

# Ironwood Student Handbook

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Strength. Flexibility. Growth.

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This handbook is intended as an easy reference companion  
and not intended to be a replacement for structured in-person lessons,  
or as a complete guide to the study of Historical Martial Arts.

The contents of this handbook are subject to change over time. Appropriate effort will be made to update this document, and make updated versions readily available to all members.

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# Introduction

“Strength. Flexibility. Growth.”  
– *Ironwood Sword School motto*

Welcome to Ironwood Sword School. We’re excited to start your sword journey with you!

Ironwood Sword School was established in September 2014 by Robert MacLeod, and has since helped hundreds of students become part of a long lineage of tradition, chivalry, and honour.

At Ironwood, we teach a Medieval German Combat system that is based on real historical martial arts manuals or “Fechtbücher”, created by real historical figures and fencing masters of the Late Medieval, German Renaissance, and early modern periods. The art is commonly referred to as the “Kunst des Fechtens” — the Art of Combat, or “KdF” for short.

The founder of this tradition is Johannes Lichtenauer, who likely lived in the 1400s, or possibly as early as the 1300s, in what was, at the time, the Holy Roman Empire.

Little is known about the man himself, but his legacy was acclaimed in many fencing treatises written over the next few hundred years. Many authors refer to him as the grandmaster of the Art, but only one instance survives of a description of his life:

*"Master Liechtenauer learnt and mastered the Art in a thorough and rightful way, but he did not invent and put together this Art (as was just stated). Instead, he traveled and searched many countries with the will of learning and mastering this rightful and true Art."*  
– *Pol Hausbuch (MS 3227a)*

Lichtenauer, himself, did not write down any manual that we are aware of. Instead, he preserved his combat knowledge in a cryptic poem called the “Zettel”, which was handed down orally, and later written down and expanded upon by others who were a part of his tradition. It is from those secondary sources that we learn the secrets of the KdF.

The Zettel describes advanced techniques meant to overcome the common fencer in a variety of combat situations, including longsword, shortsword, spear, wrestling, and mounted combat. Because of the complexity of translating texts from Middle/Early New High German and the rarity of intact surviving material, the true nature and depth of KdF is an ongoing and exciting discussion — an adventure which you are now a part of!

## Prologue of the Zettel

*Young knight, learn  
to love god and revere women;  
thus your honor will grow.  
Practice knighthood and learn  
the Art that dignifies you,  
and brings you honor in wars.  
Be a good grappler in wrestling;  
lance, spear, sword, and messer  
handle manfully,  
and foil them in your opponent's hands.  
Strike in and hasten forth;  
rush to, let it hit, or go by.  
Thus those with wisdom, the ones who  
are revered, will envy him.  
This you should grasp:  
All arts have length and measure.*

*Translated by Christian Tobler from Cod 44A8 "Pseudo-Peter von Danzig" (1452)*

Though steeped in history, Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA) as we know it today is a relatively new thing, only surfacing in the last several decades. Unlike in martial arts with a living lineage, which have been handed down continuously for generations, those who study HEMA must research and revive something which was lost for centuries. Yet, this renewed interest in authentic Medieval and Renaissance fighting styles has spawned a vast community across the globe, likely numbering in the tens of thousands.

As a community, HEMA has much to offer. People train for all sorts of reasons: discipline, fitness, camaraderie, competition, historical study — and of course for fun! No experience is required to get started; whether you are a serious historian, an avid fantasy fan, curious to try something new, or looking to take your martial arts experience to the next level, you are always welcome here!

Ironwood hosts regular classes and special events, and our members frequently travel to other schools for workshops and tournaments. Our instructors have years (or even decades) of experience, and our members all work to support each other to become better students, teachers, martial artists, and members of society.

# Rules of the Salle D'Armes

We at Ironwood Sword School aim to create a safe, welcoming, and accessible space (or "Salle") for people from all walks of life to practice HEMA. We ask that our students, teachers, and guests follow a code of conduct that contributes to this aim.

The first rule of the Salle is:

**Safety first.**

The second rule of the Salle is:

**Always respect yourself, your instructor, and your fellow students.**

## GENERAL RULES

- Never touch or pick up a weapon unless you are instructed to, or have been given permission.
- Always treat any training weapon as if it were a real weapon.
- Hold and carry the weapon at all times as if it were sharp.
- Never rest the point of a weapon on or in the ground.
- Never hit anything with a weapon that is not a pell or a properly equipped training partner.
- Be careful to lay down weapons so they will not fall or cause a danger to others.
- No play fighting – ever!
- Stop and walk away if something makes you angry.
- Always train with intent and a focus on control.
- Remember, partner drills are cooperative drills. Sometimes that means being hit; sometimes that means being the "Buffalo" and attacking with full intent so your partner can properly execute their technique.
- Always demonstrate good sportsmanship.
- Anyone has the right to call a halt at any time for safety reasons. If a halt is called for any reason, everyone engaged in any kind of practice, drill, or sparring must stop immediately. Drills and sparring are not to resume until an instructor determines the situation is clear.

Instructors reserve the right to remove anyone from the Salle D'Armes at any time if they feel said person is not following the code of conduct, or is otherwise endangering themselves or others.

## **RULES FOR EQUIPMENT**

Any student who engages in the practices below without following these requirements is solely responsible for any injuries resulting from their actions.

Instructors may require specific equipment for practice beyond what is listed below. Instructors have final say on whether a piece of equipment meets the minimum standards.

All equipment must be in good condition. We all have a responsibility to spot equipment defects and malfunctions before they become a risk, both for ourselves and others. When in doubt, ask the instructor to check equipment for quality.

### **Attending Classes**

- People with long hair must keep it tied back during training.
- Jewellery or other adornments which may choke a person, or catch a weapon/person and become dangerous must be removed for training.
- Clothing should be loose, modest, comfortable, and allow freedom of movement.
- No open-toed shoes are allowed for training.
- A pair of clean, non-marking, flat-soled training shoes must be worn indoors.

### **Regular Solo Drills**

As above with the addition of:

- Blunt training weapons are required and may be provided.
- You can BYOB (Bring Your Own Blade) but it must be approved by an instructor.
- Sword trainers must be maintained. Edges must be filed to remove nicks and burrs; blades should be checked regularly for potential weakness; steel blades & parts should be kept oiled and rust free.
- Work/padded gloves are recommended.

### **Pairs Drills & Boffer (Foam Sword) Sparring**

As above with the addition of:

- Padded or rigid gloves/gauntlets recommended.
- Fencing mask or helm as indicated by instructor (helms must have full eye protection).
- Rigid throat protection (gorget) as indicated by instructor.
- Back of the head protection recommended.

## Sparring Games/Constraint-Led Sparring

As above with the addition of:

- Rigid throat protection (gorget) required.
- Heavy padded or rigid gloves/gauntlets required.
- Gambeson or some type of padded jacket required.
- Rigid elbow and/or forearm protection recommended.
- Groin protection recommended.
- Chest protector (plastron) recommended.
- Back of the head protection highly recommended.

## Free Sparring

As above with the addition of:

- Rigid elbow and/or forearm protection required.
- Groin and chest protection is required.
- Back of the head protection required.
- Rigid knee and shin protection is required.
- Gambeson must have no openings at the armpits

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SCHOOL

Students of the martial arts are held to a higher standard than others and are expected to take personal responsibility for their actions. Students are expected to act appropriately and with restraint at all times, both in and outside of the Salle. Students have a moral responsibility never to use their training for aggression or in the service of ego.

Like the knights of old, students are expected to work tirelessly for the betterment of themselves and society. This idea is common in all times and to all martial arts, both Eastern and Western, as evidenced by the following quote from the 16th century German fencing master, Joachim Meyer:

*“Observe, if you will learn to fight artfully, you should attend to these verses with diligence. A combatant shall conduct himself properly, not be a boaster, gamer, or toper, and also not swear or blaspheme, and shall not be ashamed to learn. Godfearing, modest, also calm, especially on the day when he shall fight; be temperate, show honour to the old, and also to womenfolk. Attend furthermore: all virtue, honour, and manliness, you shall cultivate at all times, so that you can serve with honour emperor, king, prince, and lord, and also be useful to the fatherland, and not a disgrace to your native country.” (Joachim Meyer 1570)*

# Ironwood Rank Structure

*All items (except restrictions)  
are assumed to be inclusive of those described in preceding ranks.*

*Outside of formal ranks, some members are awarded honorifics,  
such as "Master at Arms", "Senior Instructor", or novelty guest titles for workshops/events.*

## Rank 0 – Beginner

*Not an official rank, as no rank has been earned.*

**Prerequisites** *(what you need before you can hold this rank):*

- Must complete registration form
- Must sign off on the Rules of the Salle
- Must sign off on a liability waiver
- Beginners course fee must be paid in full in advance

**Gear Requirements** *(minimum kit you need to train at this rank):*

- "Attending Classes" Equipment

**Permissions** *(what you can do at this rank):*

- Attend 8-week introductory courses
- Perform pairs drills and boffer sparring only as instructed
- May strike pells
- May borrow school loaner equipment as required
- May use steel for pairs drills under instructor supervision

**Responsibilities** *(what is expected of members holding this rank):*

- Attend a minimum of six classes (while staying current with the curriculum)
- Demonstrate a willingness to learn
- Demonstrate ability to abide by the Rules of the Salle

**Restrictions** *(what you cannot do at this rank):*

- No steel sparring or sparring games/constraint-led sparring in the school
- No cutting with sharps in the school
- May not represent Ironwood at any events (unless with clear instructor approval)

## Beginner Curriculum

This is the primary content of our 8-week Beginner's Course. Other topics may be discussed, but these are the fundamentals which will be tested for graduation to the rank of *Neuling*.

### Footwork

- Passing Steps
- Gathering Steps
- Transverse Steps
- Slope Pass
- Compass Step

### Basic Theory

- How to hold a sword
  - Basic "Hammer" Grip
  - Thumb Grip
  - Handshake Grip
- Parts of the sword

### Longsword Techniques

- Guards
  - Vom Tag
  - Nebenhut
  - Ochs
  - Langenort/Langort
  - Pflug
  - Schrankhut
  - English Guard
  - Alber
  - Kron
  - Eisenport
- Basic long edge cuts
  - Oberhau
  - Mittelhau
  - Unterhau
- Thrusts
- The Guards Drill
- The Guard Flow Drill
- Meyer's Square/Cross 1 & 2
- Throwing to the low hangar
- Throwing to the bind
- Zornhau
- Zornort
- The 1st Winden

## Testing from Beginner to Neuling

The test occurs during the final class of the beginner's course. It is administered by two or more Ironwood instructors. The class is tested as a group, though individuals may be asked questions or requested to perform a demonstration directly. The presiding instructors will confer and make a final call on who passes.

# Rank 1 – Neuling / Novice

*A scholar in the making.*

**Prerequisites** (*what you need before you can test into this rank*):

- Must successfully graduate from 8-week beginners course

**Gear Requirements** (*minimum kit you need to train at this rank*):

- 350N (or greater) fencing mask
- A rigid gorget (throat/neck protector)
- A training-safe longsword (nylon is acceptable)

**Symbol of Rank** (*how you can show others that you hold this rank*):

- Neuling Certificate
- Ironwood Patch with a Navy Blue Background and White Thread\*

*\*Your patch is only awarded once you meet the following, as determined by an instructor:*

- Own kit sufficient for Free Sparring
- Have sufficient sparring experience
- Demonstrate that those who train with you benefit from sparring you



**Permissions** (*what you can do at this rank*):

- 3-month allowance during which you may borrow gear while acquiring your own
- Free sparring with patched members with proper kit (or anyone if you're patched)
- Pairs drills with steel, and boffer sparring with any members
- Represent Ironwood at social & educational events (and competitive events if patched)
- Cut with sharps under Rank 2+ supervision
- Pay-as-you-go

**Responsibilities** (*what is expected of members holding this rank*):

- Make earnest effort to develop as a student through regular practice, and accumulation of the necessary knowledge and equipment to proceed to the next rank
- Provide your instructors with at least 3 months notice when you are interested in testing for your next rank (*Freifechter*)
- Before one's first tournament outside the school, seek out a coach of Rank 2+

**Restrictions** (*what you cannot do at this rank*):

- No representing Ironwood at competitive events outside the school (unless with clear instructor or coach approval)
- No borrowing required gear after 3 months at this rank (unless waiting for delivery of own equipment, or due to recently discovered defect in own gear)

# Neuling Curriculum

Upon earning the rank of *Neuling*, a student may attend general classes at their own pace. When a student has gained sufficient experience with the *Neuling* curriculum, they may test for their next rank (*Freifechter*).

This curriculum is inclusive of items from the previous rank, though students will be held to a higher standard when testing those fundamentals. Students should also have the ability to demonstrate competency, fluency, and safety in a free sparring context.

## Footwork

- Double Step/Shifts
- Lunge

## Wrestling

- Basic breakfalls (back and front)
- Ringeck's Drei Ringen
- Figure 4s/the Keys

## Dagger

- Basic Grips and Guards
  - Low Guard (Forward grip)
  - Middle/Side Guard (Reverse grip)
  - High Guard (Reverse grip)
  - Double Grip Guard
- Basic Attacks
  - Reverse Grip Oberhau
  - Reverse Grip Mittelhau
  - Forward Grip Unterhau/Italian Thrust
  - Forward Grip Oberhau/French Thrust
- Basic Plays
  - Counters/Disarms against basic attacks, with and without a dagger
  - Counters against counters while attacking with a dagger
- Basic Dagger Drill
  - High Guard, Right Oberhau between collarbone
  - Side Guard, Left Mittelhau to throat, rip back
  - High Guard, Vertical Oberhau to chest, pull back with offhand assist
  - Low Guard, Right Unterhau under ribs, pull back with offhand assist
  - Low Guard, Right Oberhau to chest, pull back into Double Grip Guard
  - Reload to High Guard and repeat

## Longsword Techniques

- The Meisterhau
  - Zornhau
  - Krumphau
  - Zwerchau
  - Schielhau
  - Scheitelhau
- Plays of the Zorn
  - Zornort
  - 1st Winden
  - Zucken
  - Abnehmen
  - Schnappen
  - Durchwechseln
  - Duplieren
  - Mutieren
- Crashing Plays
  - Ringen Am Schwert
    - Suppressing the arms
    - Throws
  - Draw & attack with dagger
  - Pommel Strikes
  - Disarms
  - Hende Drucken
  - Half-Swording
- Short edge cuts
- Kronhau
- The 24 Winden
- The Fehler
- Sprechfenster
- Throwing to the high & low hangars
- Throwing any cut from any guard

## Advanced Theory

- Binds/Blade Engagements
  - 3 ways to win in a bind
  - Soft/Hard binds
  - Fühlen
- The Drei Wunder (Three Wounders; cuts, slices, thrusts)
- Vier Leger/Vier Versetzen
- Primary versus Secondary Guards
- Nachreisen
- Absetzen/Ansetzen
- Vor, Nacht, Indes
- Zufechten, Krieg, Abzug
- Ability to translate most, if not all, of the glossary section of this handbook
- Silver's True/False Times (Time of the Hand/Body/Foot/Feet)
- The history of Kunst des Fechtens

## Testing from Neuling to Freifechter

A student should express their intent to test for the “prize” of *Freifechter* with at least 3 months' notice for their instructors to determine a training plan. Only 1 student may take their test at a time. A partner will be provided for paired techniques, and the student may direct their partner to act as is necessary. For crashing and dagger plays, students should prepare to demonstrate one of each type of their choosing. The test has three sections:

1. Historical, Theoretical, and Foundational Knowledge (*solo*)
2. Practical Skills Demonstrations (*paired*)
3. Longsword & Dagger Sparring (*minimum 3 bouts of 2 minute durations*)

## Rank 2 – Freifechter / Free Fencer

*Strength.*

**Prerequisites** (*what you need before you can test into this rank*):

- Minimum 10 months at Rank 1
- Provide your instructor with minimum 3 months notice of your intent to test
- Receive nomination for testing from a Rank 3+ member
- Receive permission for testing from the Rank 4 member
- Own kit sufficient for free sparring with steel

**Gear Requirements** (*minimum kit you need to train at this rank*):

- “Free Sparring” Equipment

**Symbol of Rank** (*how you can show others that you hold this rank*):

- Freifechter Certificate
- Ironwood Patch with a Light Blue Background and Black Thread
- Maroon Instructor’s T-Shirt (if instructing)



**Permissions** (*what you can do at this rank*):

- Borrow necessary equipment (only when own kit has malfunctions)
- Represent Ironwood at any and all events
- Assist with instructing Ironwood classes
- Lead workshops in and outside of the school

**Responsibilities** (*what is expected of members holding this rank*):

- Make earnest effort to develop as a student through regular practice, and accumulation of the necessary knowledge and equipment to proceed to the next rank
- Self-directed learning, study, research, and solo practice outside of class.
- Encourage and prepare lower rank members for advancement at all times

**Restrictions** (*what you cannot do at this rank*):

- No teaching/leading classes solo (unless with clear instructor approval)

## Freifechter Curriculum

Upon earning the rank of *Freifechter*, a student must advance their core training while adventuring out into new and self-directed forms of involvement. This curriculum is inclusive of items from the previous ranks, though students will be held to a higher standard when testing those fundamentals.

To become an *Eisenknecht*, a student must pass a **Test**. The specifics about the test portion of advancing to Eisenknecht will be disclosed at a later date. It will challenge a student's advanced *KdF* skills and knowledge in an individual exam setting.

They must also complete **9 Feats** of their own choosing, selecting 3 from each of the following categories: **Strength**, **Flexibility**, and **Growth**. New feats may be created by current *Eisenknechts* and the *Holzknicht* at any time, and students are encouraged to suggest feats of their own invention for consideration.

Finally, a student must pass an **Ordeal**, a significant feat which will be designed in conference with senior members to suit the student's unique goals in the historical martial arts community. Ordeals will be designed to be completable within a year's time.

### List of Feats

Some feats may be repeated, or accepted in multiple categories. Feats accomplished prior to becoming a freifechter may be accepted. Current Eisenknechts will determine when a feat has been accomplished, and students must keep a record. Discuss with your instructor if you are uncertain about how to accomplish a feat, or would like to suggest a new feat.

#### Feats of Strength

*Feats which demonstrate a member's martial prowess.*

- Compete in your first HEMA tournament
- Place First, Second, or Third in a HEMA tournament
- Demonstrate sparring proficiency in a weapon other than longsword and dagger
- Demonstrate cutting proficiency with a sharp blade
- "10,000 strikes": document the practice of a particular move for 10k iterations.
- Demonstrate flawless understanding/translation of all glossary terms
- Read 10 HEMA sources & recite knowledge of each
- Forge a weapon or piece of armour of your own
- Compete in an archery tournament
- Head judge at a tournament outside of Ironwood

## Feats of Flexibility

*Feats which demonstrate a member's ability and willingness to serve and learn from others.*

- Assist with instructing a beginner's course
- Teach at least 10 classes outside of the beginner's course
- Develop and teach a workshop in or outside the school
- Attend a HEMA workshop event outside the school
- Be a guest instructor for another school
- Attend 5 classes total at other longsword schools
- Coach a fighter leading up to and during a tournament
- Write an article/paper on HEMA
- Produce a video for Ironwood on HEMA tactics, gear review, etc.
- Earn a victory in a scored match against a different weapon and system than ours
- Forge a weapon or piece of armour for another person
- Invent a novel ruleset, sparring game, or martial challenge and put into practice
- Demonstrate advanced knowledge of a particular treatise or weapon system

## Feats of Growth

*Feats which demonstrate service to the school and the community at large.*

- Serve on the Council of Things to Come for a full year
- Assist with a public Ironwood demo booth for a full day event
- Assist with running a workshop for the public
- Complete a project for marketing, such as a promo video, poster design, etc.
- Volunteer for at least a full day at an HMA event locally or abroad
- Head judge at a tournament in our outside the school
- Serve as timekeeper/scorekeeper/table staff at a tournament
- One of your students earns their *freifechter* rank
- Get your First Aid certification
- Organize a tournament or league within the school itself
- Perform a significant act of public relations for the school, such as a TV or podcast interview, magazine photo shoot, etc.

## Rank 3 – Eisenknecht / Servant of Iron

### *Flexibility.*

#### **Prerequisites** *(what you need before you can test into this rank):*

- Minimum 1 year at Rank 2
- Must have at least moderate experience with fencers/styles from outside the school
- Must receive nomination to test from a Rank 3+ member
- Must receive permission to test from the Rank 4 member

#### **Symbol of Rank** *(how you can show others that you hold this rank):*

- Eisenknecht Certificate
- Ironwood Patch with a Red Background and Silver Thread
- Maroon Instructor's T-Shirt (if instructing)



#### **Gear Requirements** *(minimum kit you need to train at this rank):*

- Must own and carry a well-maintained first aid kit when instructing
- Loaners as required for your location and curriculum when instructing

#### **Permissions** *(what you can do at this rank):*

- Attend leadership meetings and confer on topics affecting the overall school
- Lead both classes and workshops in the world at large
- Open new Ironwood chapters with permission of Rank 4
- Remove students from a class or event for not abiding by the Rules of the Salle

#### **Responsibilities** *(what is expected of members holding this rank):*

- Encourage and prepare lower rank members for advancement at all times
- Provide regular reports to other Rank 3+ members on school activities
- Assist in coordinating any school-wide events and mandates

## Rank 4 – Holzknecht / Servant of Wood / Head Instructor

*Growth.*

**Prerequisites** (*what you need before you can hold this rank*):

- Current Rank 4 member retires, or chooses to promote an additional Rank 4
- You are a currently practicing Rank 3

**Symbol of Rank** (*how you can show others that you hold this rank*):

- Round double dragon pin
- Ironwood Patch with a Navy Blue Background and Gold Thread



**Gear Requirements** (*minimum kit you need to train at this rank*):

- N/A

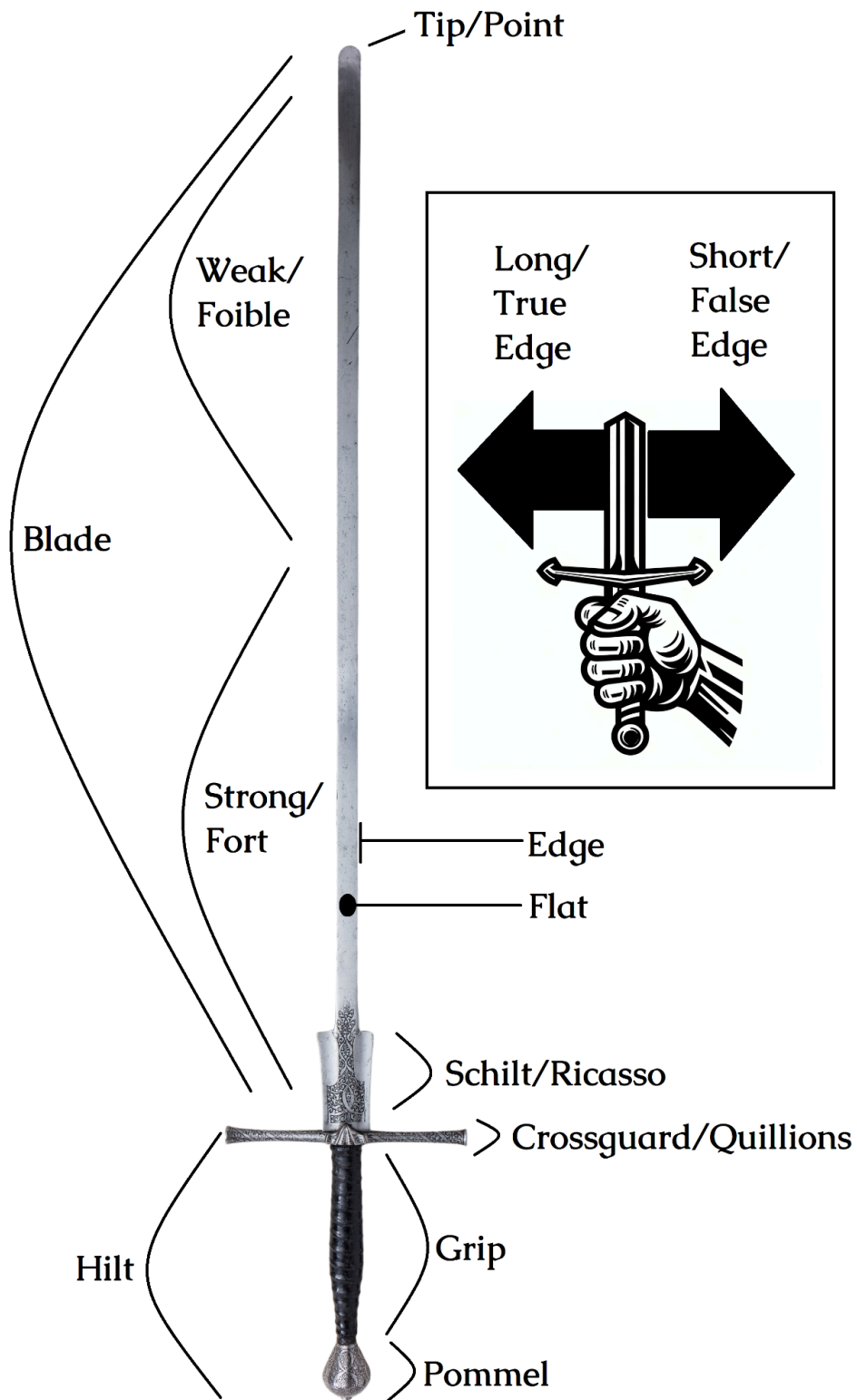
**Permissions** (*what you can do at this rank*):

- Update rules, ranks, and regulations, unless otherwise specified.
- Attend and oversee all rank tests
- Veto power over events, marketing, curriculum, and any issue put to vote
- Permanently eject students from the school
- Grant and strip ranks from members regardless of the rank requirements previously described

**Responsibilities** (*what is expected of members holding this rank*):

- Encourage and prepare lower rank members for advancement at all times
- Oversee fiscal, insurance, and licensing requirements
- Ensure lower rank members are meeting their rank responsibilities
- Adjudicate all instructor rank progressions, and provide final say on all rank progressions

# Parts of a Longsword



Here illustrated is the anatomy of a “*federschwert*”, or *feather sword*, which is a commonly used blunt training sword. It offers great flexibility, is light, and is modeled after historical precedents.

A traditional sharp longsword has a long triangular blade, along which you may find a groove called a “*fuller*”. Some blacksmiths make training-safe blunt longswords in the classic design. The terminology in the diagram applies to both types of longsword, with the exception of the “*schilt*”, which is unique to the *feder*.

When holding a sword, the edge furthest from your wrist is the “long” edge. The edge nearest your wrist is the “short” edge.

# Glossary of Terms

This glossary of terms is neither exhaustive nor exact. There is much discussion about how best to translate the Middle/Early High German to modern English, and never are we graced by a 1-to-1 translation — not to mention the often cryptic and conflicting nature of the source material.

Below is a collection of some of the most acceptable translations for use within our school, and those which will be used for testing purposes.

You can find a pronunciation guide for many German terms at <https://www.academyofarms.com/audiodictionary/>



Abnehmen	Taking off, Cutting around
Absetzen	Setting aside
Abzug	Withdrawal, Retreat
Ansetzen	Setting on
Alber	The Fool, Fool's Guard
Bloßfechten	Shirt fencing, Open/Unarmoured fighting
Buffel	Buffalo
Duplieren	Doubling
Durchwecheln	Changing through, Disengaging
Drei Ringen	Three Wrestlings
Drei Wunder	Three Wounders
Eisenport	Iron Gate Guard
Fechtbuch	Fight book
Fechtschule	Fight/Fencing school
Federschwert	Feather sword
Fehler	Failer, Feint
Fühlen	Feeling
Halbschwert	Half-sword, Halfswording

Hauptstücke	Main techniques, Handworks
Hende Drucken	Hand pressing
Hengen	Hanging, The Hangers
Indes	In time, Meanwhile, During, In tempo
Krieg	The war/battle
Kron	Crown Guard
Krumphau	Crooked Hew
Kunst des Fechtens	Art of Fighting/Combat
Langenort/Langort	Longpoint
Meisterhau	Master/Secret cut/strike
Messer, Langes Messer	Knife, Long Knife
Meyer's Square/Cross	A diagram showing patterns of cuts to the four openings
Mittelhau	Middle Hew
Mortschlag, Mordhau	Murder Strike/Blow, Murder Hew
Mutieren	Mutating through, Transmuting
Nachreisen	Chasing, Traveling after, Following, Pursuing
Nach/Nacht	The after, Behind time, False time
Nebenhut	Tail Guard
Oberhau	Over/Overhead Hew, Cut from above
Ochs	Ox Guard
Pflug	Plow Guard
Ringen	Wrestling
Ringen Am Schwert	Wrestling at the sword
Scheitelhau	Scalping Hew
Schielhau	Squinting/Cockeyed Hew

Schild	Shield
Schnappen	Snapping
Schnitt	Slice
Schrankhut	Barrier Guard
Sprechfenster	Speaking window
Stich	Thrust
Unterhau	Under/Underhand Hew, Cut from below
Vier Leger	Four/Primary Bases/Lairs/Guards/Wards
Vier Versetzen	Four/Primary Displacements/Breakings/Offsettings/Parries
Vom Tag	High Guard, From the Sun/Roof, Guard of the Day
Vor	The before, Ahead of time, Initiative, True time
Wechsel	The Changer
Winden	Winding
Zettel	Recital
Zornhau	Wrath/Wrathful Hew
Zornhut	Wrath/Wrathful Guard
Zornort	Wrathful Point, Point of Wrath
Zucken	Twitch/Pulling/Withdrawing
Zufechten	The Onset, Approach, To fighting, To battle
Zwerchau	Thwart/Cross/Lateral Hew/Strike

**The Vier Leger and corresponding Vier Versetzen**

Vom Tag	Zwerchau
Ochs	Krumphau
Pflug	Schielhau
Alber	Scheitelhau

# Solo Drills

There are many ways to continue practicing and conditioning outside of class. You also do not need any fancy equipment. You can practice with just a sword — or even just a stick! You can even work fundamentals like footwork without anything at all.

Some general ways include watching your form in a mirror, or by analyzing a recording of yourself. You can also practice attacks against the air, or against a safe target like a pell. Below are a few specific exercises to help you keep up your training at home.

Remember to train safely, maintaining a reasonable distance from people and property. Be cautious about training in public especially, as many people do not know how to react when they see someone swinging a sword around by themselves. As we might say, “Ten people with swords in the park is a class. One person with a sword in the park is a call to the cops.”

## RIBBON CUTS

This is a drill where you alternate short and long edge cuts such that you draw a reminder ribbon-like shape on the air: 🎀

Start in Right Nebenhut or Right Eisenport. Throw a rising short edge cut from your lower right to upper left. Flow that into a long edge Right Oberhau with a step, following through until you are positioned in Left Nebenhut or Left Eisenport. Now throw a rising short edge cut from your lower left to upper right. Flow that into a long edge Left Oberhau with a step, following through until you are back in the starting position. Repeat.

## X-CUTS (or “BUTTERFLY CUTS”)

X-cuts are any pattern of cuts that alternate cutting across the diagonal lines between opposite openings. In simpler words: cutting an “X” shape in front of you. They are sometimes also called butterfly cuts, because some versions trace the shape of a butterfly’s wings.

You can experiment with different patterns to challenge yourself. Try mixing up long edge and short edge cuts, or combining oberhaus and unterhaus. You can also cut across the same line twice before switching sides.

## ZWER-ZWER-ZWOOP

This is a drill to improve your Zwerchau and Winden, specifically. Stand in a stable, sunken position with your feet shoulder width apart, holding the sword in thumb grip.

First, throw a Right Zwerchau. Then a Left Zwerchau.

Now, keeping your sword tip exactly where it is, wind your arms clockwise until they are in the Left Ochs position.

From here, throw a Left Zwerchau. Then a Right Zwerchau.

Once again keeping your sword tip exactly where it is, wind your arms counterclockwise until reaching the Right Ochs position.

Repeat.

## GUARD FLOW DRILL

These actions should flow together, and not be treated as discrete/separate movements.

1. Left Nebenhut
2. Left Eisenport
3. Alber
4. *Step left foot forward*
5. Right Eisenport
6. Right Nebenhut
7. Vom Tag
8. Right Ochs
9. Right Pflug
10. *Step back into* Left Pflug
11. Left Ochs
12. Kron
13. Pull back to Left Nebenhut

Repeat fluidly. You can even try practicing with your eyes closed, to focus on the feel of the movement.

## THE GUARDS DRILL modified from Tobler (2004, p. 48)

Take a step with every move.

### *(First Version)*

1. Begin in Vom Tag
2. *(Right Oberhau to)* Left Nebenhut
3. *(Left Mittelhau to)* Right Nebenhut
4. *(Right Unterhau to)* Lefts Ochs
5. *(thrust to)* Langenort/Langort
6. Left Pflug
7. Right Schrankhut
8. English Guard
9. Alber
10. Kron
11. Right Eisenport

### *(Mirrored Version)*

1. Begin in English Guard
2. *(Left Oberhau to)* Right Nebenhut
3. *(Right Mittelhau to)* Left Nebenhut
4. *(Left Unterhau to)* Right Ochs
5. *(thrust to)* Langenort/Langort
6. Right Pflug
7. Left Schrankhut
8. Vom Tag
9. Alber
10. Kron
11. Left Eisenport

## STRETCHES & PLYOMETRICS

Like our motto suggests, flexibility is just as important as strength. It's important to stretch before intense training, to avoid both short and long term injuries (especially for arms/wrists).

Some of our favourite stretches include the "spiderman stretch", "wringing the towel", "offering soup", and gently rotating all our joints from head to toe. Plyometrics are any exercise that strengthens ligaments and tendons specifically, such as "pogo jumps", "square hops", and "frog jumps". Consider adding a few flexibility exercises throughout your day!

## SWORD ARM EXERCISES

These are 3 one-handed conditioning exercises you can do using a sword (or sword-like object). You can change the difficulty of the exercise by moving your hand position further down the hilt. Always do these slowly, and focus on controlling the movement rather than doing it quickly. Be sure to train both arms equally.

1. **“Levering”**: holding the sword vertically, with your arm straight in front of you, in hammer or handshake grip, lower the tip forward until your arm and the sword form a straight line out from your shoulder. Raise the sword to the starting position, and repeat.
2. **“Windshield Wipers”**: holding the sword vertically, with your arm straight in front of you, in hammer or thumb grip, lower the tip to the left until the sword is parallel with the ground. Then rotate it back the other direction until the sword is parallel with the ground, with the tip pointing right. Raise the sword to the starting position, and repeat.
3. **“Circles/Spirals”**: holding the sword straight out in front of you, draw 10 tiny clockwise circles with the point, then do the same but counterclockwise. It can help to imagine you are tracing an object in the distance. Alternatively, start from a central point, and very gradually spiral outwards, then back inwards. Once you return to the central point, change directions and repeat.

## BALANCE DRILLS

Good balance equals good footwork and better overall control of your actions.

You can check your balance in many guards by lifting your toes off the ground. If you can't remain stable just on your heels, you may need to improve your form. For cuts, you can try throwing random cuts on the air while standing on one foot, or alternating feet after each throw.

Try mixing up some of the other drills we've discussed by performing them on one foot. Or, if stepping is required, step from one foot to the other. Be sure to hold each one-legged position for a moment, so you aren't relying on momentum instead of balance.

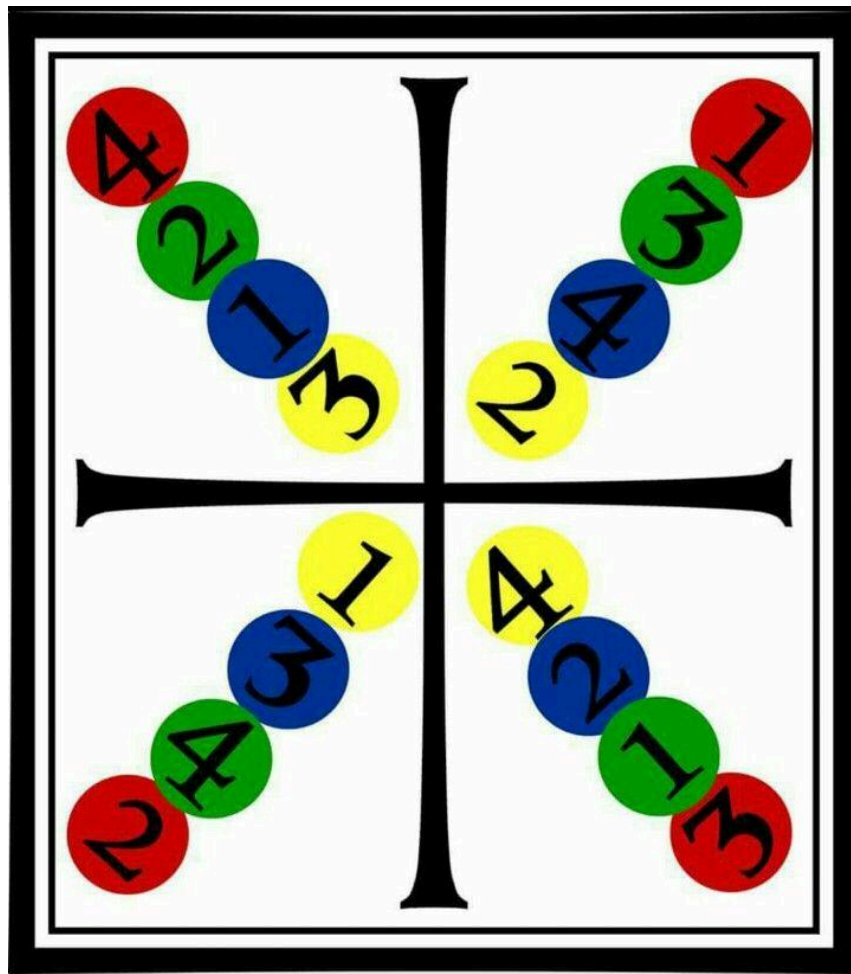
## THE MEYER'S SQUARE/CROSS

This is an attack drill based on a strategy described by Joachim Meyer, in which you throw a combo of four non-repeating cuts/thrusts to each of the four openings. There are a total of four of these four-move combos, which we refer to as Meyer's Square 1-4 respectively.

You may do this stationary, or with footwork. You may alternate between long edge cuts, short edge cuts, and/or thrusts as you see fit. We recommend starting with long edge cuts only.

In the diagram, each of the combos are grouped together by how far they are from the centre. Meyer's Square 1 is all the outermost numbers. Meyer's Square 2 is the second outermost. Meyer's Square 3 is the third outermost. Meyer's Square 4 is the innermost numbers.

The numbers in the diagram indicate the sequence of targets in a given combo. For example, Meyer's Square 1 has you attack to your upper right, then your lower left, then your lower right, then your upper left. *E.g. Right Oberhau, Left Unterhau, Right Unterhau, Left Oberhau*



# Additional Sources

As a new student, your best source of wisdom is going to be your instructors and senior fencers. But at some point, it's worth doing your own research — and it's thanks to curious minds that we discover new ways to enjoy our Art!

Many written and/or illustrated fencing manuals have been discovered (in part or in full), and they all help inform our understanding of both the theoretical and practical aspects of fencing with Medieval and Renaissance weapons. Most of the surviving manuscripts are curated by museums, universities, libraries, and others who archive and preserve the knowledge to share.


Different organizations use different systems of classification (similar to the Dewey Decimal System) to identify specific items in their collection. You will often see fencing manuals referred to by their categorical ID within that unique system. Many of the texts also have affectionate nicknames pertaining to an author, a location, or other interesting aspects.

Plus, many modern practitioners have created their own books and resources to help expand our knowledge and study of HEMA today. Here is but a small portion of sources, primarily focused on works related to the Lichtenauer tradition.

## HISTORICAL SOURCES

- “Pol Hausbuch” (MS 3227a), author unknown
  - *The oldest known description of the Lichtenauer tradition*
- “Talhofter Fechtbuch” (MS Chart.A.558), by Hans Talhofter
  - *The first of five text & illustrated manuals attributed to Talhofter*
- “Paulus Kal Fechtbuch” (MS 1825), by Paulus Kal
  - *A Zettel gloss using mostly illustrations as opposed to text.*
- “Codex Lew” (Cod.I.6.4<sup>o</sup>.3), by Jude Lew
  - *Lew’s Zettel gloss, as well as notes about other Lichtenauer fellows*
- “Glasgow Fechtbuch” (MS E.1939.65.341), author unknown
  - *Compendia of treatises from the Fellowship of Lichtenauer, and others*
- “Goliath Fechtbuch” (MS Germ.Quart.2020), by Georg Lemberger (unconfirmed)
  - *Compendia of treatises, most likely with a single illustrator, and a single scribe*
- “Gründtliche Beschreibung der... Kunst des Fechtens”, by Joachim Meyer
  - *Meyer’s 1570 treatise on his own expanded system of martial combat*
- “Opus Amplissimum de Arte Athletica” (MS Dresd.C.93), by Paulus Hector Mair
  - *Mair assembles vast amounts of existing texts to preserve the chivalric arts*

## MODERN SOURCES

- Books
  - “Fighting with the German Longsword” by Christian Tobler
    - *One of the first complete systems authored in modern times*
  - “Ringeck Danzig Lew: Long Sword” by Stephen Cheney
    - *Three Lichtenauer (Zettel) glosses side by side, with notes*
  - “The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany” by B. Ann Tlusty
    - *Contextualizes the nature of arms and combat in history*
- Websites/Blogs
  - Wiktenauer ([wiktenauer.com](http://wiktenauer.com))
    - *What Wikipedia is to general knowledge, Wiktenauer is to HEMA*
  - Keith Farrel’s Blog ([keithfarrell.net](http://keithfarrell.net))
    - *Keith is the longtime author of some of the most popular HEMA articles*
  - True Steel ([truesteeltraining.com](http://truesteeltraining.com))
    - *Paid online workshops by a variety of international HEMA instructors*
- Podcasts
  - “Fencing by the Book” hosted by Michael Chidester
    - *Several experts discuss various glosses of the Zettel’s longsword section*
  - “The Sword Guy Podcast” hosted by Guy Windsor
    - *Windsor, a prolific HMA author, interviews noteworthy guests*
  - “The Historical Fencer Podcast” hosted by Anders Linnard & Axel Petterson
    - *Two high-level competitive fencers discuss all things HEMA*
  - “By the Sword” hosted by Fran Lacuata
    - *Fran interviews guests, often touching on topics of inclusivity in HEMA*
- YouTube
  - Laurel City Historical Fencing ([@LaurelCityHistoricalFencing](https://www.instagram.com/LaurelCityHistoricalFencing))
    - *Thorough workshops and even entire courses, plus many fun drills*
  - Björn Rütter ([@BjornRuther](https://www.instagram.com/BjornRuther))
    - *An instructor from Germany with many great demonstrations*
  - Evanhut ([@Evanhut](https://www.instagram.com/Evanhut))
    - *A channel run by our very own instructor, Evan!*
  - Ironwood’s YouTube Channel ([@IronwoodSwordSchool](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...))
    - *We occasionally upload sparring footage and other content*
- TikTok
  - Veronica  ([@designcryptidhema](https://www.tiktok.com/@designcryptidhema))
  - Rob ([@robinswords](https://www.tiktok.com/@robinswords))
  - Dryadanthe ([@dryadanthe](https://www.tiktok.com/@dryadanthe))
  - ESRIMA\_DE\_DUELO ([@esgrima\\_de\\_duelo](https://www.tiktok.com/@esgrima_de_duelo))

# Gear Guide

Acquiring one's own kit is a point of pride for HEMA practitioners. In the early days of HEMA, reliable consistent options were few and far between. Nowadays, we are seeing rapid expansion across the market, with new inventions and vendors popping up all the time.

Because of this, choosing your gear can feel overwhelming. This guide will break down some of the common questions and give you some ideas about how to plan to build a kit you can be proud of!

## What equipment should I get first?

Everyone wants to get their sword first. But with only a sword, you cannot train safely with partners. At the same time, buying your full kit can take a lot of time and money.

Our suggestion is to budget for your initial training essentials and buy them all at once: a **sword**, a **mask**, a **gorget**, and **rigid gloves**. That way you can enjoy using your new sword safely in class, right away! It is also our requirement that once you reach the *Neuling* rank, you should acquire at least a sword, mask, and gorget within the next three months.

## How much does it cost to get a full kit?

Prices for gear are becoming more affordable all the time. But there are also many specialized options that may take longer to acquire, and cost more to manufacture. So the variability of pricing is ultimately dependent on what you want, and can afford.

For a basic drilling kit of gloves, mask, and sword, you might expect to pay around \$400-600.

For a complete tournament and sparring kit, you might expect to pay around \$1500-2000.

You can save money by purchasing secondhand gear, or going in on group orders where bulk discounts and/or reduced shipping can lower your costs further.

You should also consider that most people don't go out and buy a full kit right away. You need time to learn what you like, and many manufacturers need weeks or months to complete custom orders. Most people won't have a full kit for at least their first year, if not longer!

## What is a Newton Rating?

When shopping for gear, you will often see ratings for fabric given by “Newtons”. The most common levels are 350N, 800N, and 1600N, though others exist. This is a measurement of puncture resistance, or in other words: *how much pressure the fabric can take before tearing*. 1 Newton is equal to the amount of force it takes to move 1 kilogram of mass 1 metre in space. The Newton rating of a piece of equipment is tested using a specialized device.

## Why does Newton Rating matter?

99% of the time, it doesn't. The reason it matters is for that 1% chance that something could go wrong while training. Say you were sparring, and your opponent's sword happened to break mid-attack, there is a chance the sharp broken edge could cut you, and the result could be dangerous. Having a certified puncture resistance of 350N or higher makes it so you can rest assured the sharp edge will not make it through the fabric, in that rare case.

## What do mask ratings mean?

HEMA masks are typically modeled after Olympic fencing masks. Because of this, we have borrowed some of their terminology. If you see that a mask has an FIE or CE rank, it is referring to standards set by the International Fencing Federation.

Rating	Mesh Strength	Bib Strength
CE1 (350N)	Standard (~350N)	350N
CE2 (800N)	Stronger than CE1, but not specified	800N
FIE (1600N)	Highest (measured against 12kg weight)	1600N

Because HEMA masks typically use a higher rating for the steel mesh regardless of the fabric bib, many brands will simply advertise the Newton rating of the fabric bib, as it is assumed the steel is of higher grade. For instance, a 350N HEMA mask may already have steel mesh rated at the CE2 or FIE level, so it technically offers more protection than CE1 requires.

Some new HEMA-specific masks use hard plastic in addition to steel or fabric. There is no international rating system for this type of covering, but they often offer equivalent or superior protection.

### **How long will my equipment last?**

With proper care (and proper use), most pieces of equipment last anywhere from a few years to a few decades.

That said, it is important to remember that gear is MEANT to be used up. It sustains damage so that you don't. Expect that you will need to repair or replace items over time.

### **If I'm not using steel swords, do I still need a full kit?**

The answer actually depends on the intensity of the training, not the material of your sword. You should treat most swords equally: wood, nylon, and steel can all break bones. The only exception might be foam (aka "boffer") swords — for these you just need a mask and gloves, even for sparring.

For everything else, you need to scale your equipment based on the intensity of training, considering things such as speed, level of force, targets, and the competitiveness of the exercise. You can see a breakdown in the Rules of the Salle, under the section called "RULES FOR EQUIPMENT", or else ask your instructor for clarification.

### **What do tournaments typically require?**

Tournaments all have their own specific requirements, but you can expect to see the same type of gear requirements we list in our Rules for Equipment section for "Free Sparring" gear. If anything, some tournaments will require higher ratings of protection than that.

### **Can I just rent equipment from the school?**

No, we don't offer any sort of rental program (and who would want to rent sweaty gear anyways?). We occasionally have gear to sell, talk to your instructor to see what's available.

### **Can I just use work gloves/winter gloves/lacrosse gloves/Red Dragons?**

For light solo and partner drills, absolutely. For anything else, absolutely not. You should have rigid protection (HEMA gloves) for any type of competitive drills, sparring games, or sparring.

## Where should I buy my equipment from?

The short answer is: *wherever offers exactly what you want for the lowest cost, and can deliver it by the time you need it.*

We tend to promote Canadian distributors, because the shipping costs are typically much lower (duties on international orders can quickly add up, and are often not known until your order crosses the border). Here are the top vendors we love and trust in Canada:

- HEMA Gear Canada ([hemagearcanada.com](http://hemagearcanada.com))
- Sword Gear ([swordgear.com](http://swordgear.com))
- Sword Shop ([swordshop.ca](http://swordshop.ca))
- North Armoury ([northarmoury.ca](http://northarmoury.ca))
- Historical Combat Armoury ([historicalcombatarmory.com](http://historicalcombatarmory.com))

There are other Canadian vendors that outfit some HEMA equipment, but are not primarily HEMA vendors. Some examples are Reliks, Blades Canada (aka Warriors & Wonders), and Crossed Swords. Be sure to check product descriptions thoroughly to ensure you are getting equipment that is actually rated for HEMA use.

Outside of Canada, there are many international HEMA vendors worth noting. It would be impossible to list them all, but here are a few and why they are worth checking out:

- Purpleheart ([woodenswords.com](http://woodenswords.com))
  - *The best customer service from any US vendor, fair prices and wide selection*
- Winter Tree Crafts ([wintertreecrafts.com](http://wintertreecrafts.com))
  - *Makes an affordable steel gorget that was expertly designed with care*
- Superior Fencing ([supfen.com](http://supfen.com))
  - *Probably the best value in the world for gambesons, but slow turnaround times*
- Regenyei Armory ([regenyei.com](http://regenyei.com))
  - *The maker of many long standing industry standard sword designs*
- Sigi Forge ([sigiforge.com](http://sigiforge.com))
  - *Excellent maker of high-end HEMA swords*

## I'm still confused! What should I do?

Talk to us! Your instructors, fellow fencers, and online forums can help you figure out what's right for you. Most people will happily let you try their equipment so you can figure out what suits your needs, or talk to you about our experience with different gear/vendors. So invest in some free advice before you invest in a piece of gear that might not work out.

# FAQs

## **Is HEMA safe?**

Like all sports and martial arts, there is a small risk in HEMA of serious injury or even death. However, HEMA is generally a very safe practice and most injuries are infrequent and minor. All activities are conducted under instructor supervision, and with appropriate safety equipment.

We use a graduated rank system that only allows for more advanced training (such as sparring) once a student has appropriate experience. You won't do anything advanced unless you are ready, and want to.

## **When will I learn other weapons besides longsword?**

You already are! While we start with longsword, the concepts we learn actually apply to the overall German combat system, and can be used with any weapon (even with wrestling).

We offer specific classes on other weapons somewhat sporadically, and introduce them when we feel we have sufficient knowledge to make them useful and interesting. Daggers and wrestling are part of our core curriculum, but we also teach things like spear, messer, quarterstaff, and sickle as their own programs or workshops. We occasionally host other guest instructors, too.

If you are looking to progress with a specific weapon, talk to your instructors. If we don't teach it, we'll do our best to find you someone who does!

## **Can I bring my own sword?**

Yes, as long as it is approved by an instructor first.

The training weapons we use are specialized and meet safety requirements that are specific to our martial art. While swords may be the great equalizer, not all swords are created equal. Most display swords are not appropriate for training, and we do not practice with sharp weapons.

## What should I expect a typical class structure to look like?

Our general classes follow a typical flow that looks like:

1. Salute In
2. Warmup
3. Stretches
4. Fundamentals
5. New Lesson
6. Salute Out

The new lesson is usually half of the class. When possible, time is reserved at the end to pressure test the new lesson with full kit. We also have regularly scheduled classes that are just focused on sparring and sparring games, though at such times we still offer our standard lessons for anyone not sparring.

## Will I ever practice cutting with a sharp sword?

We host an event once or twice a year called Cutting & Combat. It is a free, informal event with many activities for the HEMA enthusiast to enjoy — one of which is to try cutting inanimate objects with sharp swords. This is typically the only time we do so, and an experienced student will help you learn how to do so safely if you want to try it out!

## Are there any special programs for kids or teens?

We do not offer regular children's courses, though it is something we have done in the past and may offer from time to time.

Youths aged 15-17 may, with instructor and parental permission, join an adult class.

For students who are in high school, you can actually receive a Physical Education credit towards your Ontario Secondary School Diploma by practicing HEMA with Ironwood. Ask your instructor for more information on how you can do HEMA for high school!

