

# Fencing Class Notes #1: General Anatomy of Modern Fencing Swords

Custom and international rules govern the basic components of all modern fencing swords. French is the international language of fencing, but many moves and terms come from the old Italian school.

## NOMENCLATURE:

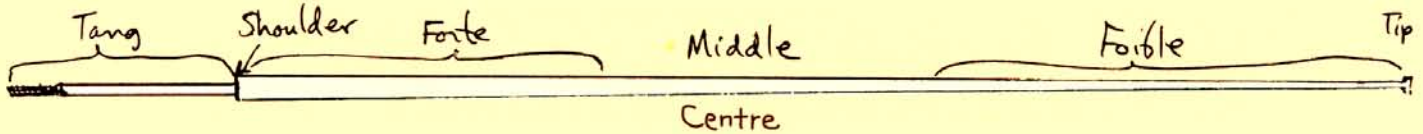
A sword is often referred to as a "blade," "weapon" or by its proper name in English or French as shown:

ENGLISH	FRENCH	MEANING
Foil	Fleuret	Leaf, flower
Duelling Sword	Epee	Pointed
Saber	Sabre	saber

## Flexible Steel Blade (le fer)

Blades are still made the hard way - forged in one piece - in Europe, Russia, Japan and China. The blade has three sections: the strong part (forte) near the guard; the middle (centre); and the weak part (foible) near the tip (point).

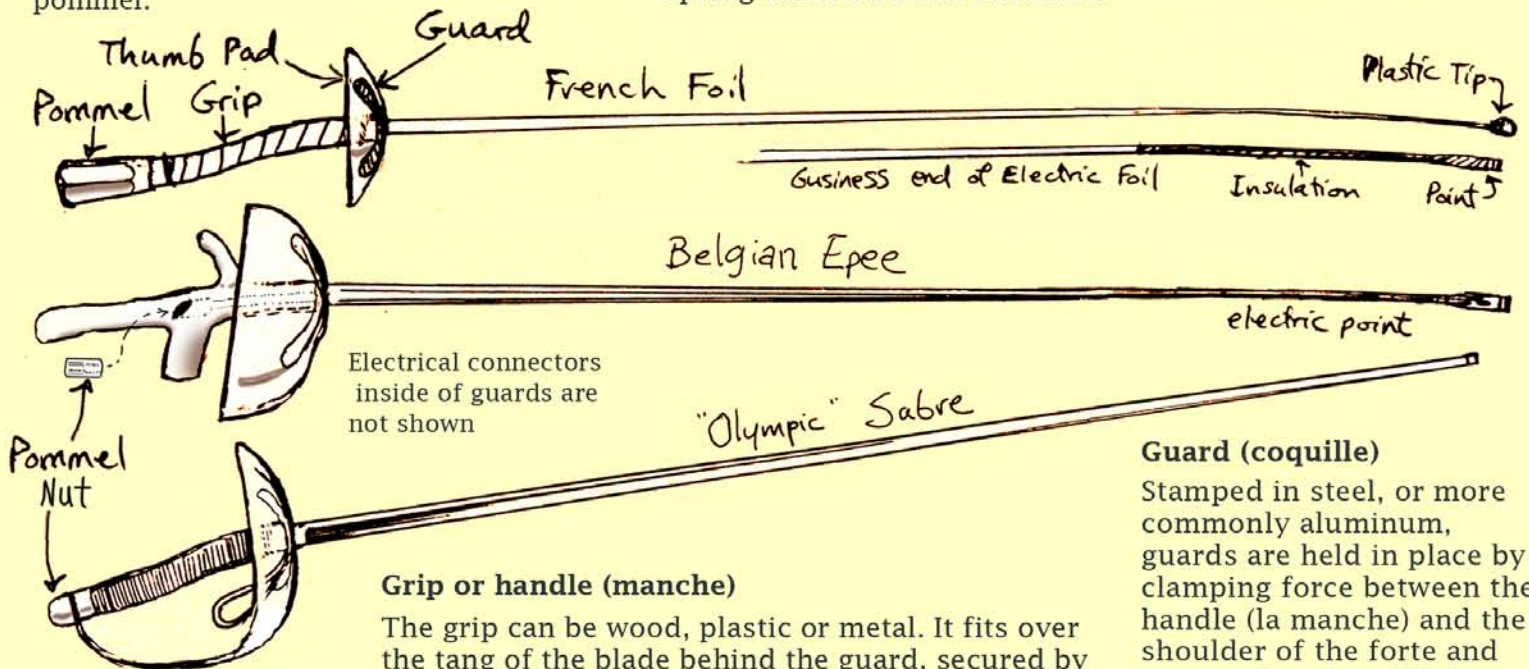
In cross section, foil blades are rectangular, epee blades are heavier and vee-shaped. Sabre blades are rectangular or



The slender Tang is enclosed inside the hilt. The end is threaded to mate with the pommel and hold the weapon together. The **hilt** includes the guard, handle and pommel.

Foil and epee blade tips are forged flat for safety (we add plastic tip caps). Sabre tips are curled tightly back.

Electric foils and epees have cylindrical steel tips with spring-loaded button switches.



## Pommel (pommel)

Originally the counterweight on the end of a medieval sword, the pommel serves modern fencing swords the same way as well as being a nut to hold the whole sword together.

On pistol grips, the threaded nut is small and cylindrical to fit inside the grip, but it's still called a pommel or sometimes a "nut."

## Grip or handle (manche)

The grip can be wood, plastic or metal. It fits over the tang of the blade behind the guard, secured by the pommel.

Epees and foils have specifically right or left-handed grips that curve away from the heel of the hand. The simplest is the French, with a rectangular cross-section and subtle curves along its length.

Many competitive fencers use a "pistol-grip" (or "orthopedic"), shaped to fit the palm, making it easier to grip and manipulate the weapon. The "Belgian" (on the epee above) may be the most popular but the "Russian," "German" and "Visconti" grips are also seen everywhere. Foils and epees are named for their grips.

The sabre has a simple grip with a downward curve like that of a military sabre, usable by either hand. Still, the tang is bent slightly left or right to accommodate right or left hand. Some fencers add a finger strap (shown) for more control.

## Guard (coquille)

Stamped in steel, or more commonly aluminum, guards are held in place by clamping force between the handle (la manche) and the shoulder of the forte and tang. A thumb pad helps prevent injury. Competition weapons have electric scoring cable connectors attached under the pad.

Occasionally you will see an Italian foil identified by a rapier-like cross-guard connected to the coquille via two half-ring shapes.

The sabre has a basket-like guard with a "knuckle-bow" that curves around to the back end of the tang where it is clamped between the handle and pommel.



# CLASS NOTES #2: Guard and Grip

Head up, face straight to opponent, alert, ready

Weight forward, ready to attack

Make a straight line from your elbow to top of opponent's head

Keep the body moving in a straight, level line by alternately flexing knees

Weight on the heels, not toes

Standard guard is with the sword in sixth (*sixte*) position.

Easy, loose off-weapon hand

OUTSIDE

INSIDE

ON GUARD (*en garde*, pronounced the same way) is your basic position for fencing in all three weapons.

The front toe must aim at the opponent's feet. The sword hand is off-center towards the "outside" (the direction of your back) while the elbow is more to the center as seen by your opponent.

Shown is the foil guard. In Epee, the arm is half-extended.

In Sabre, the sword hand is rotated to a sabre guard and the other hand is placed on the rear hip.

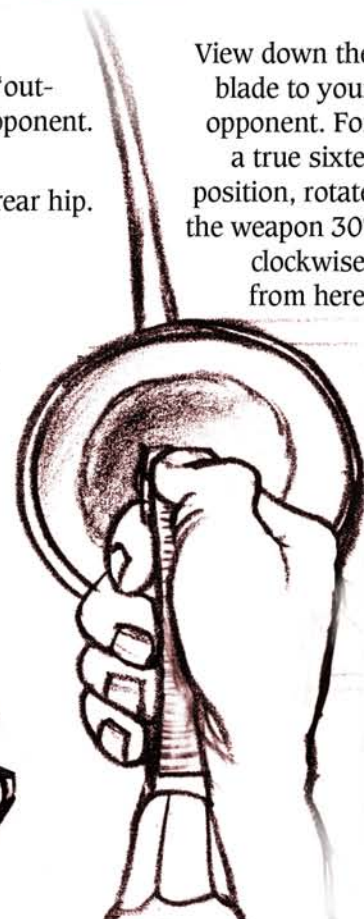
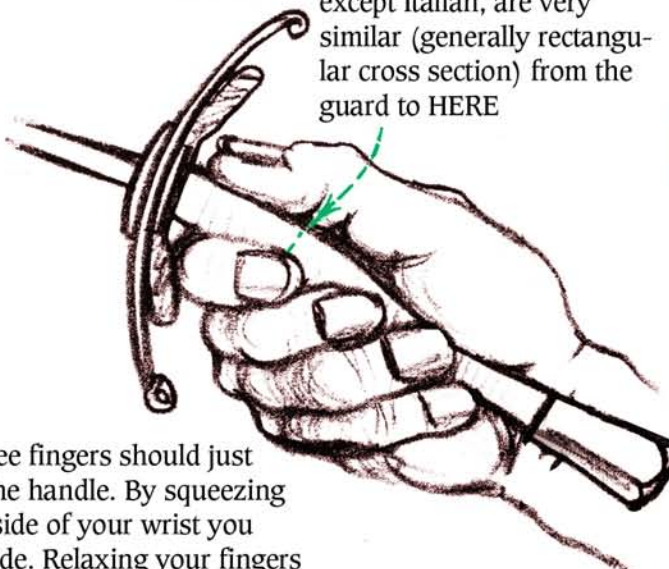
View down the blade to your opponent. For a true sixte position, rotate the weapon 30° clockwise from here.

## GRIPPING the Foil

The correct foil grip is a little bit counter-intuitive: it should be so light that it seems as if it might fall out of your hand at any moment, yet you are always in complete control. There are two components. The front grip is with the thumb and forefinger alone. With the other fingers relaxed, you can "teeter-totter" your weapon with these alone.

All foil and epee handles, except Italian, are very similar (generally rectangular cross section) from the guard to HERE

The tips of your other three fingers should just lightly touch the side of the handle. By squeezing the handle against the inside of your wrist you move the point to the inside. Relaxing your fingers pushes the point the opposite way.





# THE FOUR BASIC PARRIES (POSITIONS)

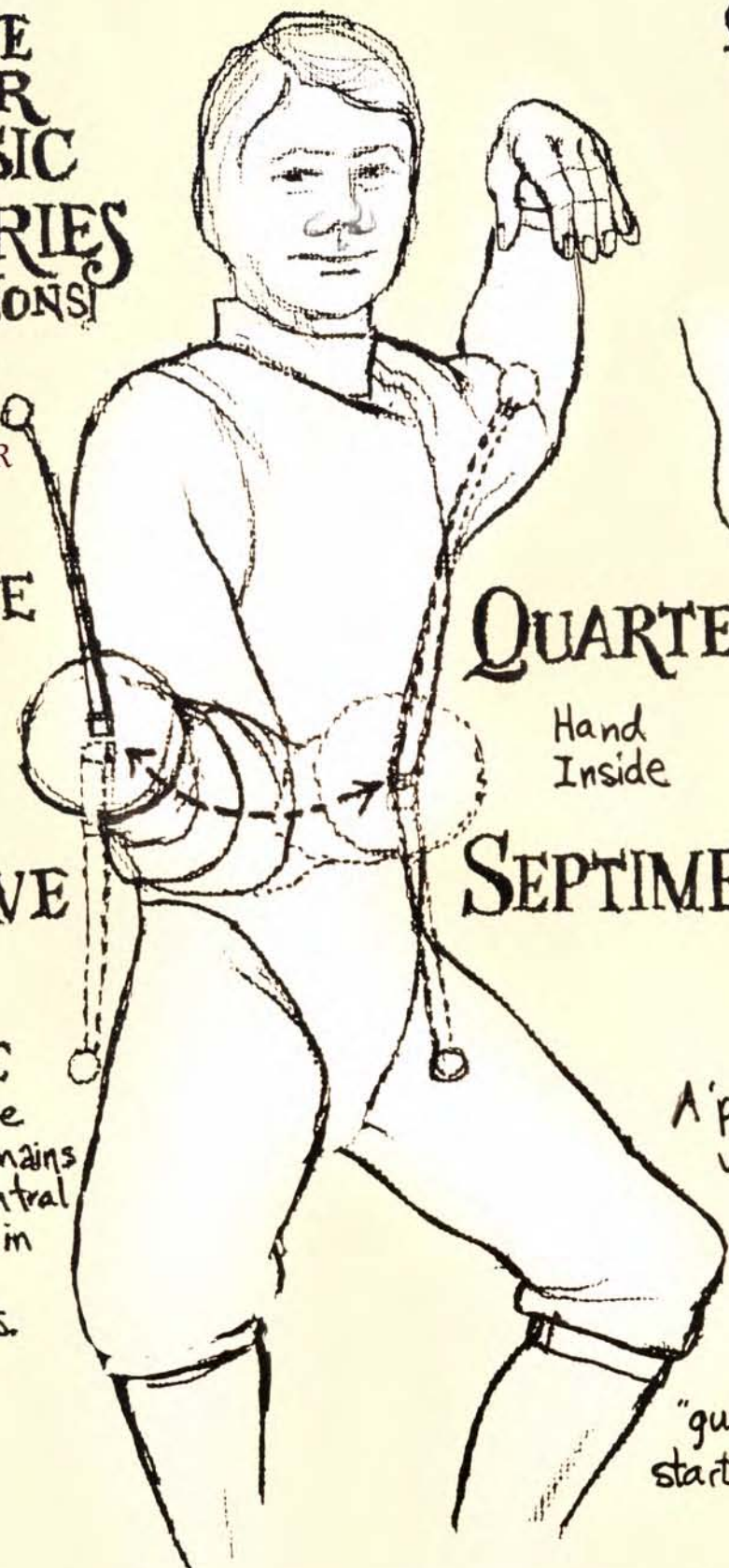
THUMB ON TOP FOR THESE FOUR

## SIXTE

Hand outside

## OCTAVE

NOTE That the elbow remains in the central position in all four parries.

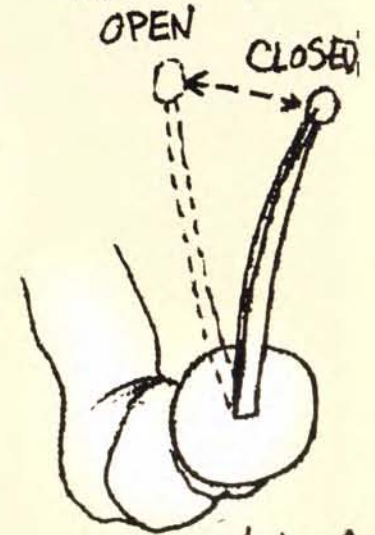


## QUARTE

Hand Inside

## SEPTIME

### DETAIL QUARTE



Note ↑ that in opening a line, primarily the fingers, and to a lesser degree, the wrist, move the weapon.

A 'position' is where you end up after making a parry. It is also a "guard" - the starting position.



# CLASS NOTES #4: : THE LUNGE

by David S. Hoornstra Rev.2016

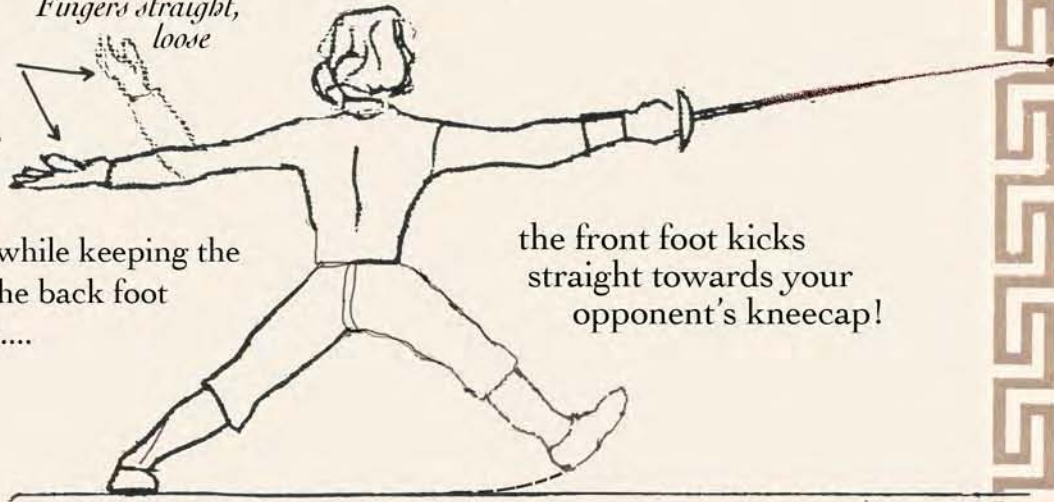
1. "On Guard" position  
(*en garde* is pronounced exactly the same way)  
(See Notes #2))



Make sure your front foot points straight forward

2. Flash both arms out to full extension. hand to the outside, point lined up with target.

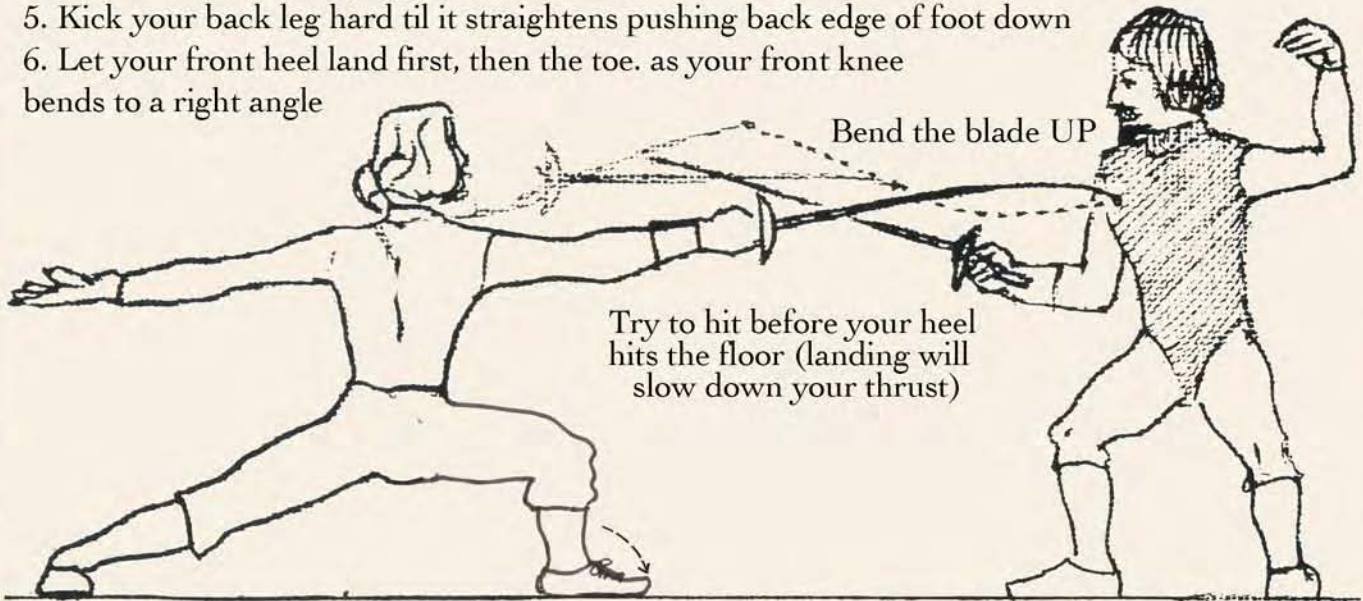
*Fingers straight, loose*



3. Kick both legs apart while keeping the feet at the same angle, the back foot gripping the floor while....

the front foot kicks straight towards your opponent's kneecap!

4. Keep the front foot flying forward, off the floor, until your swordpoint lands
5. Kick your back leg hard til it straightens pushing back edge of foot down
6. Let your front heel land first, then the toe. as your front knee bends to a right angle



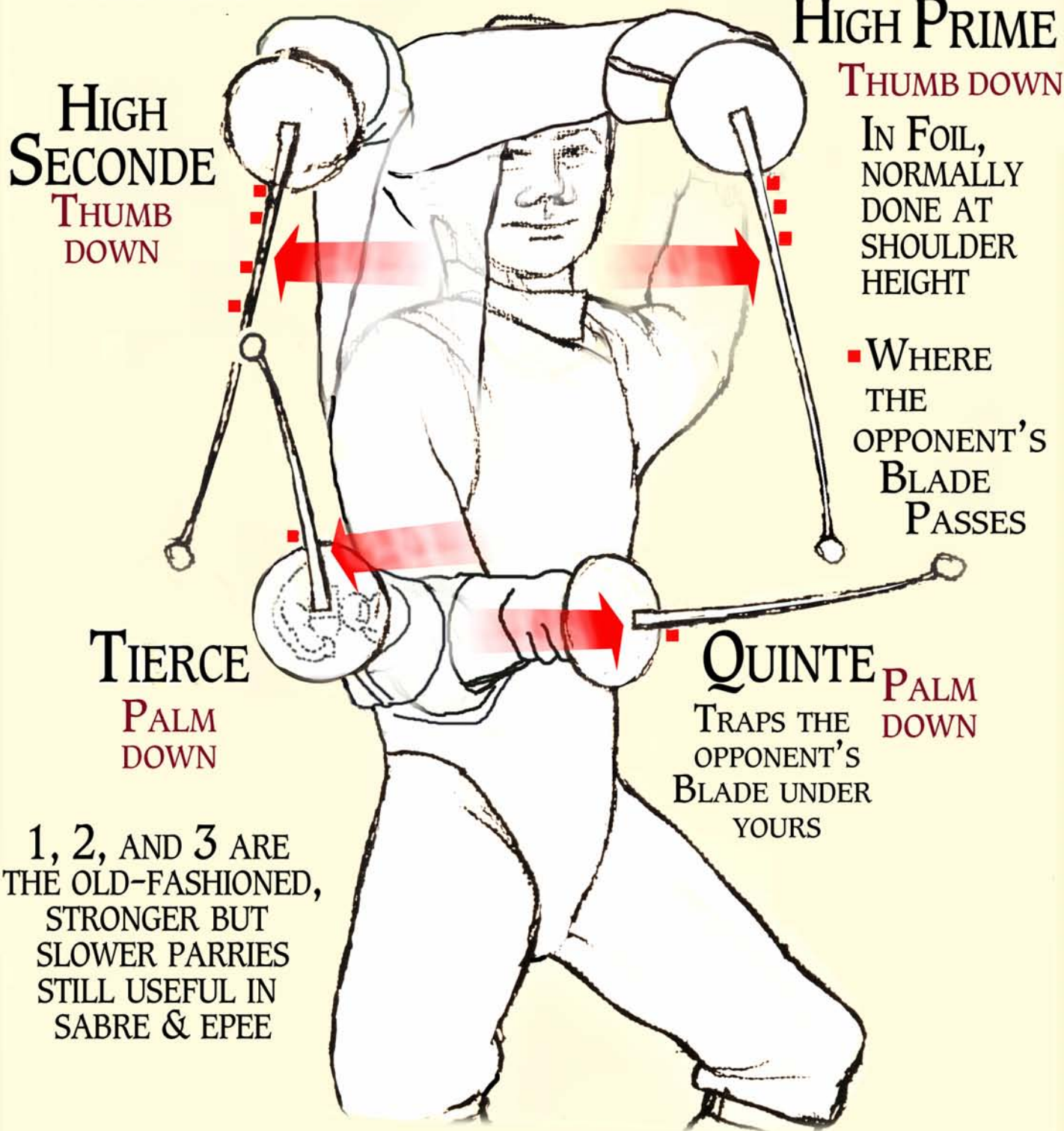
Until you are really good at this combination of moves, do them in steps:

- Extend the sword arm fully *before* kicking your foot forward.
- Extend the arm not by throwing the hand forward but by raising your elbow into the line between your shoulder and hand.



# THE FOUR SECONDARY PARRIES: FOIL/EPEE

A "POSITION" IS WHERE YOU END UP AT THE END OF A PARRYING ACTION. IT IS ALSO CALLED A "GUARD" OF THE SAME NAME/NUMBER.

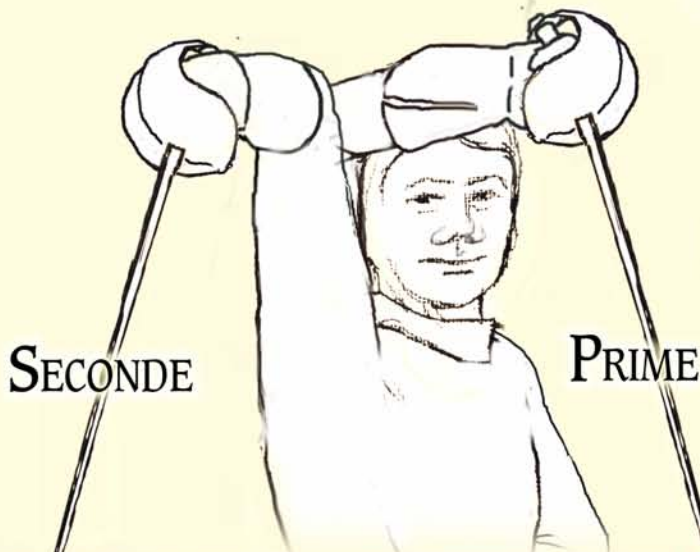
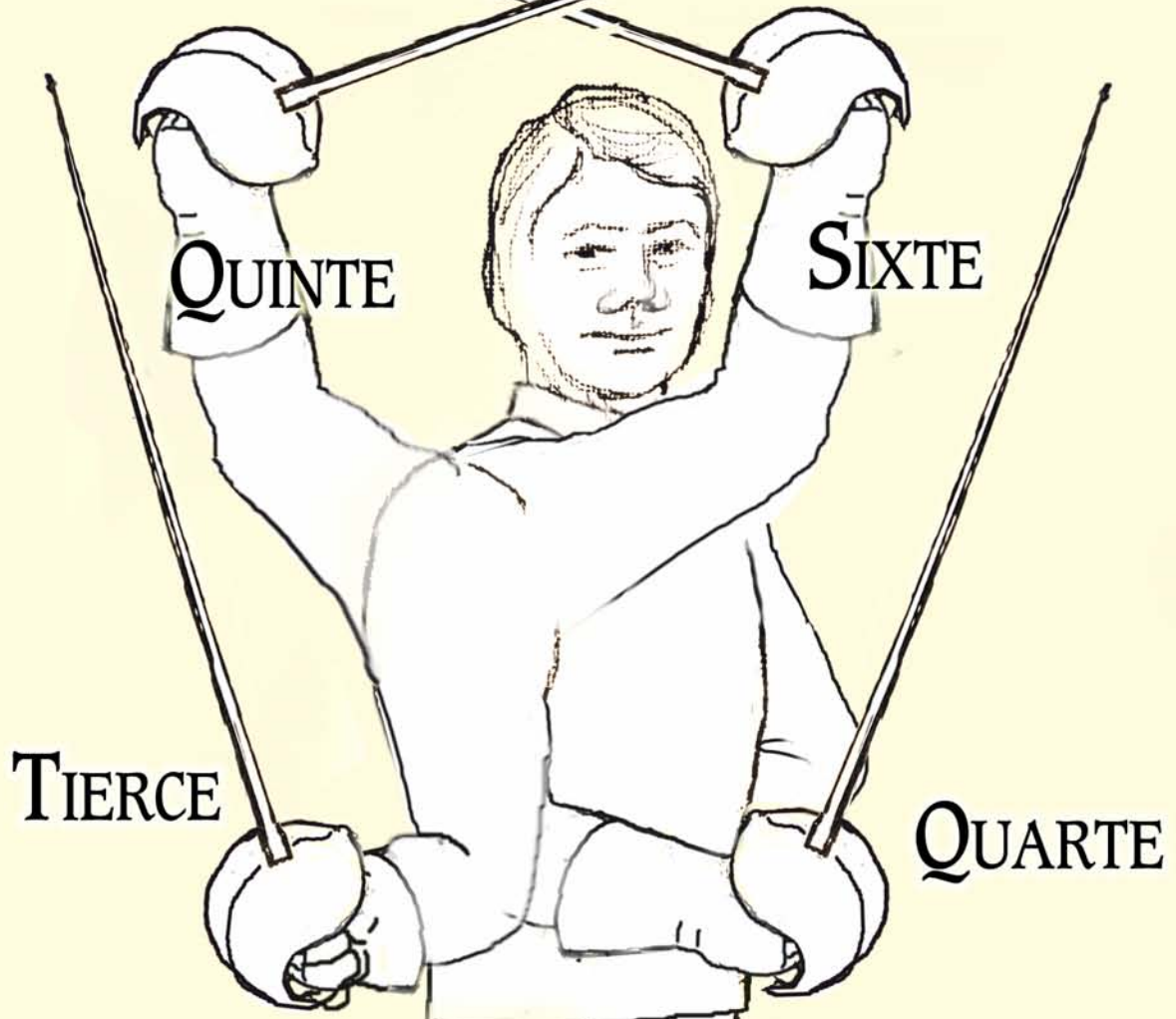


1, 2, AND 3 ARE THE OLD-FASHIONED, STRONGER BUT SLOWER PARRIES STILL USEFUL IN SABRE & EPEE



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# THE SABRE PARRIES (GUARD POSITIONS)



SECONDE AND PRIME ARE JUST LIKE THE FOIL VERSIONS EXCEPT FOR THE GRIP. ALWAYS AIM THE KNUCKLEBOW TO THE INCOMING BLADE.