

What Is Fencing? US Fencing Online - info@USFencing.org

The sport of fencing is fast and athletic, a far cry from the choreographed bouts you see on film or on the stage. The movement is so fast the touches are scored electronically.

The Weapons

Foil, épée and sabre are the three weapons used in the sport of fencing. While it is not unusual for fencers to compete in all three events, they generally choose to develop their skills in one weapon. Foil and épée are point-thrusting weapons. Sabre is a point-thrusting as well as a cutting weapon. The target areas differ for the three weapons, though all three are scored electrically.

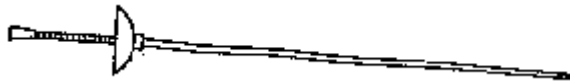
Object

The main object of a fencing bout (what an individual "game" is called) is to effectively score 15 points (in direct elimination play) or five points (in preliminary pool play) on your opponent before he scores that number on you. Each time a fencer scores a touch, she receives a point.

Foil



The foil has a flexible rectangular blade, approximately 35 inches in length, weighing less than one pound. Points are scored with the tip of the blade and must land within the torso of the body. The valid target area in foil is the torso, from the shoulders to the groin, front and back. It does not include the arms, neck, head and legs. The foil fencer's uniform includes a metallic vest (called a lamé), which covers the valid target area, so that a valid touch will register on the scoring machine. A small, spring-loaded tip is attached to the point of the foil and is connected to a wire inside the blade. The fencer wears a body cord inside his uniform that connects the foil to a reel wire, connected to the scoring machine. There are two scoring lights on the machine. One shows a green light when a fencer is hit, and one shows a red light when her opponent is hit. A touch landing outside the valid target area (that which is not covered by the lamé) is indicated by a white light. These "off target" hits do not count in the scoring, but stop the fencing action temporarily.



Épée



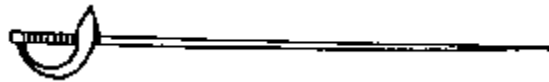
The épée (pronounced "EPP-pay"), the descendant of the dueling sword, is similar in length to the foil, but is heavier, weighing approximately 27 ounces, with a larger guard (to protect the hand from a valid hit) and a much stiffer blade. Touches are scored only with the point of the blade. The entire body is the valid target area. The blade is wired with a spring-loaded tip at the end that completes an electrical circuit when it is depressed beyond a pressure of 750 grams. This causes the scoring machine to light. Off-target hits do not register on the machine.



Sabre



The sabre is the modern version of the slashing cavalry sword, and is similar in length and weight to the foil. The major difference is that the sabre is a thrusting weapon as well as a cutting weapon (use of the blade). The target area is from the bend of the hips (both front and back), to the top of the head, simulating the cavalry rider on a horse. The sabre fencer's uniform includes a metallic jacket (lamé), which covers the target area to register a valid touch on the scoring machine. Just as in foil, there are two scoring lights on the machine, one for each fencer. Off-target hits do not register in sabre.



Right-Of-Way

One of the most difficult concepts to visualize in foil and sabre fencing is the rule of right-of-way. This rule was established to eliminate apparently simultaneous attacks by two fencers. In essence, right-of-way is the differentiation of offense and defense, made by the referee. The difference is important only when both attacks land. The winner of the point is the one who the referee determined was on offense at the time the lights went on. Épée does not use the right-of-way in keeping with its dueling origin. If both fencers hit within 1/25th of a second of each other, both earn a point. However, it is equally important to have a sound defense for épée, since the entire body must be protected from a touch.