

CODE OF CONDUCT

In the Fencing Salle

Introduction:

Fencing has been historically linked with the concept of honor and nobility for hundreds of years and remains a key component of our tradition, which is based on the celebrated Scuola Magistrale Militare di Scherma (Military Masters Fencing School) in Rome (established in 1884). In addition to learning the art and science of swordplay, our tradition teaches the manners and behavior becoming of an officer and a gentleman or gentlewoman. This Code of Conduct includes the common courtesy and consideration we should use toward each other in our everyday lives. It also includes rules specific to the fencing salle and the study of swordplay. Though the behavior of most students falls within these rules naturally, it is possible that participants are not fully aware of this part of fencing tradition. Attached are rules of conduct and safety for the fencing salle. Each student participating in the class agrees to know, understand, and follow these rules to the best of their ability. Also attached are two articles and a pamphlet which give further information regarding the historical link between fencing and honor.

History:

In his article “Fencing Instruction and the Concept of Honor,” Maestro William Gaugler writes, “As is well known, young men from the sixteenth century to the early twentieth century were sent to fencing schools both to receive instruction in swordplay, and to acquire the manners and polish of a gentleman, that is, an honorable, kind, polite, gallant man.” Maestro Gaugler further states that “the sword has long been linked with nobility...[and is] carried at the side of a *signore* or gentleman, whose dignified, polite, gracious, and courteous manner was designated in Italy as *signorile*...[which] embodies the concept of lordliness.”

Maestro Aldo Nadi, in the brochure for his Academy, writes, “It shall be clearly understood that Fencing is the sport of gentlemen (of Fencing George Bernard Shaw mentioned, in a letter to me, “its unquestioned aristocracy”), and that the fencing strip has its own ethics – which are far more important than the competitive value of **any** fencer...It is the Fencing Master’s strict moral duty towards his artistic ancestors to see to it that centuries-old traditions are respected, honored, and enforced.”

In the *Manuel d’esrime* of 1877 it states, “...that the master and his assistants must set an example for their students. Their speech should be calm and measured. They must be loyal and reproachable in their conduct. And they must maintain a dignity and pride that brings respect to the uniform, and earns them the esteem and consideration of their pupils.” (*The History of Fencing*, Gauger, Bangor.)

The instruction given in this class is based on the prestigious Scuola Magistrale Militare di Scherma (Military Masters Fencing School) in Rome (established in 1884). The military employs a respected hierarchy, or chain of command, in order to train people at the highest level of skill and behavior becoming of an officer and a gentleman or gentlewoman. Our pedagogy is rooted in a military tradition, and, therefore, the tradition of proper behavior must be maintained in the fencing salle today.

To this end, below are rules of conduct and safety to be observed in the fencing salle. Participants who choose to disregard these rules are, in fact, causing damage to the learning environment of the salle and disrespecting the noble art and science of fencing.

Rules of Conduct in the Fencing Salle

- The Fencing Master's authority is absolute.* The fencing salle is a benevolent autocracy with the Fencing Master at the head of that autocracy.
- All individuals must behave in a civil, courteous, and sportsmanlike manner.**
- The Fencing Master will be addressed as "Maestro" or "Maestra," depending on gender.
- All participants will arrive on time and be ready to begin work at the scheduled start time of the class. If tardiness is unavoidable, the participant will enter the salle quietly, get ready to work quickly and await the Fencing Master's instructions on joining the class.
- On entering, as well as leaving, it is necessary to greet everyone in the room.**
- The Fencing Master will not be interrupted while giving instruction or correction.
- Individuals may ONLY free fence with the Fencing Master or with his or her permission.**
- When "Halt" or "First Position" is called, the participants will come to first position, dressing the lines, and quietly await instruction. If an action is not heard because the participant is talking over the Fencing Master, the instruction will not be repeated, and the lesson will continue at the proper tempo.
- During the lessons the bystanders must conduct themselves in a manner that will not prevent the student from hearing the Fencing Master's voice.**
 - Loud talking will be avoided.
 - Cell phones will be used outside of the classroom.
- Questions and discussion in order to better understand fencing theory and execution are welcome and encouraged. However, critique of the Fencing Master's corrections, lesson plans, and class organization is **not**.
- All non-master participants will wear light-colored clothing. Black is reserved for the Fencing Master. Wearing black when you are not a master shows the same disrespect as an Army Major wearing a LTC's sign of rank on his shoulder.
- Participants will work with whomever the Fencing Master pairs them.
 - If you are a Student working with a trained teacher of any level, you will show that instructor the same respect you would the Fencing Master. This includes not arguing with corrections given or interrupting the lesson at an inappropriate time to ask questions. The proper tempo of the lesson must be maintained. The instructor is in control of this. If you have questions wait until an appropriate break or until after the lesson to ask them.
 - If you are in the role of instructor, you can utilize this opportunity to give yourself a lesson, perfecting your form, placement, execution of actions, speed, timing, and distance. In the past, this is exactly what the top-level fencers, such as Aldo Nadi, would do to practice or improve their own fencing. You will also practice the honorable behavior becoming of a fencing teacher. If the Fencing Master offers corrections, you will receive them politely,

with a “Thank You.” If this is intentionally not followed, you will no longer receive corrections.

- Returning students will be expected to act as an example to new participants by following the rules and helping them to understand and comply with these rules.
- Individuals will not smoke, drink alcohol, or use illegal substances in the fencing salle. Participants also will not come to the salle under the influence of these substances.

*Aldo Nadi Fencing Academy Brochure.

***The History of Fencing*, pp. 169-70.

Rules of Safety in the Fencing Salle

- Individuals must warm up before participating in the lesson or bout. Due to time constraints, this is the responsibility of the individual.
- Participants must NEVER point a weapon at a nearby, unmasked person. When walking with a weapon or waiting for instruction, the point of the weapon with face downward toward the floor.
- Individuals will NEVER turn their back to an opponent. If done, this shows disrespect and leaves one vulnerable to attack.
- Participants must wear all necessary protective clothing and equipment during the lesson or bout.
- Individuals should regularly check the equipment they are using for unsafe elements. If one finds any equipment broken or unsafe the item should not be used and brought to the immediate attention of the Fencing Master for repair or replacement. (If an individual supplies his or her own equipment he or she is responsible for maintaining and regularly checking it for safety.)
- Participants should regularly check to ensure that the rubber button on the point of the foil is in place. If it is missing, the foil should not be used and brought to the immediate attention of the Fencing Master for repair or replacement. (Note that not all foils have a rubber button. This rule applies to those that do.)
- Individuals must NEVER bend the blade of the weapon with their hand, foot, or the floor to avoid breakage. If a blade needs to be adjusted it should be brought to the Fencing Master to be properly adjusted.
- Participants should use only fencing actions that are appropriate for the skill level and the facility at hand.
- If at any time a weapon (or blade) breaks, fencing should stop immediately and, if a class weapon is involved, the Fencing Master should be notified immediately.
- The individuals or individuals responsible for breaking any equipment due to not following the rules of the fencing salle will be required to compensate financially the Fencing Master (or owner) of the equipment. In other words, “you break it, you buy it.”