



# **Recommended Safe Operating Procedures for Classes, Competitions, & Events**

Version 1.6

## Preamble

These procedures form the HFA recommended minimum standards for safe training for the purposes of insurance and general safety, and are adapted from martial arts industry best practices.

It is expected that most clubs will already have their own version of these procedures, however clubs may freely adapt this set of procedures to their own specific activities. Any legal information provided on this document is of a general nature only and should not be regarded as a substitute for legal advice and/or reference to the appropriate legislation.

If you have additional suggestions/recommendations for general safe practices, please let us know at [historicalfencingaus@gmail.com](mailto:historicalfencingaus@gmail.com), and we can add them here if appropriate.

## Usage Rights

The content of this document is offered under Creative Commons CC BY 4.0<sup>1</sup> license. You are free to:

- Share: copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially.
- Adapt: remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

Under the following terms:

- Attribution: You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.
- No additional restrictions: You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

The HFA logo remains copyright HFA material, and may be reproduced and distributed as part of the document for attribution purposes.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



## 1.0 Class Supervision

- All formal classes should be provided by an instructor appointed by the club.
- When teaching minors we recommend at least one other adult should be present.
- Informal sessions (e.g. “Open Hal” events) do not need an instructor, however a designated supervisor should be present.
- All events must have a designated First Aid provider.

## 2.0 Waivers/Understanding of Risk

- All participants must sign the appropriate waiver for the event/activity, including identification of medical conditions may affect them during the activity, and emergency contact information
- Where a participant has identified a relevant medical condition they should not commence training until their training has been cleared by an appropriate medical practitioner.
- For non-standard activities (e.g. test cutting) and competitive events, waivers should be tailored to the risks specific to that activity
- For competitive events, athletes must declare that they are appropriately qualified to compete in the event, and they agree to follow all lawful event rules.
- Clubs operating in Victoria shall include an additional declaration with their waiver specifying that the applicant is not a Prohibited Person as defined by the Control of Weapons Act, 1990.

## 3.0 Hazard Management

Hazard Management is any procedure, policy, rule or action that has as its function the reduction or removal of any risk that may be associated with the conduct of training or events.

Clubs should perform hazard assessment and risk reduction which would include but not be limited to:

- Ensuring the training area is clear of any dangerous and/or sharp objects that may provide a risk of injury, including trip hazards, furniture, or wet surfaces.
- Instructors/fencers must have access at all times to first aid equipment.
- Persons should not wear jewelry etc during training which the instructor deems may present a hazard to the student or to others.
- All equipment must meet the appropriate safety standards for the activity.

## 3.1 Spectators & Bystanders

Where club activities include spectators or other bystanders, appropriate precautions should be made such that:

- Bystanders should maintain a safe distance from fencing activities
- Bystanders should not have ready access to fencing equipment.
- Bystanders should not participate in any fencing activities at an event

## 4.0 Safety while Fencing & Practicing

Fencers should behave safely at all times, and adhere to safety protocols appropriate to their activity.

Behaving safely means to proactively take steps to reduce the risk of injury to themselves, their fencing partner, and others.

Activity definitions:

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

## 4.1 Safety Briefings

Prior to their first class or a fencing event, participants should be briefed on safety procedures. These procedures should include at least the following items:

- Safety expectations and requirements regarding intensity and behaviour
- Not acting irregularly or erratically with swords in class.



- Being aware of the nearby fencers and their weapons, especially the point of the weapon, while moving in class.
- Being aware of environmental hazards and bystanders
- Location of first aid equipment & procedures for its use.

## 4.2 Fencing Restrictions

The following requirements apply to all fencing activities:

- Practitioners should not engage in any fencing without the instructor's consent.
- Fencing at full force should always be forbidden; fencers should take steps to ensure that intensity levels are never intentionally exceeded and act to mindfully reduce the risk of injury at all times.
- Fencing of any kind for children under 12 should not be allowed with steel weapons

Supervision:

- An instructor or assigned supervisor should monitor participants engaged in fencing, in case of risks to bystanders, or the fencers themselves.

Hazard Awareness:

- All fencers should maintain awareness of hazards in the fencing environment, including bystanders, other fencers, and environmental hazards.

Protective Equipment

- All participants should wear safety equipment as specified in section 5.2.

## 4.3 Safety Equipment

### 4.3.1 General Provisions:

- Should be maintained in good working order, preferably to manufacturers standards
- Should be clean with proper attention to hygiene (refer Sports Medicine Australia's Policy on Infections/Diseases).

### 4.3.2 Low Intensity Drills and Fencing

Drilling is any pre-arranged, or tightly constrained, set of movements intended to develop specific fencing skills. Drilling may be performed slowly (i.e. tai-chi like speeds) or at speed (moderate to normal speed).

Technical/Controlled Fencing is where two or more practitioners engage in very slow paced unscripted motions or semblance of fighting, using any part of the body or a weapon, without the landing of any blows that risk bodily harm.

For low intensity drills and fencing the following requirements apply:

- Mask (350N+) - occasional drilling without masks is allowed at very slow speeds for specific purposes
- Throat protector (if using thrusting techniques)
- Groin protector (if applicable)
- Gloves commensurate with sparring speed (not required at very slow speeds)
- Coaches may demonstrate techniques without a mask & hand protection only at slow speed for demonstration purposes (so they can communicate effectively with the class).

#### 4.3.3 High Intensity Drilling, Fencing, and Competitive Fencing

Drills may be performed at a higher intensity to more realistically simulate fencing conditions.

Regular Fencing is where the use of fighting techniques by one or more of the practitioners is not predetermined or advised. The purpose of the activity is to test a practitioner's ability to respond spontaneously and effectively to unforeseen fighting techniques. Regular fencing is usually carried out at high speed and so should attract higher safety standards. This is often referred to as "Sparring."

Competitive Fencing is regular fencing in a competitive context, which may add more risks (see 10.0 Competitions & Events)

The following safety equipment is the minimum recommended for all participants:

- Fencing jacket (350N+)
- Leg Covering (350N+ preferred)
- Mask (350N+)
- Mask Overlay (if appropriate to the weapon)
- Appropriate Throat Protection
- Gloves appropriate to weapon (eg. sparring gloves for longsword)
- Additional protection appropriate to weapon & fencing conditions (eg. forearms & elbows, chest protector, etc)
- Enclosed shoes
- Groin protector (if applicable)

#### 4.3.4 Cutting

Cutting is the use of sharp swords to cut specific media such as tatami mats, bottles, clay, or other materials.

- Students should only be allowed to perform cutting exercises when they have reached the requisite level of experience as determined by their instructor.
- Sharp weapons shall be secured in a safe area when not in use.
- Cutting shall only take place in an allocated space free of obstructions or other hazards.
- Only a single person shall handle the sharp weapon at any time
- While staff are setting up targets etc. nobody shall be in the cutting area with a sharp weapon.
- The person holding the sword shall not engage in any other activities such as setting up targets without first placing the sword down in a safe area or with another person.
- If using wet targets (water bottles, wet tatami, etc) the fencer shall ensure their hands are dry.
- No persons shall not be allowed in areas where they may be struck by a released sword.
- Junior students should not engage in cutting with sharp swords.

## 5.0 Grappling/Wrestling Considerations

This standard applies to the teaching and practice of any grappling art taught in total, or taught as a component of a historical fencing class, including armed techniques which involve grappling, locking, restraining, choking and strangulation techniques. It is recognized that some components of these arts and their practices are of extremely high risk and so must be approached with caution.

- We recommend that Throwing/Grappling Mats be used for all activities involving the practice of high speed throws, wrestling, submission holds; including where such activities are included in sparring.
- When teaching, it is recommended that instructors make students aware that a lock or hold should not be applied so as to cause injury i.e. to a point where risk of breakage or dislocation does or could occur. The lock or hold will be applied to minimum pressure. A 'tap out' safety system will be taught before any lock or hold is taught.
- Strangulation techniques should not be regularly practiced in such a way that it is fully applied i.e. to a point where unconsciousness or 'blackout' does or could occur.
- Submission techniques should not be regularly practiced in such a way that it is fully applied
- A 'tap out' safety system should be taught before any strangulation or submission is taught. It is noted that choke or strangulation techniques can, and has, resulted in brain damage and/or death.

## 6.0 Weapons

### General Provisions:

- Instructors can deny the use of a weapon to a student if they deem it unsafe/unfit for purpose.
- The weapon must be in good repair without surface rust, sharp edges, or cracks/burrs.
- Weapons used for fencing should be fitted with appropriate safety tips.
- Participants with weapons should adhere to local legislation concerning weapon ownership.
- Sharps may not be used under any circumstance for drilling or sparring.
- Sharps may be used for 'Test Cutting' under strict controls.

## 6.1 Weight and Flexibility

Weapons used for fencing should exhibit sufficient flexibility that they mitigate the risk of injury from thrusts and certain strikes, and should not be unreasonably heavy in the blade in order to reduce the percussive effect of strikes. Typically for Competitive and Regular Fencing:

- Longswords should weigh less than 1.6kg and have  $\leq 16$ kg flex, with a preference for  $\leq 12$ kg.
- Sideswords, sabres, arming swords, and backswords should weigh less than 1.2kg and have  $\leq 12$ kg flex, with a preference for  $\leq 8$ kg.
- Rapiers should weigh less than 1.4kg and exhibit  $\leq 10$ kg of flex, with a preference for  $\leq 8$ kg or less.

## 6.2 Ownership & Storage of Weapons & Equipment

### General Provisions:

- When not in use swords and other weapons should be stored somewhere safe and not easily accessible.
- When at training
  - Weapons should be placed in a location under the control of the organisation where members of the public are not able to easily access them.
  - All equipment should be placed out of the way so as not to represent a hazard to participants or spectators.

### Victorian Clubs/Organisations:

- Clubs and their members in Victoria are **required to** familiarise themselves with the Control of Weapons Act (1990) specifying the prohibitions and requirements on weapons in that state.
- Specifically, when not being used for training or competition, swords **must be** stored safely and securely - 'stored safely and securely' means:
  - Stored in a manner calculated to ensure that the sword:
    - is not readily accessible to a person other than the person seeking to rely on the exemption; and



- is not available for possession, carriage or use by any person who does not belong to a class of exempt persons specified in the above Table or who does not hold an approval issued by the Chief Commissioner of Police; and
  - When being transported between the sword's usual place of storage and places at which the sword is legitimately used in accordance with this Order:
    - stored in a manner calculated to ensure that the sword is not readily accessible to a person other than the person seeking to rely on the exemption; and
    - concealed from plain sight during transportation
- Furthermore clubs operating in Victoria are **required** to keep records of members possessing swords, and issue them with membership cards in accordance with The Act.
- Prohibited persons **shall not** be entitled to possess swords, as specified by the Control of Weapons Act (1990)

## 7.0 Health Risk Minimisation

For general training in classes, as well as other event types:

- Participants should advise the Instructor if suffering from any injury or medical condition, either permanent or temporary, which may be adversely affected by certain types of training. Examples of this may include blood pressure problems and cardiac disorders, neck, knee and back injuries, diabetes and asthma.
- Participants with the above or other potentially dangerous conditions should seek medical approval to participate in martial arts classes, where possible, and whether there are any restrictions or conditions applicable.
- Participants are advised not to train if they may be suffering from the flu or other viral infection that may be passed on to other persons, in accordance with Australian health industry recommendations.
- Participants should not attend training under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.
- Smoking should not be allowed in or around the training area.
- Participants give proper attention to personal hygiene and exhibit clean grooming; and ensure that fingernails and toenails are trimmed and clean.
- Participants with a cut or bleeding injury are advised to cease training immediately and receive appropriate first aid. Rejoining the training session should not be allowed until the instructor has deemed that is safe to do so. The procedures for dealing with cuts or bleeding injuries are as outlined in the Infections Diseases Policy of Sports Medicine Australia – Attachment '3'
- Participants suffering from a concussion, should be assessed, and if concussion is suspected, should withdraw from the activity, and not recommence training for a period of time as specified by their health care professional.

## 8.0 Prohibited Activities

We recommend prohibition of the following:

- Uncontrolled throwing on an unmatted surface
- Use of live blades in any circumstance for drilling or sparring or by minors.
- Exercises that are generally considered dangerous, or any other exercise which is known to be a danger to the student.
- Providing instruction to a student who has not signed a waiver/contract

## 9.0 First Aid Equipment

We require that:

- All classes include a First Aid kit containing the required items for the kind of injuries which rarely occur.
- At least one member of the class has received prior first aid training, including CPR etc.
- All students are informed of the location of the first aid kit.
- Any use of the kit includes an injury report.

## 10.0 Events & Competition

When running activities and events outside of normal club based classes, the following considerations apply in addition to those listed in previous sections.

Definitions:

- Competition refers to any sporting event in which fencers compete against one another with the aim of winning. Organisers should acknowledge that the nature of competitions means that additional measures and restrictions may be necessary in order to maintain safety of participants, including competitors, volunteers, and officials, as well as spectators at events.
- Events refer to any fencing event not covered under normal classes, and includes but is not limited to one-off events with guest instructors, camps, demonstrations, and events for creation of training videos or materials.

### 10.1 Hazards

- All events should follow the guidelines for Hazard management as specified in section 4.0.
- Organisers should make provisions to protect participants from environmental risks such as exposure to sun or extreme conditions of heat or cold. Provisions may include reduction or cancellation of activities, providing appropriate shelter or protective equipment (sunscreen, drinking water, etc), and removing participants from harmful conditions.

### 10.2 Behaviour Management

As competitions and events bring together fencers with different backgrounds and safety expectations, all events should have procedures which address safety risks caused by participant behaviour. Examples of Behaviour Management procedures in a competition setting can be found in the HFA General Tournament Procedures document.

Behaviour management procedures regarding safety should :

- Define who is responsible for applying and reviewing the consequences of Behaviour Management (e.g. referees or designated officials)
- Define to whom specific Behaviour Management consequences apply
- Be maintained throughout the event, and subject to review and modification during the course of the event to maintain safety.
- Include provisions for preventing participants from harming themselves through their own behaviour.
- Include provisions for removing others from harm by the specific participant should they exhibit dangerous behaviours.
- Include options for removal from premises, should the behaviour warrant it.

Behaviour Management procedures in a competition should be accompanied by rules specifying consequences for breaches of behaviour related to safety. The aim of these consequences is to guide participant behaviour by penalising safety or conduct infractions. In a competition setting, Behaviour Management consequences should:

- Be provided to all participants in advance so that expectations and consequences are well understood.
- Provide a defined set of consequences based on severity and repeated infractions. Typically this is a penalty system which starts with nullification of points, or application of penalty points, and escalates to match loss or ejection from the competition (see the “card” system in the HFA General Tournament Procedures document).
- Be applied consistently and equitably to all competitors at all times regardless of rank or reputation.
- Include consequences for unduly endangering the safety of other fencers during matches, outside of matches (e.g. social fencing and general activities).
- Include consequences for actions which may cause self harm to a fencer, including non-reporting of injuries, or irregular actions likely to cause harm.
- Include consequences for actions which may cause harm to officials or bystanders, including irregular actions likely to cause harm.
- Include consequences for actions which suggest escalated safety risk to participants (e.g. threats or bullying, enticement to violence).
- Include consequences for action likely which encourage compromise of Behavioral Management processes, or undermine event safety procedures.

### 10.3 Injury Management

In addition to standard procedures outlined in section 8.0:

- Events should have a designated, easily identified first aider present at all times.
- All injuries must be immediately reported to the officials tasked with maintaining safety.
- Failure to report a serious injury may result in Behaviour Management consequences (see 11.2).
- If a fencer is injured, or causes an injury to a fellow competitor or attendee, an investigation should take place to assess intent and any Behaviour Management consequences (see 11.2).
- In event of suspected concussion, mandatory concussion inspection should be conducted by tournament safety officials.
- If safety officials suspect a serious concussion participant should be escorted to medical facilities for diagnosis and treatment.
- If safety officials suspect a general concussion the fencer must be withdrawn from competing.

## Appendix A: Version Control

Ver sion	Date	Changes	Author
1.0	13/11/2019	Initial version	Daniel Pope
1.1	19/2/2019	Public release - clarifications and layout changes.	Daniel Pope
1.2	19/2/2019	Added clarifications to preamble.	Daniel Pope
1.3	22/2/2019	Added section 7.1 - storage and ownership of swords and equipment	Daniel Pope
1.4		Updated injuries and general wording	Daniel Pope
1.5	18/11/2024	Added section 11.0 - competitions and events Updated hazard management (4.0) to include spectators Updated weapon information (7.0) to include flex etc. Updated sparring and drilling (5.0) to improve definitions	Daniel Pope
1.6	18/2/2025	Updated/clarified usage rights	Daniel Pope