machine. Because the head is valid target area, the fencer’s mask is also electrically wired.

If epee is the weapon of patient, defensive strategy, then saber is its polar opposite. In saber, the rules of right-of-way strongly favor the fencer who attacks first, and a mere

graze by the blade against the lamé registers a touch with the scoring machine.

These circumstances naturally make saber a fast, aggressive game, with fencers rushing their opponent from the moment the referee gives the instruction to fence.

Athens was the first Olympics to feature a Women's Saber event.

## Right-Of-Way

The right-of-way rule was established to eliminate apparently simultaneous attacks between two fencers. This rule is only applied to foil and saber and the difference is important only when both the red and green lights go on at the same time. When this happens, the winner of the point is the one who the referee determines held the right-of-way at the time the lights went on. The most basic, and important, precept of the right-of-way is that the fencer who started the attack first will receive the point if they hit the valid target area.

Naturally, the fencer who is being attacked must defend himself or herself with a parry, or somehow cause their opponent to miss in order to take over right-of-way and score a point. A fencer who hesitates for too long while advancing on their opponent gives up right-of-way to their opponent. The referee may determine that the two fencers truly attacked each other simultaneously. The simultaneous attack results in no points being awarded, and the fencers are ordered back en garde by the referee to continue fencing.

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**In saber, the fencer who starts to attack first is given priority should his opponent counterattack.**

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## Penalties

Penalties are divided into four categories:

### Category One

- All Category One penalties are interdependent. Upon the first occurrence of an offense during a bout, the fencer is warned and receives a yellow card. Committing any additional offense during the bout will result in the offender receiving a red card and the opponent receiving a penalty touch.

### Category Two

- All Category Two penalties are also interdependent. A fencer is given a red card upon first and any subsequent infraction during a bout.
- Both Category One and Two infractions result in the annulment of a touch made by the offending fencer while committing the offense.

### Category Three

- Category Three penalties may be assessed for infractions against safety or the order of the competition.
- Such infractions can result in penalty touches (red card) or expulsion (black card) from the competition.

### Category Four

- The Category Four penalties involve unsportsmanlike conduct, using fraudulently modified equipment, collusion or brutality. The infractions result in automatic expulsion (black card) from the competition.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usafencing.org/fencing-for-parents>




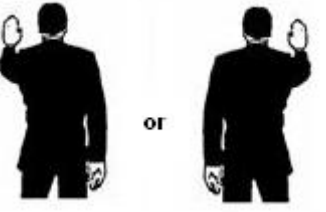
## Following the Action

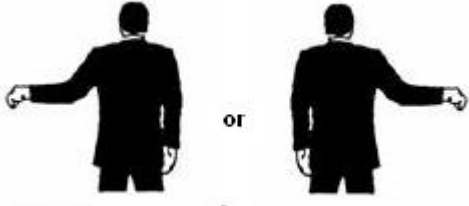
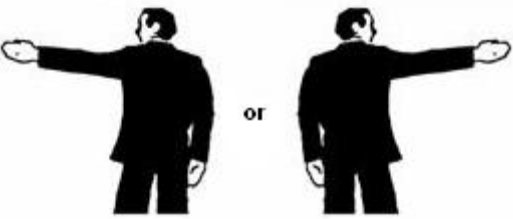
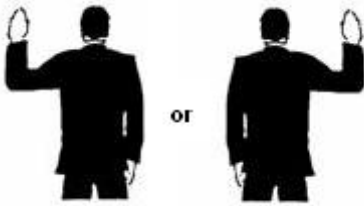

The fencer being attacked defends themselves by use of a “parry,” a motion used to deflect the opponent’s blade, after which the defender can make a “riposte,” an answering attack. Whenever a hit is made, the referee will stop the bout, describe the action, and decide whether to award a touch. Fencers seek to maintain a safe distance from each other – that is out of the range of the opponent’s attack. Then, one will try to break this distance to gain the advantage for an attack. At times, a fencer will make a false attack to gauge the types of reactions of their opponent.

When a fencer lands a hit, the referee stops the bout and – in foil and saber – determines who was the attacker, if their opponent successfully defended themselves, and which fencer should be awarded a touch, if any.


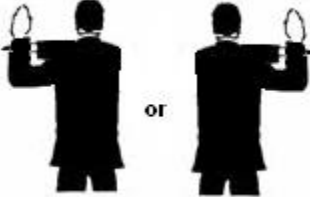
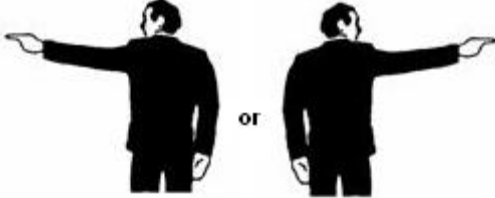
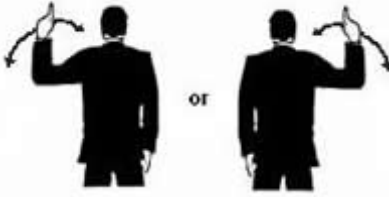
While it may be difficult to follow the referee’s calls (not helped by the fact that the officiating is performed in French!) the referee always clearing raises their hand on the side of the fencer for whom they have awarded a point. Watching these hand signals can make it easier for newcomers to follow the momentum of a fencing bout without understanding all of the intricacies of the rules.

## Refereeing Hand Signals:

<p><b>On Guard</b></p> 	<p>This is the referee signal to order the fencers into the on guard position.</p>
<p><b>Ready</b></p> 	<p>This is the signal made by the referee to determine if both fencers are ready to begin.</p>
<p><b>Play/Fence</b></p> 	<p>This is the signal to start fencing. The referee will bring his hands together.</p>
<p><b>Halt</b></p> 	<p>This signal requires you to immediately stop fencing. The referee will normally hold up his right hand unless the halt was caused specifically by the left-hand fencer.</p>

<p><b>Attack from left/right</b></p>  <p>The image shows two fencers from behind. The fencer on the left has their left hand raised, and the fencer on the right has their right hand raised. The word 'or' is placed between them.</p>	<p>This is the signal that determines the attacking fencer. Left hand raised represents the fencer on the referee's left while the right hand raised represents the fencer on the referee's right.</p>
<p><b>Hits</b></p>  <p>The image shows two fencers from behind. The fencer on the left has their left hand extended horizontally, and the fencer on the right has their right hand extended horizontally. The word 'or' is placed between them.</p>	<p>This is the signal that determines which fencer hits. Left hand raised shows the fencer on the referee's left has been hit and if the right hand is raised it shows that the fencer on the referee's right has been hit by the opponent.</p>
<p><b>Point Awarded</b></p>  <p>The image shows two fencers from behind. The fencer on the left has their left hand raised, and the fencer on the right has their right hand raised. The word 'or' is placed between them.</p>	<p>This is the signal that determines whom the referee is awarding the point. Left hand raised means the point goes to the fencer on his left while the right hand raised means the point goes to the fencer on the referee's right. In Epée if both hands are raised it means both fencers receive a point.</p>
<p><b>Together</b></p>  <p>The image shows one fencer from behind with both hands extended horizontally.</p>	<p>This is the signal that shows both attacks started simultaneously.</p>



<p><b>Off Target</b></p> 	<p>This is the signal that shows that the fencer has hit a non-valid target. In this case the fencer does not score a point.</p> <p>This is only applicable to foil and epee.</p>
<p><b>Parried</b></p> 	<p>This signal indicates that a fencer successfully parries an attack. The left hand represents the fencer on the referee's left performed the parry while the right hand represents the fencer on the right.</p>
<p><b>Point in Line</b></p> 	<p>This referee signal indicates that one of the fencers established point-in-line against his/her opponent. The left hand represents the fencer on the referee's left took point-in-line while the right hand represents the fencer on the right.</p>
<p><b>Fails/Miss</b></p> 	<p>This signal shows that the action of one of the fencers has failed to hit either on or off target. Left hand raised shows the fencer on his left has missed while the right hand raised means the fencer on the referee's right has missed.</p>

## What did you say? Glossary of Fencing Terms

**\*Advance:** Taking a step towards one's opponent.

**\*Attack:** Movement or series of movements by which a fencer tries to score a point. In foil and saber, the fencer who attacks first acquires the "right-of-way." In order to execute an attack properly (i.e. one that the referee will acknowledge), the fencer's hand must be clearly extending towards their opponent's valid target in a threatening manner.

**\*Beat:** Sharp tap on the opponent's blade to initiate an attack or provoke a reaction.

**Engagement:** Contact between the fencers' blades – often as the prelude to an attack.

**\*En Garde:** Position taken before fencing commences.

**\*En Garde Lines:** The lines on the 1 from which fencers start.

**\*Feint:** A false attack intended to get a defensive reaction from the opposing fencer, thus creating the opportunity for a genuine attack ("feint-disengage attack")

**Fleche:** Explosive, running attack (Foil and Epee only)

**Flunge:** Action unique to saber – a combination of a lunge and a fleche. Evolved recently after the FIE modified saber rules in 1992 to prohibit running attacks.

**Guard:** Part action in which a fencer blocks his opponent's blade.

**\*Lunge:** Most common attacking technique, in which the fencer launches themselves at their opponent by pushing off from the back leg (which generally remains stationary).

**\*Parry:** Defensive action in which a fencer blocks their opponent's blade.

**Piste:** French term for the fencing strip.

**Point-in-Line:** Action in which the fencer, who is generally out of attacking range, points

their weapon at their opponent with their arm fully extended. In order to be considered “established”, a fencer must maintain the point-in-line for a minimum of two tempos (steps) and “break” the distance from their opponent and refrain from moving their arm away from the extended position. A fencer who establishes a point in line has right-of-way, and their opponent cannot attack until they remove the blade from line by executing a beat.

**\*Recover:** The return to the en garde position after lunging.

**\*Riposte:** Defender’s offensive action immediately after parrying their opponent’s attack.

**Second Intention:** A tactic in which a fencer executes a convincing, yet false, action in hopes of drawing a true, committed reaction from their opponent.

**Stop Hit, Stop Cut(saber):** A counteraction made at the moment of an opponent’s hesitation, feint, or poorly executed attack. To be awarded the point, the fencer attempting to stop-hit must clearly catch their opponent’s tempo. Hence, if their Stop Hit is not “in time,” the referee may award the touch to their attacker. If executed correctly, a stop hit generally results in one light going off for the fencer who initiated it.

**\*Strip:** Fencing area, 14 meters long by 2 meters wide.

*\*Most used in beginning fencing*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usafencing.org/glossary-of-fencing>

## USFA Membership Requirements

Most, if not all, fencing clubs require mandatory USFA membership for all fencers. The main reason is that the clubs purchase group insurance from USFA and USFA requires all fencers, even beginners, to have at least a non-competitive membership for any fencing-related classes and activities. For individuals, USFA membership includes secondary insurance for the fencer.

Membership is yearly, with the USFA year going from August 1 to July 31. USFA provides different levels of membership based on your competition level:

- Non-competitive: Minimum requirement for most clubs
- Competitive: Required to compete in any USFA sanctioned event
  - Upgrade from non-competitive to competitive at any time by paying the difference

Note that it is very important to specify the correct division when registering with USFA. Divisions use USFA information to check the validity to fence at different qualifying events.

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## Competitions

So far, we've mentioned both training and competition. Let's go further into this topic and discuss the difference between the two and the reasons to participate in competitions. We also want to share information about how competitions are organized, what to expect, what to bring, and how to prepare.

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<sup>3</sup> Page 17, <http://AcademyofFencingMasters.com> © 2014 Academy of Fencing Masters

## Why Compete?

When your child joins a fencing club, he or she will join training sessions or classes and will be taught to fence. Your child will practice skills, technique, and spend time “competing” against classmates in a training environment. Training alone provides many of the benefits to joining a sport and fencing in particular. Participating in competitions means that you are attending tournaments and competing against fencers outside of your club. The main factors to consider when deciding whether to compete are desire, budget, and time commitment. Competing does create additional costs and requires much more time, including traveling to tournaments. Local competitions are not that expensive, both in registration and travel costs. National competitions typically require airfare and accommodations and have more expensive registration. Okay, so that’s the necessary business about the commitments involved in competing. More importantly, let’s discuss the many benefits to your child from participating in fencing competitions. First of all, it’s fun! Traveling to competitions, preparing for bouts, going to dinner with the club after the day is done, even the stench of the day’s equipment in the backseat of the van on the way home: these are memories that your child will hold onto forever.

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Second, competing teaches invaluable life lessons. We have a strong belief that all children should compete in a sport. This belief is part of what drives us to educate parents on the sport that we know and love. Some of the life lessons your child will learn from fencing competitions:

- Discipline
- Mental preparation
- Self-esteem
- Focus
- Strategy
- How to set goals and make plans to meet them
- How to handle success with graciousness and overcome failure with poise
- How to deal with fear of failure

We believe one of the biggest benefits in the above list is focus. Competing in a sport,

and particularly fencing, forces your child to be focused and ready for a very short moment. Fencing bouts can be over quickly and you either win or you lose. If you're not focused, your opponent may overtake you before you get your head in the game.

## Age Brackets & Divisions

Fencers are grouped into categories based on age, but a young fencer can often compete with older fencers, as I will explain in this section.

***The age brackets can be a bit confusing at first glance. Here are some main points:***

- Most ages are eligible to fence in more than one bracket depending on the child's skill and comfort levels.
- For example, an 11-year-old may choose to compete in the 12-and- under bracket, but also has the option to compete in the 14-and-under bracket for more challenging competition.
- "Age" is determined by birth year and the year in which the current fencing season begins.
- The fencing season is from Aug 1 through July 31, but age is still based on birth year.
- For example, in the 2013-2014 season, a child that turned 13 on January 1, 2014 or after will be considered "12" for the entire season because the fencer was 12 when the season started. Therefore, the child can compete in the 12-and-under and 14-and-under brackets for the entire season.
- Once a child is 13, the child can compete in any non-Youth age bracket (as well as Y14).
- Note that here we mean "13" by birth year according to the above rules. Again, if the child turned 13 after January 1st of the current season, the child would be considered "12" for the entire season and could compete in Y12 and Y14.
- Another note, the rules get a bit more complex specifically for Division 1 and when you add in national points (more on this later). However, we won't get

into all the details since once your child achieves this level of fencing, you will be able to write a book of your own!

## Age Bracket Chart

This chart shows the age brackets for each event. It is for the current season but in general, it does not differ from season to season.

CATEGORY	CODE	BIRTH YEARS	CLASS
Division I	DV1	Born 2007 or earlier	A, B or C
Division II	DV2	Born 2007 or earlier	C, D, E or U
Division III	DV3	Born 2007 or earlier	D, E or U
Parafencing	PARA	Born 2007 or earlier	N/A
Senior Team	STM	Born 2007 or earlier	N/A
Veteran/ Veteran Team	VET/VTM	Born 1981 or earlier	N/A
Veteran 40-49	V40	Born 1972-1981	N/A
Veteran 50-59	V50	Born 1962-1971	N/A
Veteran 60-69	V60	Born 1952-1961	N/A
Veteran 70 & Older	V70	Born 1951 or earlier	N/A
Veteran 80 & Older	V80	Born 1941 or earlier	N/A
Junior/Junior Team	JNR/JTM	Born 2001-2007	N/A
Cadet/Cadet Team	CDT/CTM	Born 2004-2007	N/A
Youth 14/Youth 14 Team	Y14/Y14TM	Born 2006-2009	N/A
Youth 12	Y12	Born 2008-2011	N/A
Youth 10	Y10	Born 2010-2013	N/A

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.usafencing.org/age-classification-eligibility>

## Equipment

Equipment is essential to enjoying Fencing. For beginners, we provide equipment that can be used but as fencers become more advanced and more committed, we recommend purchasing your own set of equipment.

At a minimum for saber fencing you will need:

1. White Jacket
2. Glove (Electric)
3. Saber
  - You can either order a fully assembled sabre or order components individually to suit your preferences. There is a lot of room for customization with many different components available. For beginners, a basic sabre will be adequate, but for more advanced fencers and for competition, you might wish to assemble your weapons yourself to fit your preferences.
4. Mask (Electric)

The above equipment will be enough for fencers wishing to simply practice with the class and not pursue competition. For competitions and electric (open fencing), the additional equipment is required.

1. Lamé (conductive jacket)
2. Knickers (pants)
3. Fencing Socks (long socks such as those for soccer are adequate. Must cover the knee)
4. Fencing shoes (more stable and help with cushioning for lunging)
5. Underarm protector
6. 2 Body Cords
7. 2 Mask Cords
8. Fencing Bag

If you are considering purchasing your own equipment, we would be happy to help you figure out correct sizing and offer gear recommendations.

### Some good sites for equipment

<https://www.absolutefencinggear.com/shopping>

<https://thefencingpost.com/>

<https://www.blue-gauntlet.com/>



## Additional Resources

The following are great resources for more information on Fencing:

General Information about Fencing Competitively, qualifying for various national events, how points work, fencing in college, etc: <https://www.fencingparents.org/about>

Official USA Fencing Athlete handbook. All the information you need about competitive fencing can be found here: <https://www.usafencing.org/athlete-handbook>

Information about National Points: <https://www.usafencing.org/point-standings-faq>

Current USA Fencing National Points Standings: <https://www.usafencing.org/current-point-standings>