YOUR GUIDE TO BECOMING A TRUE, MODERN SWORDSMAN

THE TRUESWORDSMAN – The Ebook

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Welcome

In the last 2 decades, and the last several years in particular, there has been an amazing growth in interest in historic European martial arts - particularly Longsword Fencing. Many books and a few organizations have sprung up on the subject, but so far, no websites dedicated specifically to the subject.

He closest would be www.thearma.org, however that's more of a Web Headquarters for the Association, and less of a site specifically dedicated to the techniques of Longsword Fencing. There are a number of great articles on longsword fencing, as well as historical manuals and translations available there for the enthusiast, but overall it's a bit hard to navigate around to find exactly what you want and they also have focus on other medieval/renaissance weapons as well. Also, many of the benefits it offers are available only to members, and membership costs money (albeit not much at all). Overall it's a great site, but still fills a different niche than to what I find there to be a lack of on the internet today.

A couple years ago, my best friend and I decided to start our own investigation of the Longsword. We got some wasters, we got some books, we got some translations of actual German and Italian treatises on the subject. We began our practice in earnest. Having other martial arts knowledge has been absolutely critical in accomplishing what we have so far. Kendo, Iaido, Aikido, Wrestling, Boxing, Muay Thai, Systema, Knife Fighting, Escrima - between us we've got some knowledge of many different martial arts. Primarily, I am a wrestler and an Aikidoka. Tom, my compatriot is primarily a Kendoka and laidoka.

Not only practice but much study, analysis, critique, and dedication has gone into our Longsword training. And eventually, throughout our work, we found the materials we had to be somewhat lacking. Often the pictures in our modern books displayed bad form (torqued knees, tense shoulders, bad grips, etc), or the books would have decent pictures but little technique. More than one book we've come across has been merely a glorified book of drills with little else.

Also, many times the number of variations on a single thing were overwhelming, and each source would say THIS is how you do it, but the multiple sources would contradict each other. In light of this, we decided to write an ebook for beginning swordsmen.

Our focus is not to say 'we're better than them' or 'they're bad because', but rather, we'd like to acknowledge what others have done, and at least show everything, along with a brief analysis of why some hold their sword this way, or why this manual shows this guard that way but that manual has it different. Too often these sources only show one variation and say that it's the way to go, when clearly there is not just ONE way to do things.

In this ebook, I've tried my best to show and acknowledge BOTH German and Italian stuff. I've also included my and Tom's commentary on much of it as we've experienced it. We explain why we do it one way over another, but why no way is necessarily better - because people are different. Just because holding a sword a certain way causes my shoulders to build a bit of tension doesn't mean it will for everyone.

So when using this ebook, don't just take my word for it.

Try things out for yourself, give everything a chance, and find what works for YOU.
Before the Sword

There are a number of things that one can and should do to train without even picking up a sword. To really excel at longsword fencing, one must be strong, flexible, quick, and in good cardiovascular shape. Such qualities are easier to develop for some than others, but nobody who was a great swordsman ever got to be who they were without training in these things.

Strength

For training strength, I find the best and healthiest way to work is against your own body weight. Training with weights is good enough for those that cannot work out every day, but is difficult to do properly, and done improperly can be detrimental to your martial skills.

Click here for Appendix B – My Workout

Flexibility

Being flexible increases your ability to stand wide and deep, as well as increases the range of motion of your muscles. Being flexible also increases one's ability to be relaxed, which is important for strength. Being properly flexible keeps us safe as well.

Stretching should be done every morning after you wake up and every evening before you go to bed, as well as before and after every workout. If you do not stretch every day, then you lose what you gained the day before. Make sure you hold stretches in the morning and evening for at least 10 seconds each, and 30 seconds each before and after each workout. When stretching, the goal is to relax into the stretch, not push yourself beyond your limits. Gently push into each stretch until you are slightly uncomfortable in it.

Make sure to take good deep slow breaths and then slowly push a little bit farther. It should hurt to stretch, but not be agonizing. Try your best to relax the muscles being stretched (being tense while stretching will benefit you nothing).
Footwork

In swordsmanship one needs a stance that is stable but adaptable; one that one can ground into, but is quick and easy to move from as well. The easiest and best way to do this is to always have a 'back foot' and a 'front foot', i.e. One foot should always be farther forward of the other foot than it is to the side.

There is an invisible line called our 'Weak Line' which is perpendicular to the line that is drawn directly connecting our two feet. It only takes a small amount of force along this weak line to unbalance us.

Of course, having the feet somewhat to the side is okay, but too far to the side and this shifts our weak line more and more parallel to our opponent. The more parallel this line is to him, the easier he can unbalance us, as he can more readily apply force along this line.

Paradoxically, I feel that it is not ideal to have the legs too wide with one foot directly behind the other either. The reason for this is that doing so rotates our hips and subsequently our shoulders away from our opponent. The downside to this is that it limits the range of motion of the arms.

Also, imagine where your belt buckle is when you wear a belt. Approximately two inches below that is where your centre is. This centre should always face your opponent, and all movement you do should originate from this centre.
Having one foot too far back inhibits our ability to keep our centre facing our opponent. Thus, I feel that one should always have the rear foot carried a little to one side (to allow good range of motion of the arms, and also to keep the centre aligned), but not too far (to prevent the weak line from being too parallel to the opponent).

With any stance, there are 2 points called 'Weak Points'. These points lie on the weak line and are always at the spot where an equilateral triangle is formed with our two feet.

Essentially, if we think of ourselves as a tripod that is missing one leg, the weak points are where the third leg would be to give us the most support. These weak points represent the places where we are most susceptible to unbalancing. Knowledge of the weak points and weak lines is essential when we begin closing in, winding, and grappling at the sword.

In any of these cases, we should see our opponent's weak line and weak points and take advantage of them, while protecting our own.

**Stepping**

There are 3 main types of step that we will commonly use, and a fourth which is a bit more advanced that we will cover in this manual. The first two are called 'The Basic Step' and 'The Passing Step'. A basic step is one where your feet maintain their relative positions - Front Foot stays forward and Back foot stays back. Other manuals call this a 'Gathering Step'.

As a rule of thumb, when taking a Basic Step, move first the foot closest to the direction you wish to move, and follow with the other foot. A Passing Step is one in which the feet change their relationship to one another - Back foot becomes front, and Front foot becomes back. It is called a passing step because one foot 'passes by' the other.
Both of these steps should be done at first with a 'One-Two' count. One the first count (one) the first foot is lifted and then placed. On 'Two', the second foot is lifted and placed.

This is especially important to do, and almost all beginners have a tendency to 'drag' their following foot to its new position while taking a basic step, and also they rotate their back foot during a passing step. While this isn't inherently bad, many make the mistake of leaving a portion of their weight on those feet - in a basic step this stresses the knee joint, and in a Passing Step, this grinds both ankle and knee.

It is important to keep bad habits at a minimum and take the time to actually lift and place the feet, as this will improve longevity of the joints of the leg, while simultaneously putting them in a more habitually stronger position. This is because when one is fully aware of the leg (as in lifting and placing the foot), one is more apt to keep the leg properly aligned - and thus more stable. At more advanced levels of training, it may seem that practitioners drag or rotate their feet into the ground, but this is merely an illusion, as a good swordsman will not put weight on such vulnerable joints.

The Third step is one of the most useful for adjusting your fighting distance (in the German tradition, this is called 'Zufechten').

An important aspect of this, is not only physical distance, but also the angle of attack, and where the weight is centred in the body. The third step I have elected to call the 'Switch Step'. I find this appropriate as it not only switches the feet, but switches angles as well. Basic practice of this step involves stepping forward with the back leg and placing it parallel to the front foot, then moving the other foot behind it.

This motion is highly variable, one can easily change his angle of attack up to 90 degrees with this step, as well as make smaller, more subtle adjustments to his distance with an opponent than with
other steps. It is especially important with this step, that the motion originate with the hips. Application of this Step can be seen in several of our Drills.

The Fourth step I have decided to codify is what I call 'Step-Pivot'. It is difficult to do quickly, but its use in closing and entering into our opponent's space is invaluable. One takes a step forward(a la Passing Step), but right as the step lands (on count 'One'), the entire body pivots 180 degrees inward(i.e. counter-clockwise for a step forward with the right foot, and clockwise for a step forward with the left foot).

Properly done, this is a very effective way to enter in behind an opponent, and properly timed, will give the advantage in a grapple.

The Switch Step

The switch step is as easy to diagram as the other basic steps. Its true usefulness is not...

You will notice that in the middle part of the step, the feet are parallel, which means our weak line is also parallel to our opponent. This is a dangerous position.

To avoid having this taken advantage of, the motion of this step (and all steps, actually) must originate with the hips, and be fluid. If the opponent tries to take advantage by pressing in at us while we take this step, we must pull the second leg back quickly, rotating about our centre - this will negate our opponent's efforts.
The key to this step is also its versatility.

When pulling the second leg back behind the other one, one can carry the foot further back while rotating on the front foot. Done well, this will allow you to adjust your angle, up to 90 degrees. Also, this step can be combined with a passing step - if the initial step of a passing step is carried a bit wide rather than perfectly linear, the second leg can be pulled back behind it.

Properly done, this will result in you being in perfect attacking distance to your opponent, while simultaneously exiting his line of attack. The only way to really understand all the various intricacies of this step is to practice it.

**The Step-Pivot**

The Step Pivot, like the 'Switch Step', begins with a Passing Step. Instead of merely adjusting the back foot on count two, the front foot pivots itself on count 2, and the back foot simultaneously rotates around. Properly done, the feet will maintain their relationship with one another - the initial front foot will be the front foot when the step is completed, and the same is true with the back foot. What changes is the facing of your whole body, which will have turned 180 degrees.

This step is very important when you wish to grapple at the sword - it is a strong entering movement. This will allow you to get behind your opponent's front, and thus more effectively neutralize him.
Primary Guards – an Overview

Though I have elected to use the German Naming Scheme for the Primary Guards, it should be noted that in the Italian system the series of guards is near-identical. I will include the corresponding Italian name along with each guard.

There are 4 primary guards which represent the ideal combination of both offensive and defensive actions. In German, these are Pflug, Vom Tag, Alber, and Ochs. I will refer to these as Plow Guard, Roof Guard, Fools Guard, and Oxs Guard respectively. These are direct translations.

**Pflug - Plow Guard**

This guard is held with the cross more or less at hip level and with the Point threatening the Opponent’s Neck or Face.

**Vom Tag - Roof Guard**

This guard is held at the shoulder (usually the right), with the blade vertical and tilted a little back.

**Alber - Fools Guard**

Held with the cross at about the same level as the Plow Guard, this guard has the sword pointed down at the ground.

**Ochs - The Oxs Guard**

This guard is held just above the shoulder with the point threatening the opponent's face.
Pflug – The Plow Guard

Pflug is one of the guards with the most variations to it. In the Italian tradition, this is called 'Short Position'. Pflug can be held with either leg leading, and is assumed by holding the pommel of the sword about level with your centre (i.e. just below the naval) and with the tip of the sword pointed at the throat of your foe.

The Italian tradition shows this guard with the hilt virtually touching the belly. I choose to hold the sword more forward, with the arms more extended (but not rigid). The Von Danzig manual shows that this guard is held with the long edge of the sword oriented upwards when held on the left side. I find that this is more hindrance than help as it tenses the body more.

I feel that this guard can be held with either the weight kept back on the rear foot, or forward more on the front foot. When forward, I keep the sword extended, as described above, and I take the pommel and move it ever so slightly towards the rear hip, this orients my blade at a slight angle which more completely closes off my opening on one side than having the sword perfectly centred in front of me. When I have my weight back, I carry the sword back further, and hold the hilt very close to my rear hip. In this way, I am already coiled for a powerful thrust.

Plow is a very hard guard to penetrate. A good response when an opponent tries to move in on you when you are in this guard is simply to extend forward a bit into long point (often, you don’t even need to extend this far). A well assumed Plow guard prevents your foe from attacking you until he either:

a) moves his body, creating an opening for you, or
b) moves your sword, giving you the chance to take advantage of this movement.

This is why I usually begin my duels in Plow guard - it is a good place from which to begin appraising the skill of your foe.
Vom Tag – The Roof Guard

The Italian tradition lacks this guard, but in it's place has a guard called 'The Woman's Guard'. Joachim Meyer, the last of the Leichtenauer masters also lacks this guard in favor of a guard called 'Zornhut', which is identical to The Woman's Guard.

I find the Roof Guard to be more flexible, and more relaxed, and thus more reactive.

This guard is assumed with the feet slightly closer together than the Plow Guard. My interpretation also shows it to be generally more upright, with the knees slightly less bent. It also can be assumed on either side of the body, by holding the hilt at or just above the shoulder on the side of the rear foot. The reason for this is that it facilitates taking a passing step to accompany a strike - thus adding more power to the cut. The blade should be near vertical, angled slightly back.

A variation on this guard holds it with the whole sword above and slightly in front of the head, still tilted slightly back, with the elbows wide. When cutting from this position, make sure to close your elbows as you do - this will align your arms and provide more speed and power to the cut.

All 5 master cuts originate from this guard in their basic form. This is another reason I prefer Roof Guard to the Woman's Guard or Zornhut. With the latter two, it is much more difficult, if not impossible, to effectively strike a Krumphau.
Alber – the Fools Guard

The origin of this guard's name lies in it's use. One is not a fool to assume this guard, as you may think, but rather, it lures one's adversary to attack what they believe to be a fool, for this guard appears very open.

The Italians have 2 variations on this guard. The first is called 'Middle Iron Door'(because the sword resembles an iron door, ready to be swung shut), and is identical to the standard Fool guard. The second is called 'Boars tooth', and is held with the hilt further back towards the rear hip, rather than with arms extended. I prefer having the arms extended, as I feel tension building up when I hold the sword too far back (a la Boar's Tooth).

The Fool's Guard is held with the hilt at the same position as in the Plow Guard, but here the blade is oriented downward, pointing at the ground at a roughly 45 degree angle. It is my interpretation that the sword should not actually touch the ground, though I've seen some depictions of it doing so.

The Fool's Guard is one of my favorites, as it illustrates a very powerful principle. Many would call it 'deception', however I like to think of it as Proactive Movement. The standard view is that this guard deceives an adversary into attacking what appears to be open. I like to think of this guard however, as 'forcing' an opponent to attack the opening's presented, as an attack otherwise would be very foolish indeed.
Ochs - The Ox Guard

The Italians call this 'the window guard', and label it as 'unstable', which within their system implies that it is an endpoint of an action, and not a guard to be maintained. Indeed, this is a difficult position to fight from, though as you will see from some of our drills, it has its uses. Generally, I don't like to maintain this guard for too long, though, sometimes it is a good way to see how your opponent reacts to it.

Being the end point of 2 of the 5 master strikes, one does need to be very familiar with how this guard feels.

The guard is so named as the sword resembles the horn of an ox. Hold the hilt at the shoulder of the rear foot, as in the Roof Guard. Instead of having the blade vertical, it points right at your opponents' fact or throat (which means it is usually angled ever so slightly down). The Italian guard has the blade aligned vertically, whereas the German manuals have the edge at a diagonal.

It is important to be comfortable with a vertical edge alignment, and a horizontal one, as well as in between.

This is because one finishes the 3rd master cut with the edge horizontal (the Zwerchau), another with the edge vertical (schielhau), and when winding into this position, it should be at an askew angle, as this will deflect the opponent's blade the best.

A good defensive manoeuvre from this guard is to drop it into Hanging Point when thrust at or cut at from your other side.

One can simultaneously make a passing step or a switch step and thus enter in deeply and begin to grapple, or strike with the pommel or even the blade(depending on your distance). This will be illustrated in one of our drills.
Secondary Guards – An Overview

Secondary Guards are Guards that I interpret as not intended to be maintained as a fighting stances; or those which do not offer the same degree of both offense and defense as the primary guards; yet are essential to the art overall. Again, I've chosen to represent the German Guards, and again, there are Italian versions of all of these, which I will mention in the individual entries. I do not see them as sufficiently different to merit their own articles. The 5 I've decided to include are: The Near Guard, The Side Guard, The Long Point, The Crown, and the Hanging Point.

The Near Guard

This guard is held at the side with the blade angled back slightly and the edge threatening the opponent.

The Side Guard

Similar to the near guard, but with the blade directly perpendicular to your line of attack, and the flat facing the opponent.

The Long Point

The arms extended in front of the body and the sword in line with the fully extended arms.

The Crown

The Hilt at face level with the blade vertical and oriented at an angle.

The Hanging Point

The sword cross at or just below shoulder level with the blade pointing forward and down, as if 'hanging'.
Nebenhut – The Near Guard

In the Italian manuscripts, this is known as 'Long Lying Tail', or just 'Tail Guard'.

This, along with the German name 'Near Guard', gives us an idea of how hold this guard.

Interestingly, the Italians list this guard as 'stable', which means one's tactics while in this guard would be similar to the Fool Guard - instead of threatening with a rising thrust as in Fool Guard however, the Near Guard threatens with the edge of the sword.

This guard is assumed by having the sword angled towards the ground and slightly back, on the side of the rear foot, and can be assumed (as all our other guards) on either side of the body.

Because of the way we're built however, it is easier to assume this guard on the right side, with the left leg forward (when we hold the sword right handed anyway).

My interpretation is that either edge can be threatening the opponent, however it is usually easier (for me at least) to threaten with the long edge on my right side, and the short edge on my left side.

I consider this a secondary guard, because although one can use it similarly to alber (as is evidenced by Fiore's inclusion of it as a stable guard), the sword has a longer distance to travel and so is easier to see coming when cutting into an opponent's blade as an interception - thus it is more difficult to use in this manner.

This guard is still very necessary however, as it is the position into which downward cuts travel, and the initial position for upward cuts from below.
Schrankhut - The Side Guard

This guard is called 'The Complete Iron Door' by Fiore. This illustrates it's relationship to the Fool Guard (middle iron door).

It is held with the hilt at the same location as the Fool Guard, and the blade is still pointed at the ground, but here the blade is also at a 90 degree angle to your facing. In the Italian system this guard is only ever held on the right side with left leg leading.

I see no reason why one cannot hold this guard on either side of the body however, excepting that when held on the left, it causes the wrists to cross.

Crossed wrists is generally avoided in favor of open, uncrossed arms, but I choose to include this guard on both sides of the body, as this is the finishing position for the Krumphau - the second master strike, and one should be trained to use all meisterhau from both sides.

It is important to note that in this guard, the flat of the blade faces forward - not the edge. This and the subtle change in blade orientation are the only differences between this guard and the Near Guard.
Long Point

This guard is both named similarly and assumed identically in both German and Italian manuals. The Italians call it simply 'Long Position', whereas the German 'Long Point' (langenort) is used.

With both arms extended far in front of you, and the blade in line with the arm of the top hand, and the feet such that the forward foot is the same as the top hand (i.e. right hand on top, right foot forward), and the weight shifted forward as well, this is Long Point. It represents the limit of your effective fighting range.

This is the position into which one thrusts, and through which a fully extended cut should pass. Many fighters do not extend fully in their cuts. This is sometimes appropriate when the cut is meant to intercept another sword, or catch an opponent moving in. But for attacking, it is both safer and more powerful to extend to the fullest. If your opponent does not extend fully, and you do, this gives you a range advantage, even if you are the smaller or shorter combatant.

Kron – the Crown Guard

This guard, like Long Point, is identical in both German and Italian manuscripts. In German it is referred to as 'Kron' the Crown, in Italian, it is either called 'Coronet' or simply 'Front Position'. The naming scheme for this guard is pretty straightforward as well.

Holding the sword in front of you with the cross of the sword at eye (or crown level) and the blade vertical and angled slightly forward and tilted slightly towards the side of the front foot, while the long edge is angled slightly away from the front foot - this is the crown guard. It’s use is in collecting an incoming cut, or pulling up an incoming thrust.

This guard has good potential in also deflecting an opponent's sword so that one can move in to grapple. Apart from the above mentioned uses however, it should be generally avoided as a deflection, as it does not offer any immediate offensive follow up apart from the aforementioned entering and grappling opportunity.
Hanging Point

This is a less emphasized guard in the German tradition, and I can't seem to find it in the Italian system.

I believe this is because this guard offers less immediate offensive options.

I've seen it variously called 'Iron Door' as well, which is not to be confused with the Italian iron door, or the Iron Door guard presented in Joachim Meyer's fechtbuch (which appears to be a defensive plow guard variant with the hilt oriented over a very bent knee).

This guard is similar to the Ox guard.

If you assume an Ox guard, and then let the whole sword 'hang' somewhat forward and down, with the point dipping at a slightly steeper angle, this is hanging point.

It can be assumed on either side, but feels much more comfortable, relaxed and natural when held on the left side.

A skilled fighter in this guard is devastatingly hard to hit.

The position the sword is in this guard can easily close off any of the 4 openings.

This is a good guard from which to initiate a bind or grapple.

“A skilled fighter in this guard is devastatingly hard to hit”
Cutting

Cutting with a medieval longsword is a bit more than just swinging it around wildly. Just like in an unarmed fight, you want to use the minimum amount of effort to the greatest potential effect - and you want to keep it as surprising as possible. A cut that you can see coming a mile away is not only a wasted cut, but a surrendering of your initiative to your opponent.

A good way to practice your cuts is to imagine circular movement. The most basic cut is one that moves from the Roof Guard to the Near Guard on the opposite side of the body, and passes through 'Long Point'. Ideally, this movement involves a step - though one does not always HAVE to step to cut. If you can step to cut, this is preferred, and at the beginning levels, all practice cuts should be made with a step: This is because stepping forces you to move your body with the cut. Once this becomes natural, you can begin to cut without a step (remembering to keep the motion originating in the hips).

Try to time the cut so that at the moment of your fullest extension (i.e. In long point) your stepping foot touches the ground. The feeling should almost be one of 'throwing' the sword tip out as far as you can, before continuing it's arc back to your side into the Near Guard.

It's also import to be aware of which arm does what during a cut. The bottom hand (usually the left) is the one wherefrom power derives. This is accomplished by a 'pulling' feeling coming from that arm. Remember that relaxation and extension are important in both arms. There should also be a feeling of the sword moving like a lever with the top hand acting as the fulcrum - by moving the bottom hand and keeping the top hand in place, the entire blade moves.

The top hand is the hand that aims the cut. Generally speaking this is done by extending that arm towards your target as your bottom hand 'pulls' to create a motion that is both moving forward and also arcing. The top hand especially should be very relaxed. There should NOT be a feeling of 'pushing' the blade with that hand.

The path of the bottom hand should be an arc that ends around your centre. The top hand should have made a similar arc but end more extended towards the target, while rotation in the hips is where the power to drive the cut through comes from. The most common problem that all practitioners have is using their shoulders too much in the cut. When all is said and done, the pommel of the sword should be pointed right at your centre (a person's centre of gravity - approximately 2 inches below and just behind the belly button).

One tip to executing good cuts is to pay attention to the elbows and wrists. At the end of a downward cut, the wrists should be rotated on top of the grip of the sword. The elbows should have started wide at the beginning of the cut, and closed rapidly during the cut, and should end up very
very close to your sides. This closing of the elbows should be done simultaneously to the rotation of the wrists, which will create an additional 'snapping' motion of the blade.

All in all, a good cut comes from many individual motions that all work together to move the blade in an optimal way. The wrists and elbows close to snap the blade forward, while the hands and arms extend in a forward arcing motion that creates a sort of 'shear' effect on the target. The rotation of the hips provides sustained power in the cut.

From a scientific standpoint, the ability of a sword to cut is increased by three things. Decreasing the surface area of the edge, increasing the mass of the blade, and increasing the speed it is travelling. We cannot in a duel change the first one, we can augment the second, and we can directly control the third. By rotating the hips and 'putting the body into a cut', we can effectively add our own mass to the sword. This increases it's inertia which also increases it's ability to maintain a high velocity despite the adverse effects of friction. Being relaxed will allow our muscles to move freely, which will increase our ability to accelerate the blade to a much faster velocity.

**Edge Alignment**

Like the subject of gripping, or footwork, this is often overlooked by beginning swordsmen. To protect your sword (and your wrists) from undue torque or strains, and to facilitate the greatest potential in your cuts, your edge must always be aligned properly with your target. The easiest way to explain this is through pictures. I'll let them do the talking.

**Gripping the Sword**

While many practitioners of various weapon-arts have their preferred methods of gripping their various weapons, just as many do not pay attention to how to grip the handle of the sword. There are many possible ways in which one can grip the longsword, and one should try several before choosing the one best suited to their tastes. It is important to practice at least a little bit with
different methods of gripping to understand the pros and cons of each grip. As for myself, there are two ways of gripping that I commonly employ.

The first I call a 'v' grip because the thumb and forefinger form a sort of 'v' shape on the handle.

With this grip, the handle lies upon a line in the hand that connects from the outside bottom of them palm to the base of the forefinger.

The pinky finger should grip firmly, while the other fingers get progressively more relaxed, with the thumb and forefinger being most relaxed. This is done with both hand, resulting in what is a firm and strong grip, that is also very flexible and relaxed. Try to avoid using a 'club' grip, i.e. one where the grip lies perfectly perpendicular to the forearm and is held tightly with all the fingers. Not only will this inhibit the range of motion of the sword and cause your cutting potential to drop, but it is also one that I find to build tension in the forearms, which a good opponent with take considerable advantage of.

Many swordsmen I've spoken to have expressed that when they attempt such very tense grips that they are actually more prone to being disarmed!

The second grip I use I call the '90 degree' grip, because the sword is rotated 90 degrees to the previous grip.

This grip is important because it facilitates much more fluid movements in 3 of the 5 master-cuts. The thumb of the top hand lays on the flat of the blade near the cross. Experimenting with this grip will reveal how it aids in the Krumphau, Zwerchau, and Scheilhau.
Meisterhau - An Overview

Originally these were called the 'Secret Strikes', but in Joachim Meyer's manual, they are called 'Master Strikes (ger. 'meisterhauen'). These strikes are so named because of their surprising simplicity at the beginner levels and complexity at advanced levels; but most importantly because of their ability to provide good defense along with a strong offense, as well as good follow-up options.

There are 5 such strikes, in order: Zornhau (Strike of Wrath), Krumphau (Crooked Strike), Zwerchau (Cross Strike), Schielhau (squeinting strike), and Scheitelhau (scalp strike).

Each is designed not only to provide defence in offence, but to provide a counter to the likely attacks of specific guards.

**Zornhau**
A good strike to intercept any downward cuts. It is a strong transition from the Roof guard into the Plow Guard.

**Krumphau**
Counters most attacks from the Oxs guard and any thrusts launched against you. It is a strong transition from either Roof Guard or Side Guard into a side guard on the other side of the body.

**Zwerchau**
Counters most attacks from the Roof Guard. It is a strong transition to the Oxs Guard from either the Roof Guard or an Oxs guard on the other side, and strikes horizontally.

**Scheilhau**
Counters most attacks from the Roof Guard. It is also a strong transition from Plough Guard into Oxs guard, but is different from the Zwerchau in that it strikes down vertically.

**Scheitelhau**
Counters most attacks from the Fools Guard. It is not a transition from one guard into another, but rather a very high Overhead Strike from Roof Guard targeting the scalp or crown of the opponents face with the tip of the sword.
Zornhau - The Strike of Wrath

The first of the Master Strikes is also the easiest.

Not unrelated, it is the most commonly used in a duel.

A Zornhau is any strike made such that instead of driving through in a complete arc, the blade goes just far enough to threaten the opponent's face with the tip of the sword.

At its most basic, this strike can be described as merely a strong transition from the Roof Guard (either above the head or at the shoulder, or even the Woman's Guard/Zornhut) into the Plow Guard.

Such a strike serves two purposes - It intercepts an incoming thrust or cut negating it, and it immediately threatens the opponent. The latter of the two is often taken for granted, but should not be overlooked. The ideal finish to this strike positions us with the Initiative.

Once we have the initiative, we should fight to keep it.

This is best done by taking another attacking action - A thrust, a wind, or a grapple are all equally effective. Clearly a thrust is most obvious in this position.

This strike is particularly effective at countering an incoming downward diagonal or horizontal cut. It is important to make sure that the pommel points clearly at your centre, as this will ensure that the point stays pointed clearly at your opponent.

As a note, it is important to understand the difference between striking in a wrathful manner, and wrathfully striking. Control and Discipline are at the heart of good swordsmanship, and we should never compromise our control by lashing out in wrath. Rather, we have all felt wrath at one point or another - tap into that, and remember the feeling of it. Use that feeling to really give power to this strike.

“We have all felt wrath at one point or another – tap into that, and remember the feeling of it. Use that feeling to really give power to the strike”
Krumphau - The Crooked Strike

The second of the 5 Master strikes is the Crooked Strike.

It is called so because unlike most other strikes, this one strikes out almost directly to your side, rather than in front of you.

In the basic form of this strike, the sword moves in a manner like a 'windshield wiper' - in an arc in front of you going sideways. From a technical standpoint, this is done by strongly transitioning from Roof Guard (at the shoulder) or Side Guard into a Side Guard on the other side of the body at the same time as one takes a passing step, or a switch step. It is important to note that this strike should be with the long edge when striking to your left, and should hit with the short edge when striking to your right.

The target of this strike should be the extended hands or forearms of your opponent while he is in the Long Point guard.

Since Long Point is a transitional guard most often seen in the middle of a cut or at the full extension of a thrust, you must time this strike along with your opponent's actions. Timing your actions in this way is called moving 'In Des' (which is hard to translate but basically means 'in time' or 'during', 'at the same moment', etc.).

This strike, like the Zornhau, should also be followed up quickly so as not to give up the initiative. From the askew position in which you are in, the easiest follow up is to cut straight forward into your opponent's face or chest.

If your strike lands over his sword, you can still make this movement, or you can wind.

If your sword is too early and lies under his sword, this is a more difficult position, from which winding or moving in to grapple is best.
Zwerchau - The Cross Strike

The Zwerchau is a good attack to use on its own, or as a follow up to another attack, even another zwerchau.

The unpredictable nature of it along with its offensive and defensive capabilities make it a potent strike.

One executes a zwerchau by transitioning from either Roof Guard (at the shoulder) or Ox Guard into an Ox guard on the other side of the body. This should be accompanied by a step, but doesn’t have to. This movement in particular among the movements one makes with a sword should originate with the hips, as this will allow a very quick movement that is simultaneously powerful. One can sometimes get away with poor use of the hips with other sword movements (though one shouldn’t), but with this one it is imperative to use the hips well, or else the strike is useless.

The target of this strike should be the head of your opponent, and the sword should strike horizontally with the short edge when struck from the right to the left, and with the long edge when striking from the left to the right.

The nature of this strike is that by moving into the Ox guard, you close off your upper opening on the side that you transition the guard into. This is perfect for collecting and setting aside an incoming strike.

As mentioned, a very good follow up attack to a zwerchau is another zwerchau. One can chain them together in this way, and it is very powerful to do so, as you can overwhelm an opponent in this way.

Interestingly, the counter to a Zwerchau is another Zwerchau - if your opponent attempts a zwerchau, perform your own zwerchau under his, and you will be protected from his strike, and he will be hit.

With practice, one can use this strike to hit lower in the body - mixing up the targets of your zwerchaus is another good way to get a good hit. It is important to note, that when striking a zwerchau low, one should still hold the hilt high in front of the head.
**Schielhau**

Schielhau means 'squint strike' or 'squinting strike', and refers to how it appears that you squint in the final position of this strike, with the blade along your line of vision. This visual naturally draws an onlooker's gaze from your face to that of your target along your line of sight, hence the name.

The schielhau is related to the zwerchau in execution, but differs in it's target. In their basic form, both begin in Roof Guard and transition into the Ox guard on the opposite side of the body. But where the Zwerchau offsets an incoming attack at the same moment as the offensive strike is made, the Schielhau initially collects an incoming strike, sets it aside and places your blade on the inside of the opponents, then your blade moves in to strike.

Also, it is important to note that a Zwerchau strikes horizontally, where a Schielhau strikes downward. Both are aided by the 90 degree grip.

Schielhau is unusual in that if you strike it from your right side, your target should be the right side of your opponents head(or his right trapezius muscle). Those with quick minds will realize that this means your sword crosses over and strikes the far target (as the left of your opponent is a nearer target). This is done because it is harder to evade, and also affords you more leverage the more your opponent's blade is set aside.

 Strikes of similar mechanics and execution will become natural to you as you gain comfort in executing this particular strike. This principle can be applied to any setting aside motion into any of your 4 openings.
Scheitelhau

The 5th of the five master cuts is the ‘Scheitelhau’, which means ‘Scalp Strike’.

This is used to attack someone in the Fool Guard or to counter thrusts which rise from below.

One executes a Scheitelhau by raising the hands high and pushing up with the bottom hand which will lever the blade of your sword downward. Your target is the front-top of your opponent’s head (his fore-head or even his face will do also). Done properly, this will keep your sword far enough away from the Fool guard to preclude his ability to intercept it easily.

It is important however, to keep in mind that one must step off line somewhat when making this strike. This is to help void any thrusts or upward cuts your opponent makes while you execute this strike, as if he tries to Go Through your attack and move inward, this stepping off the line will keep you out of his attack’s way.
Common Mistakes

Here I’ve tried to compile a brief list of common mistakes I see in beginners when they begin sword training. Obviously, most cases are not as severe as shown here, but I’ve decided it best to illustrate my point by showing each in the extreme.

Arms and Shoulders Too Tense

Especially after a lot of cutting practice, the arms and shoulders (biceps, triceps, trapezeus, and deltoid muscle groups) are often held too tense.

Try to relax and loosen these groups of muscles.

Bad Cutting Distance

Obviously this problem arises from practicing too close to a pell, or too close to a partner.

Practicing with bad zufechten (fighting distance) is completely counter productive to what our goals are. Be sure to keep your distance so you can fully extend and cut your opponent with the last foot or so of your blade.

Club Grip

This is the common way one holds a club or hammer, or even a baseball bat.

While it feels secure, it builds tension in the forearms and limits mobility.
Elbows too Wide

This mistake causes your guards and your cuts to be weak. Don’t compensate too much by locking the arms straight though. The arms should be extended but also relaxed.

Over-Extended Knee

Though a good quick lunge in modern sport fencing is good, I don’t recommend doing this in a longsword match. This strains the knee joint and also stresses the quadriceps as your weight is so forward you’re basically holding yourself with that muscle. This will build a LOT of tension in the leading leg, and tire you out quickly. The furthest you should extend is having your knee directly over your heel, but no further.

Sword Too Far Back

Especially be aware of this when in the Roof Guard. The tip of the sword should NOT dip downward.

This indicates that the top hand is ‘pulling’ the sword up, which is counter-productive to good powerful quick cuts. The bottom hand should ‘push’ the blade straight up, this will put the blade in a good position. A dipped tip is wasted motion in two directions, so try to avoid it.

Torqued Knee

The classic knee torque. Both legs (front and back) are vulnerable to this common mistake, particularly the back leg as you advance.

As Stated before, keep the knees over the feet, and pointed in the same direction as the toes.
Training Principles

Here are a few brief overviews of what I believe to be very important principles to swordsmanship, and in their own ways, to all martial arts.

Breathing

If you have ever practiced a sport, you know that breathing is very important. It's very much an automatic function, and for many animals it is entirely an automatic function. But for us humans, we have the ability to consciously take control of our breathing, this is an oft overlooked ability, with far reaching and powerful ramifications if we take advantage of it.

Deep abdominal breathing aids our sensitivity and perception. It also helps us relax. This is evident for anyone who attempt to hold their breath for as long as they can - as your body begins burning for oxygen, you become less and less aware and tension builds- particularly in the core and shoulders, but also throughout the arms and the legs. For anyone that works out cardio vascularly, breathing has a powerful effect. When exhausted and in pain from extended effort, powerful breath control can help alleviate the pain and also allow you to exert yourself further.

Many people, before they undertake a challenge (such as in a performing art or before the beginning of a sports match) will calm themselves with a few deep breaths.

Breathing has a powerful psychological and physiological effect on the human body, and it will be either a hindrance to use or a boon. The Russian martial art of 'Systema' capitalizes on breathing more than any other art I know, but that doesn't mean we can't take their breathing principles for our own.

Breathing should be continuous. Holding the breath upon exhalation, or inhalation will build tension and anxiety, while continuous breathing will soften it. Good continuous breathing will help us exert ourselves harder, and longer, than we otherwise would be able.

Inhalation should be through the nose, and exhalation should be through the mouth. Whenever you breath, try to imagine that the breath penetrates your whole body, into your torso and then out to the very ends of your extremities, and especially deep into your belly. When you exhale, feel the breath come from inside the belly first, while the energy flows from your extremities, through your belly, and out your mouth.

When you exercise and stretch, try to keep those breathing tips in mind, and your workout and stretching routine will provide you more positive results. Another good exercise is a simple jogging one.

Begin jogging and inhale and exhale every time you take a step. Continue for 15-20 seconds and then slow your breathing so you inhale and exhale every other step. After another 15-20 seconds, slow down to inhaling and exhaling every third step.

Be sure to breathe as deeply and continuously as possible. Continue this pattern up until you take 8 or more steps with each inhale and exhale. Try to keep your steps even. Once your breathing is as slow as you can make it while remaining relaxed and continuous, slow it down a bit more, then every 10 seconds or slow speed it back up until you're taking 1 step with each breath again. Then go for
about 25 seconds or so holding your breath, then slowly stopping and let your breathing return to normal. Ponder how you feel at each point in the exercise. Go through the entire experience. This will give you some positive insights to the power of breathing, as well as build your cardiovascular fitness.

**Perception - Decision - Action**

In any martial conflict, I don’t like to think of it as a fight, but rather a relationship that is built off of a single repeating process which both or all parties involved in go through. This process holds true in any situation, and has three steps.

The first thing to happen in this process I call 'Perception'. If someone moves aggressively against you, you perceive it in a myriad of ways. You could see his movement, or his expression, or hear words he says, or maybe you can hear footsteps coming from behind, or the light scraping of clothing. Any number of physical things can communicate to you of an impending action to be taken by another. Sharpening your powers of observation, you will find that you will more able to remain calm during stressful or difficult times, which will aid in the second step of the process.

The second step is the Decision process. This is the part where you, rationally or irrationally, decide a course of action based upon your perception. For example, your opponent is attacking you to your high-outside opening, so you decide to move into the Ox guard to collect his attack and simultaneously threaten him with your point. Or, you could adjust your position relative to him and use footwork to void his attack. Or you could do a combination of the two, or any number of other possible actions. The process of picking a course of action makes up this step.

Third is action. This is where you actually go ahead and do the movement that you concluded upon in step 2. It is important in swordsmanship(or any martial art) to be dedicated to your movements. Being uncommitted to your attacks makes weak attacks that are easy to see and nullify. This is why the decision step is vital, and why a good understanding of geometry, distance, footwork, and technique is needed. A good understanding of them will facilitate good decisions, which, when carried out with full intention will lead to good results.

It is our goal in training, this or any other art, to combine and speed up these three steps in the process to be as simultaneous and instantaneous as possible. Always keep this in mind in your training.

**Initiative - Before, During, and After**

In the German school of swordsmanship, the principle of Initiative is paramount. In any given situation, there are 3 methods of acting according to initiative: Vor (before), Nach (after), or In Des(roughly meaning 'during' or 'in the middle of').

The strongest principle in any duel is to attain an initiative situation of 'before', and keeping it. Right along with that principle is knowing that if your opponent gains the 'before' initiative, that you must fight to regain it, by either acting according to 'After', or 'During'.

Acting in the 'Before' is to move proactively. The old fighting principle says it best 'How do you avoid being hit in a swordfight? Hit your opponent first'. Or, like the more western saying 'The best
defense is a good offence'. Keep your opponent reacting and trying to defend himself against your attacks. The 5 master cuts, by nature of their mechanics, when properly done will allow you to string them together in a very unpredictable pattern that will allow you to keep the Before.

Similarly, the 5 master cuts allow you to regain the Before, when you act in the After. This is because by their very nature of being both offensive and defensive. I.E. If your opponent is in a particular guard, and you use the proper master cut to attack it, your very motion of making that cut will simultaneously provide you your defense against your opponents' likely movements. This is acting in the Before.

If your opponent is in a certain guard and seizes the Before and attacks you first, the same master cut you would use to attack him now becomes your most efficient counter to his aggressive movement and provides offense enough for you to seize the Before back from him. This is what makes a master cut a master cut.

Initiative 'In Des', or 'During' is harder to describe. This refers to when neither combatant clearly has the Before or After initiative. This is a very dynamic state to be in, and usually lasts only very very briefly, as one combatant will almost certainly gain the Before very quickly.

By learning to fight for, and keep, the 'Before', your fencing will result in very good outcomes.

Another meaning for ‘In Des’ would be that of ‘At the Instant’. This principle describes when you strike at your opponent in the middle of their own offensive action, or vice versa. Because of the dynamic nature of this state, it is related to my previous explanation of ‘In Des’.

The German School and Italian school differ in their perspective on initiative. In the German School, one is taught the 4 primary guards, and then also the 5 master cuts which are used to attack someone in such a guard and/or to counter the attacks launched from those guards.

The Italian School teaches many strikes ‘In Des’. The nature of the organization of the Italian guards and the techniques in Fiore’s and Vadi’s manuals seem to illustrate a principle of drawing your opponent into attacking you. When he does so, his defensive ability drops as he must expose an opening in his attack, and therefore you get the opportunity to counter the attack and hit that opening. I think learning and using both principles is key, that is, learning to attack a person in guard, in the middle of their attack, and also to counter-attack/riposte (Vor, In Des, and Nach).

**Tactics**

There are many tactics one can employ in a swordfight. I will briefly go over several of these here.

First there is the idea of ‘Going Through’, and the related idea I call ‘Rushing In’. Both are similar, but their difference is situational. Going Through an attack means to advance quickly so as to position one’s body close to one’s opponents’ so as to void an attack at them. For example, if an enemy attacks you high, by Going Through you close the distance so that you are now out of harm’s way of his blade – You have gone through the target area of his attack. ‘Rushing In’ is similar, but when you ‘Rush In’, you don’t wait for the attack, you simple close in to pre-empt the attack. Both of these tactics will result in a grappling situation.
Next there is the idea of ‘Pulsing’, and it’s cousin, ‘Intercepting’. Pulsing is when you rap your opponent’s blade when you are crossing swords. This is commonly done when both of you are in the Plow Guard. This can be done as a distraction, or to quickly and surprisingly move your opponent’s blade out of your way to take advantage of the opening it gives. ‘Intercepting’ is when you target the blade of an incoming sword with a strike of your own. These principles are prevalent in the Italian School, where they have guards specifically designed to do this(which are labelled as ‘Pulsativa’).

The counter to a pulsing or intercepting movement by your opponent is the idea of ‘Mutating’. Mutating is not like Feinting(though it is similar), because with a feint you purposely throw a false strike to draw out your opponent’s blade and then change the attack to hit the opening created. If you and your opponent are both in Plow guard and he pulses your blade, you mutate that by taking the momentum of your sword from that pulse and using it to generate power for a cut or thrust, effectively taking advantage of that pulse. Mutating can also be done against an opponent who intercepts your sword with his own.

Pursuing is the last tactic I will include in this section. A pursuit is not when you chase after a retreating foe(such is called ‘Advancing’). Rather a pursuit is like a filling in of a contraction your opponent makes. For example if you and your opponent are both in Plow guard, and your opponent raises his sword(to either enter roof guard or in preparation for a cut), if you are perceptive enough to catch it instantly, you can pursue his blade and this gives you the initiative and a good opportunity to cut or thrust against him.

**Binding/Winding**

At any time when your sword and your opponent’s are in contact for more than an instant, this is called a ‘bind’. Binding is the action of attaining this state, and the art of fighting whilst the swords are in contact is called ‘Winding’. Winding is a more subtle art than cutting, parrying, counterattacking and such, but is required to be a good swordsman. Whenever the two swords are in a bind, there are two ways you can maintain it, and we call these ‘Being Weak’ or ‘being Strong’. Neither is better than the other, and the one will counter the other. If when you bind your opponent pushes hard on your sword with his, he is being Strong at the bind. To counter this be weak at the sword and this will put the swords into motion. Capitalize on this and you will strike him. The reverse is also true. If your opponent is weak at the sword(i.e. not firm), then you can manipulate his sword with your own into a position where you can thrust or slice him.

The ability to perceive if your opponent is strong or weak at the bind is called ‘Fuhlen’, or ‘Feeling’. Being sensitive enough to feel this through your sword blades is a skill one must develop through practice, so drill for Fuhlen, and remember it whenever you do a drill or are sparring and are in a bind. See if you can really feel if your opponent is strong or weak at the bind.

Winding is a dynamic state(like everything else in swordplay), but keeping in mind your primary guards will help you greatly. Due to the nature of the Roof Guard and the Fool Guard they are unsuitable for winding. But remember the inherently offensive capabilities of both the Ox guard and the Plow Guard – Both threaten your opponent with the tip of your sword while simultaneously closing off one of your openings and allowing you to deflect incoming thrusts. Whenever you wind,
make sure that you are always in either Plow or Ox, on either side, and be sure to transition between
them as the situation demands.

**Grappling**
Grappling at the sword can be thought of as an equivalent to a ‘clinch’ in a boxing match. Grappling
techniques are very powerful tools, especially against someone who is not expecting them or trained
in their use. The Italian system more fully develops grappling techniques, and it can almost be
argued that the goal of the entire Italian system is to get past the sword of your opponent and enter
a grapple, where you are much safer from it.

Being in a grapple almost completely precludes your opponent’s ability to cut you. This is prime time
to get a hold on your opponent to control his blade and take him off balance to throw him to the
ground, or to manoeuvre your sword in to run him through. Other options include disarming your
foe or getting him into a joint-lock.

When in grappling distance, the long blade of your sword may prohibit you from utilizing it to it’s full
potential. This is why it’s a good idea to remember your sword’s pommel. The word pommel means
‘little-apple’ and is there to balance the sword, but it also serves as a nice clubbing weapon in it’s
own right. In fact, the modern term ‘to give someone a pummelling’ derives from the pommels on
swords. Remember the potential of your pommel, and also your elbows and knees whenever you
grapple at the sword.
Appendices

Anatomy of a Longsword

[Diagram showing parts of a longsword: Pommel, Grip, Guard/Cross, Strong, Weak, Tip/Point]
Animal Symbolism

Symbolism is very big in the Italian fighting systems, particularly using animals to represent the function of different aspects of a good swordsman. On the left is an illustration from Fiore dei Liberi’s 'Flower of battle', the Pisani-Dossi edition. On the right is a similar illustration from Fillipo Vadi’s 'Di Arte Gladiatoria Dimicandi', with his own set of symbolic images.

In Fiore’s system, above the head is a picture of a Lynx. With the lynx are some compasses (as in geometry and such). They represent academic or scholarly judgement. Objectivity and clear-sightedness. It was believed in Fiore’s day that the Lynx had the best eye-sight among all animals, and so it was chosen as a symbol of clear-judgement. Remember to be careful and wise in your actions, paying attention to the subtle aspects of fencing.

Underneath the swordsman is an Elephant with a tower on it’s back. This obviously represents strength, but also good posture. As long as the tower is vertical, it is stable. Pull the tower off-balance, and the elephant, no matter how strong, will fall. This represents a powerful principle - keep your balance, while fighting to unbalance your opponent.

By the swordsman’s right arm is a tiger (back then, they were considered 'spotted', not 'striped'). The tiger represents speed. Note that this is the top hand, and it is associated with quickness, not brute strength. Remember that the top hand is a guide in your attacks, not the provider of the power behind them.

By the left arm of the swordsman is a Lion. Here is the power behind your cuts - provided by the King of Beasts. Also, Lions are a symbol of Bravery or Courage. This is a reference to the principles I spoke
about in other parts of this manual, that of Commitment to your attack. Strike like you mean it, not half-heartedly.

The concluding verse here in Fiore's manuscript speaks of all 4 symbolic animals, that one should have virtues of all of them.

Strength/Balance/posture, Speed/Accuracy, Bravery/Power/Commitment, and Good Judgement/Skill. It is a good helping of all these traits, in balance, that make a good swordsman.

In Vadi's group of symbolism, there is a bit more detail as to specific parts of the body, as compared to the more general approach of Fiore. I believe both have merit.

Similar to Fiore, there is a compass on top of the swordsman's head. On the swordsman's right shoulder is the head of a bear. While my first impression of the bear is strength in breaking through an opponent's guard, a more precise interpretation from the verse is that the bear hunts. Your right shoulder connects to your whole right arm, which is usually your top hand. This represents that you should get your body into your movements and not restrict them - use the powerful muscles of the shoulder and right side in your attacks to force openings in your opponent's and exploit them.

The right hand itself is symbolized by a dragon. The sword-blade itself is represented by the dragons tail, which lashes. The dragon's head is about where the elbow is, and this to me says that your should make good use of your elbows when you fence close-distance. The verse accompanying this illustration is similar to Fiore's Lion, and speaks of Boldness.

The Left shoulder is a Ram. Here is your charging power. Just as rams butt each other forcefully, so your left shoulder should be used to smash into your opponent to get him off balance.

The left hand is a dog. The verse talks of the left hand controlling the point(remember when you use a 'levering action' with your sword, your right hand is your fulcrum, and your left hand controls the tip of the sword). The hound is a very swift animal. here, your left hand must be not only powerful(with power in the shoulder) but it must be swift also.

There is an eye next to Vadi's swordsman. The verse says 'The eye of the heart must stay alert, bold and full of providence.' This represents that awareness isn't just in what you see, but what you hear, and even more deeply, what you feel. Also, don't focus directly on your opponent, but let your vision be full of everything you can take in. Your ability to see movement and react to it is better when you do this. In Guy Windsor's book, 'The Swordsman's Companion', he references doing this as well. To quote him, he says "You should not stare at your opponent's face or sword, but look through him...this allows you to use your scotopic vision(using the retinal rod cells), which is much faster and more sensitive to movement than your photopic vision(using the retinal cone cells)."

The knees of the swordsman are represented by a pair of keys. This is discussed in another part of this manual.

The feet of the swordsman are represented by a Sun and a Tower. Since in those days the sun was viewed as moving around the earth, this describes that your footwork should be circular in nature. While I advocate using both linear and circular footwork, I find that circular footwork is more useful overall. The tower has a similar meaning to Fiore's tower on the elephant's back. I don't think this depiction is side-specific. Rather I interpret it as saying you should always be strong and grounded through one foot, while the other moves circularly.
My workout

When working out, we need to keep in mind that there are two types of muscle fibers - Slow Twitch and Fast Twitch. Slow twitch muscles fibers are those used to maintain a movement or extension, and Fast Twitch fibers are those used for short durations, such as while sprinting or jumping. We need to train both types to be a good swordsman.

Another thing to keep in mind is that how much force our muscles can produce is directly hindered by how much tension we carry around with us. Often, people carry tension in multiple muscle groups with them throughout their normal day to day activities. By increasing how relaxed we are normally, we can increase how strong we are simultaneously.

Lastly, our muscles are far stronger than we realize. Whenever we move a muscle, the fibers will often fire out of sync with one another. This is actually a good thing, as at 100%, our muscles are capable of tearing themselves off of the bones, or tearing the tendons and connective tissues between them. By strengthening the joints and being more flexible and relaxed, we increase how much our muscles can work without damaging our bodies.

Since training with weights stresses the joints, works the muscles in isolation, and usually builds tension, I don't recommend it. Done properly, it can be very beneficial, however with an exercise routine like this one, it is largely superfluous.

Upper Body Workout

Set a timer to buzz every 30 seconds, or have a clock handy that you can look at. Then Do the following:

Pushups

Do as many as you can, emphasizing good form in 30 seconds. Then Rest for 30 seconds.

Repeat, this time with the hands very close together on the floor. Remember good form. Rest for 30 seconds.

Repeat again, this time with hands very far apart. Rest again, this time for 1 minute.

Now do as many clap-pushups as you can in 30 seconds, and rest for 1 minute.

Now do 10 pushups, taking 30 seconds for each one, 15 seconds down, and 15 seconds back up. Rest for 2-3 minutes.

Plank Position

Plank position is a yoga pose. I have modified it for our uses. From pushup position, turn your body sideways and extend one arm straight up into the air, with the other arm extended as well in line with the other arm. Keep your body as straight as possible making sure your head is in line with your spine. Hold this for 1 minute on each side.
Abdominal Work

Using the same timer from your upper-body workout, do the following abdominal work. As a rule, try to keep your abs held in as flat as possible.

Crunches

Lay on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, hands behind your head. Crunches involve lifting the head and shoulders off the floor, then releasing back down. Do not lift the whole back off the floor, this is bad for the lumbar spine. Do as many as you can in 30 seconds, then rest for 30 seconds.

Now place your left foot on your right knee. Touch your right elbow to your left knee as many times as possible in 30 seconds. Rest for 30 seconds.

Switch to place your right foot on your left knee and touch your left shoulder to your right knee as many times as possible in 30 seconds. Rest for 30 seconds.

Now do bicycle crunches. Lifting your still bent legs into the air along with your head and shoulders, alternate as quickly as possible between touching your left elbow to your right knee and touching your right elbow to your left knee as many times as possible in 30 seconds. Rest for 1 and 1/2 minutes.

The last ab work we will do is to lay flat on your back with your arms extended above your head and your legs straight. Lift your legs, keeping them as straight as possible about 1-2 inches off the ground, as well as your arms, head, and shoulders. Hold this position for 1 minute.
About the Author

Adam Royal Sharp

Ever since I was a little boy I remember dreaming of knights slaying dragons and fighting off villains in epic sword bouts. My favorite movie of all time is ‘The Princess Bride’ (an even better book than movie actually), and my favorite scene is the duel atop the cliffs of insanity between Inigo and Westley, the Man in Black. I suppose I have my parents to thank for my interest in Honor, Loyalty, and Duty, traits that I associate with a true swordsman.

When I was 12 I began serious study of martial arts. Up until then I had only wrestled (albeit rather passionately) with my older brother and my father. When I was 12 I met a man named Aaron Tartrasus, who attended my church. He was a phenomenal martial artist, both unarmed and with a sword. He eventually applied to be a Navy Seal, but ended up closing off that path in life as he was called to be a Bishop in the Church. That’s probably the biggest thing I remember about him – his sense of duty, honor, respect, and loyalty to God. For about 3 years I trained with him off an on, in my yard, after church, on campouts, etc. He gave me my first real martial lessons.

Later, I met a man named John Alston, a convert to our church. He was a Vietnam veteran, Private First Class, but also a CIA licensed Special Forces Lieutenant. He carries a license with him that allows him to legally carry any weapon on his person at any time. Up until about 2 years ago I trained with him, mostly in machete fighting, but also in hand-to-hand combat. He inspired me as he was not very big at all, probably about 5’3 and 120 lbs. Very frail looking. He worked as a security guard however, and I wouldn’t dare mess with him, he had such presence, but also a gentle, easy-going manner.

In middle school and High School I wrestled, but my heart wasn’t in it. I took what I found to be worthwhile and forgot the rest. Wrestling for points was not what I wanted to do. My coach was experienced in Brazilian JiuJitsu however, and sometimes after practice he’d show us some of the stuff he learned studying that. Also, I played water polo on the varsity level and I swam competitively on the swim team all throughout highschool- this is where I attribute my physical fitness to.

When I was 17, I began my study of Aikido at a local dojo. The teacher there, Florian Tan, is possibly one of the men I respect and admire most above all others. He’s been a martial artist his whole life and began studying Aikido about 17 years ago. He’s studied with a number of great martial artists, not the least of which was Peter Ralston, the only white man to ever win the all Asia martial art open competition. He has also studied and practiced Tai Chi, Systema, Karate, Muay Thai, Iaido, and others. I train at the dojo with him whenever I can, sometimes 5 days a week(my schedule permitting) but most of the time 3 days or so a week. At the dojo I’ve met other martial artists as
well, the most significant is an ex-marine and black belt ranking practitioner of JuJutsu named Rob, and also a man named Mike, who is a 5th dan in Kempo.

I got into European swordsmanship as a natural extension of my passion for the sword and the ideals it represents. Online study led me to organizations like SCA(which I’m not terribly fond of) and ARMA. I met local practitioners at local Renaissance Faires. Soon, my desire was enough that I and Tom got some wooden wasters, got some books, and began our practice. We’ve found translations of manuals by Ringeck, Meyer, Peter Von Danzig and others in the Liechtenauer tradition, and also Fillipo Vadi and Fiore de Liberi. In addition to that we have purchased books by well known modern sword enthusiasts such as John Clements, Christian Tobler, and Guy Windsor. That was about 2 years ago. This is where I am now. I don’t claim to be a master, and to be honest, putting this site up is almost more for me than for anyone else, as it helps me grow and learn more of myself. Because I’m forcing myself to organize everything into this ebook, it has really illustrated how much I’ve learned, how much I’ve grown, and how much I have yet to grow and learn. Take it for what you will, I hope you enjoy it.

‘Achilles’ – Brave Mascot of the Trueswordsman
Stylistic Disclaimer

Many practitioners of western martial traditions stress the differences between the Italian and the German system, and indeed, there are many differences, but there are also a good number of differences between some of the German masters who all claim to teach Liechtenauer's system. I interpret these as the differences among the individual teachers, and what they've had success with, and what their individual preferences and personalities reflect based on both culture and personal taste and experience. There are those who have suggested that I stick to either German System, or Italian, and those who go further by saying I shouldn't even include material at all on certain masters with others as the time era was different(example: Meyer in the 1600's, Dobringer in the 1400s). While I see how this is good advice in a sense, I don't feel it's for what I'm trying to do.

What I'm trying to do, with this site, is to show MY system. Show how I fight with and how I've learned the longsword. It was evident that when Fiore wrote his manuals on martial arts, he didn't just hash out what others taught him - he showed them what he learned. He even tells us that he studied under many different masters of both German and Italian background. The same can be said for Liechtenauer himself who studied under many masters from many different geographic locations. A more contemporary martial artist would be Morihei Ueshiba, Jigoro Kano, or especially Bruce Lee, even Ed Parker... they studied many different martial arts, from many different people, and they taught what they learned, not what they were taught.

At the same time though, not everybody is the same. Not everybody is going to feel exactly the same way about every technique as I do. Therefore, I think it is important to show some of the variations on how different masters did different things. This is why I've made a lot of specific references to differences in the Italian and German systems. I'm not trying to show both at once, or even a mixture of the two. But in order to keep it valid, to show I'm not just coming up with this stuff from thin air, and also to give newcomers more power over what works for them, I've made the references I have. I want people to be able to work out a system for themselves, with my manual here online as either a starting point, or at least a good reference.

I'm trying to stay away from 'This is how I do it, because Talhoffer's manual shows and describes it this way and I like Talhoffer most.' Both the Italian and German masters had the opinion that other masters wouldn't even be fit students, let alone masters. I'm trying not to be so closed minded. In the end, one must train what works for them individually, and the only way to find out what works best for you is to try it all.

I hope this helps clarify my intent somewhat, as not an overview of a particular master or system, but a synthesis of what I've learned, while giving due credit to where I learned it. It's not perfect, it's still growing and changing, but that is the nature of things. The words and the specifics will change as time goes one, but the principles will not. I hope I'm on my way to doing them justice.

-Adam