

Understanding priority in fencing

1. **Observe and study The Tactical Wheel - imagine a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors, but with many more components.** The basic tactical wheel is similar, as each tactic will defeat the one before it, and be defeated by the one following if executed properly. The pieces are as follows: **Simple Attack** (an attack executed as one quick action) *is defeated by Parry and Riposte* (defending with the blade and/or distance, and then attacking) *is defeated by Compound Attack* (an attack executed with multiple "feints" to close distance and draw out the final parry) *is defeated by Counter Attack/Attack on Preparation* (a timed Simple Attack into the early, non-threatening phase of the Compound Attack) *is defeated by Counter Time* (a feint or preparation used to draw the Counter Attack so the ATTACKER may then make Parry and Riposte) *is defeated by Feint in Tempo* (a compound counter attack used to evade the Counter time) *is defeated by Simple Attack* (the wheel comes full-circle.).
2. **Compound knowledge of fencing tactics with The Second Intention- Each of the above actions may also be executed with a specific, pre-determined follow-up action in mind.** For example, instead of answering Parry and Riposte with Compound Attack, a subtle fencer may make her next attack just out of distance, to allow time for a 'counter-parry and counter-riposte'. Her first action would thus be called "Second Intention Simple Attack". Actions can also be made in The Third (or Fourth) Intention, but discerning and employing this level of subtlety can be extremely difficult.
3. **Understand that experienced fencers will generally try to jump around the Tactical Wheel in order to "out-think" their opponent,** rather than trying to score touches with speed and power alone, the object being to maneuver the opponent into a position where they are vulnerable to the fencer's best actions. Keep this in mind when watching bouts.
4. **Always remember that in Foil and Saber fencing, the Tactical Wheel plays a role in determining "priority" or "right-of-way".** The referee's decision about which fencer has priority when a touch occurs determines which fencer is awarded points, if any. Try to determine the fencers' intentions while you watch. This will help you to understand why some touches are awarded, and some are not. Understanding the tactical wheel will help you to "get inside the fencers' heads", increasing your enjoyment of the sport.
5. **In Foil and Saber fencing, it may be difficult to understand why a fencer has right-of-way when both fencers hit.** If either fencer asks the referee to "reconstruct" (the proper way, according to fencing etiquette, for a fencer to ask for an explanation), listen carefully to the words of the referee. It will often make what you missed clearer. Some referees explain regardless of such a request, but many simply award the **touche** (the formal name for a point in fencing) with no explanation or hand motions. Reading the rapid motions of a referee employing hand motions may be difficult, so remember these basics: a finger pointed towards the ground on one side of the referee signifies right-of-way for the fencer on that side, an arm sticking straight out in one direction signifies an attack or counterattack made by the fencer on the side opposite that arm, arms crossed in the air signify a parry made on the side of the referee on which his or her arms are crossed, and a hand held up in the air (sometimes with the arm showing attack or counterattack still extended) signifies a touche for the fencer on that side of the referee.