HOW WE TRAIN

A GUIDE FOR INSTRUCTORS

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www.ghfs.se

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INTRODUCTION

This Paper is intended to be a guide for our instructors at GHFS and is now also study material for our instructor courses. Hopefully there is some interest in this material amongst other practitioners and instructors within the Historical European Martial Arts community.

Our goal in GHFS has never been to reach an absolute truth, and that definitely applies to our pedagogical methods. Because of that, this paper contains a lot of material, the purpose of which is to propose a terminology for our martial art. It is not until we as instructors are able to communicate about the methods we use that we can progress.

The text is divided into five parts. The first part, *Courses and requirements in GHFS*, treats the requirements for our courses within the club, as well as our rules. Overall it is an internal document, but it could still be of help for other clubs and for anyone thinking about starting a club.

The second part, *Teaching HEMA as an athletic discipline*, treats things like how we learn technique, strategies for learning, motor skills etc. The chapter mainly deals with practical application and solutions, as well as the thoughts behind them.

The third part, *Pedagogy for HEMA*, discusses thoughts and ideas concerning how to teach, how learning works and methods for responding to students.

The fourth part, *Training structure and development*, gives an overarching picture for how a course should be structured in GHFS when it comes to how to develop the sequence of what we teach.

To be an instructor is the fifth and last part of this paper, its purpose is to provoke thoughts regarding the role of the instructor and why we become instructors.

I want to apologize for the obvious focus on fencing and armed martial arts. It is simply because those are my references. I hope that you as the reader can transfer the ideas in this text to your own martial art or sport, whatever it is, and that you get something out of reading this paper.

1. Study groups, courses and requirements in GHFS

Study groups

The purpose of the study group is to explore new areas in HEMA and thereby expand our curriculum with new courses. The study group is freer than a course and it doesn't have to fulfil the same requirements when it comes to a curriculum or formalised training. The mission is instead to gain knowledge within the group in the most efficient way.

The study group is ready to become a course when it can fulfil the course requirements and the instructors are considered competent enough to teach the source material. Study groups should not accept students, instead all participants should learn from each other and take part in the study and research of the source material. All study groups must also have a dedicated leader who is responsible for making sure that the group moves forward.

New courses

Today, an individual who wants to start a new course in GHFS has a much easier job than a few years ago. There is much more experience and support from the club and other instructors to draw from. The following requirements are here so that we can better help and maintain a high standard in our courses, instead of having to start from square one every time someone wants to start a new course.

Group leader and instructors

There should be a group leader and one or more instructors for every course in GHFS. The group leader's responsibilities include ensuring that the curriculum is followed and that the standard of training meets the GHFS requirements.

Course description

The group leader will provide a short description of the course. The course description has to include: clearly stated goals; either requirements or recommendations regarding equipment; previous skill requirements; and any specific safety issues.

Course curriculum

Every course in GHFS is required to have a curriculum. The Head Instructor will review the curriculum for approval before implementation. The curriculum shall span over two

semesters and include clear goals for the students. If the curriculum is changed, a copy should be sent to the Head Instructor for review.

Course material

GHFS is a historical martial arts club and all courses should have a historical basis that is interpretable, and thus contains a system. The group leader should therefore present what the course is based upon in terms of original historical material, and also any translations, texts, etc.

Instructor bio

The instructors will provide a biography that should include previous experience in martial arts, sports, leadership and pedagogy. The instructors should take part in the instructor courses provided by GHFS.

Examination

It is not necessary for a GHFS course to include examinations or tests. However, it is still important that students have the opportunity to showcase their skills and have these examined. Therefore, the group leader should inform the Head Instructor about how he intends to follow up the training, and how students advance within the course.

Attitude, responsibility and procedure

Warnings/suspensions

An instructor has the right to warn a student who displays behaviour that is not in line with the GHFS ethos. Examples of this include: a student who is not listening to the instructor; who acts in a dangerous fashion; or who treats other students poorly. When a warning is given, the Head Instructor is to be informed.

If a student has been warned on several occasions, is hindering the training or has committed such a serious offense that a suspension could be issued, the instructor should talk to that student directly in private. The instructor has the right to send a student away from a specific training session. This action should be avoided if possible and the Head Instructor needs to be informed if it does happen. The Head Instructor will then decide if a longer suspension is in order, after having talked to all persons involved.

General

Head Instructor

The Head Instructor is appointed at the annual meeting of the club. He is given the authority by the club to guarantee the quality of the courses in GHFS, and has a general responsibility for all training that takes place in the club.

It is the Head Instructor's responsibility to:

* approve the start of new courses and study groups;

* control the content description and curriculum of the courses and study groups;

* appoint and approve new group leaders, instructors and study group leaders;

* help the instructors to develop approved courses;

* support the instructors in their roles as leaders;

* make sure that GHFS has a good training environment that follows good Swedish athletic tradition;

* develop the GHFS training model;

* decide on suspensions from training.

In GHFS the courses are run independently, and it is not the job of the Head Instructor to run or plan classes, or to instruct the instructors in their chosen art.

Values

GHFS has a number of core values. These values shall permeate everything we do and function as guidelines for our activities:

• Comradeship – we respect each other.

• Skill – we maintain a high standard in everything we do and always aim to develop further.

• Historicity and academic excellence – the training is built on a serious and thorough interpretation of the historical source material.

• Democracy – we are a democratic organisation that is open to everyone and follows good Swedish sport customs.

• Physicality – we practice martial arts that put mental and physical pressure on the practitioners.

How do you behave in the club?

Be a brilliant person. Take it easy when others flare up. Be the person who keeps a cool head when things get heated and who is more prone to talk about other people's positive sides than their negative ones. See the positive sides when other people's points of view differ from yours, even when they are wrong; sooner or later the good ideas will win on their own merits.

No one likes an arsehole, but everyone likes a person who makes them feel good. Remember that no matter how good you are, there are people who are better than you at many things; some are smarter, some are funnier, some are faster, some are better looking. And that's a good thing for you, because you have something to strive for.

It is not much fun to be with people who dislike others because of skin colour, sexual orientation, gender and things like that. In GHFS we like everybody, until they have proven that they deserve the opposite. And even then, we are ready to forgive.

As a member you are part of a collective. We all become stronger if you are with us. That means that your behaviour also reflects on us. When you are fantastic, we are fantastic – when you are a bit stupid, we are a bit stupid. It is (by the way) perfectly fine if you are a bit stupid from time to time, we like you anyway, even when we are mad at you.

Cheating is not being a brilliant person. Winning is only worth it if you are worth it. Show your appreciation when someone has done something well and congratulate other clubs when they have performed well. Any good performance deserves recognition.

Drugs, alcohol, tobacco and things like that damage your health, as you already know. You also know that some people can handle it and others can't. Show consideration and if anyone has problems, they should be able to participate in our activities without feeling bad. In other words, skip the booze rather than the person.

It is really rather simple. Be a brilliant person.

Training rules

These are general rules for GHFS members. They are here for everybody's comfort and safety, and in order for us to be able to maintain a high quality of training. Some differences and additions to these rules might be found in the different courses.

1. The training starts at the appointed time. Show up on time and be ready, so you don't disturb practice.

2. Take off your shoes in the hallway, especially if the weather is bad! If your shoes make a mess, clean it up.

3. Take off jewellery and watches before you train.

4. If you want to train, you must participate in the warm up

5. Pay attention to the instructor. Techniques and other drills are performed when the instructor says they should be performed, not while the instructor is still talking.

6. Handle your training weapon like a real weapon, so you won't be sloppy when you handle an actual weapon.

7. When you are not using a training weapon, hold it in a safe way. For example, a sword can be held by the crossguard with overlapping hands, with the blade on your right shoulder – then you know where the point is.

8. Make sure you are aware of what is going on around you.

9. Always think about safety.

10. Make sure your equipment is in good shape and does not pose any danger. Take good care of your practice weapon.

11. Listen and be quiet when the instructor is talking. Do not interrupt with questions; raise your hand if it is important.

12. Avoid irrelevant theoretical discussions during training.

13. Don't use equipment that is not yours without asking first! Put all used equipment and material back in the proper place after use.

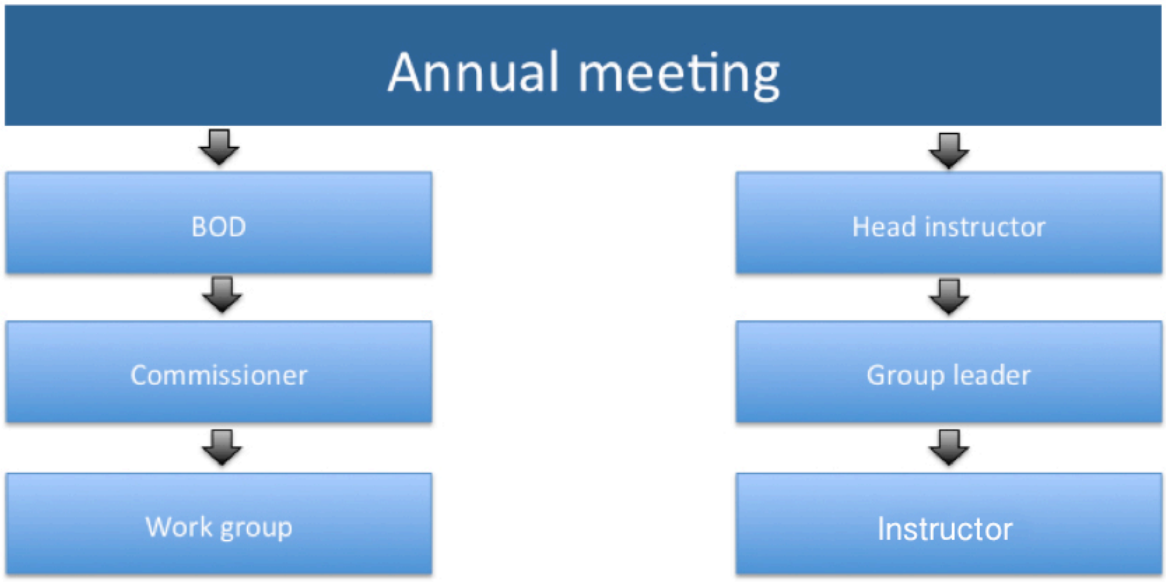
14. Help clean up and to put material back in place after practice.

15. Have a nice and respectful attitude towards fellow training partners and especially to new members.

16. Everyone is welcome regardless of gender, creed, skin colour or sexual orientation.

17. Be a brilliant person.

GHFS organisation chart



What is a good fencer?

In GHFS we train to be good fencers. What does that mean? You can be good at sparring, be a good academic or know a lot of techniques. The goal in GHFS is not one sided, all of these components are included and the individual focus of our members can be allowed to vary to some extent; but in general the goal of GHFS is to produce complete practitioners, meaning individuals who are performing at the top of their physical ability, who have good theoretical knowledge in their art, who strive to fine-tune the details in a technique and who can perform that technique in sparring and competition.

It is important to put emphasis on the entirety of historical fencing. We are not interested in a club only for academics or people who only spar, or in producing students who cannot apply their skills. Any limitation in the training of a student therefore needs good reason.

The nature of martial arts and fostering fighters

No one can have missed the contradiction in training a martial art that is no longer applicable in our society, using sources created by people who were raised to fight. We live in peaceful times, and in our parts of the world, life is comparably easy. Our muscles, bones and bodies have changed, and so have our mental conditions. The human is a flexible creature and we adapt to the time in which we live. Today we are experts at living with Internet, phones, cars and complex international and social contexts, while other times required different skills. This means people who lived before us were, to some extent, of a different kind.

Sometimes this difference becomes obvious when discussing HEMA. People who have never been in a violent situation, and who have definitely not been raised to be warriors, whose only connection to such a culture is the study of remaining material with low intensity technique training and half speed sparring once or twice a week, can hold opinions without any real experience to support them. Let us not fool ourselves, we are all this person to some extent, but the question is how much we allow our modern point of view to affect our idea of what we are doing. To some extent it has to be like this, since different people practice HEMA for different reasons.

To be aware of the difference in culture is still important, and it is also important that the modern human's point of view is not allowed to affect our views on the practitioners of earlier times. It is also important that practitioners who are ready to test their limits, expose themselves to greater risks and train harder and more realistically are not held back by misplaced benevolence and exaggerated safety mindedness. The task of the club is of course to provide a safe training environment, but as long as we are not risking lives, there has to be opportunity to push our limits.

For example, even the practitioners who are not ready to train with sharp weapons, or spar with a minimum of protective gear, or even participate in a fight with historical equipment by historical rules, can still benefit from testing their limits. Doing precisely that is why many people try martial arts in the first place. As an instructor, you should

support such student development by dealing with fears, putting things in perspective and challenging comfort zones.

Not letting yourself be stopped by bruises, a few small cuts in the scalp or even a broken rib is a part of what it means to be a fighter. Of course the people who do not appreciate harder training should have the opportunity to train without any risk of injury or pain, but the right for everyone to train in the club also means that those who want to train in a tougher environment and aim for a more historical training should have the opportunity to do so.

2. Teaching HEMA as an athletic discipline

How do you train HEMA?

The historical sources are often lacking in advice on how to train in order to become skilled. Often we only know what technique we should use in a certain situation, but the old masters are quiet regarding how they taught their students to become skilled at those techniques. Even more rarely do they describe their thoughts on how to create a functional skill set in their students; that is, how to piece together the training into a useful and functional training program. This is where modern technique and teaching methods come in. We learn *what* to train from the sources, but how to train it from modern training science.

Technique training

HEMA demands a lot of the student, but also of the instructor. One of the most important parts of being an instructor is to help the student improve his technique. It is possible to view technique learning from several different perspectives, for example a biomechanical or psychomotor perspective. A biomechanical perspective deals with how a movement can be improved, like improving power using less force. A psychomotor perspective deals with the underlying motivation and psychology behind the performed action. Instead of looking at the practitioner as a machine supposed to perform an exact action, the psychomotor perspective is more concerned with giving the practitioner a purpose and the will to achieve a goal with the action as the foundation.

In GHFS we focus on the second of these two perspectives in the beginning. The study of biomechanics is important, but first you have to understand the purpose behind the movements.

Traditionally many martial arts have attempted to create the perfect technique, where the students are marionettes following the instructions of their teacher without thinking for themselves. An example of this is classes where rows of students stand for hours performing techniques in the air. In the end, this type of practice teaches the student movements that are not expected to solve a problem or achieve an objective; they are empty movements. This is not a method we use in GHFS, though we do use single drills to train for example motor skills.

To use an example, technique training can be compared to learning to catch a ball. No one would suggest that one should learn to catch a ball without a ball. Neither does anyone believe that there is only one way to catch a ball – that is, a perfect movement that always works without variations. And everyone understands that one can only get better at catching a ball by practicing with someone who throws a ball at you.

To continue with the ball example, we can determine that once you have become good at catching the ball, you no longer think about the action, it comes naturally. You have internalised the knowledge and the action is completely psychomotor (that is, the will to perform an action in a certain context). When the ball comes flying, the catcher does not

think about stretching out the arm from a certain angle, opening the hand and closing it in the right moment. Instead it is the will to catch the ball that is in focus, not the action that is necessary to perform.

It is the same in martial arts – when you make an attack it should feel like the movement is made automatically; as if weapon, arms, feet and body are moving on their own accord and you are observing the body from the outside. What put the body in motion was only the will to hit the opponent.

In other words we want the students training to be focused on achieving an objective, and that the technique is seen as a mean to do this. The biomechanical details are a later question, and they can also vary between people. No one holds the idea that two athletic stars have the exact same technique in the high jump (for example) and that one is slightly better at performing a perfect motion. Their movements are individual and adapted to their own conditions.

Another important reason why we don't spend hours drilling movements in the air, especially in the beginning, is because it is boring. It has been proven that pleasurable learning is more effective. That said, biomechanics are not unimportant and we do practice several cutting and movement drills to improve them, but it is pointless to fine tune small details in an action that has not yet been given its context. For example, it is better to make small adjustments in a student's cut after he has executed it in a relatively stressful drill against a training partner (so that he understands why the corrections are made), rather than doing it while he has only been cutting in the air and has no understanding of why the corrections are made or what they are supposed to do for him.

How to learn techniques

On a theoretical level technique learning is divided into five stages. The training in GHFS is aimed at giving the students tools to as soon as possible be able to reach the *The generalisation stage.* We have already mentioned the psychomotor concepts and theories to get there, but it is worth pointing out again that the goal is to create martial artists who understand principles rather than just repeating empty movements.

Another important point is that we always try to move beyond the plateau where we are at any given moment, meaning we try and create progressive training. This means that we often train in a way we are not completely comfortable with and that we can't really handle, because it is at the limit of what we currently are capable of. This is a balance act where we should neither press too hard nor too soft, but strive for a level where we receive an appropriate challenge.

1. Preparation stage (accustoming)

This stage is where the students take their first stumbling steps. They get used to the tools we use, to move their body etc. It is good if this part is pleasurable. One example of a typical exercise for this stage that is used in longsword fencing is a circle drill to learn

the names of the guards, one person says the name of the guard and everyone positions themselves in that guard. Make it fun and social!

2. Gross coordination stage

This is where the students discover the basic principles. It is an "*aha!*" stage. Exercises are not supposed to be complicated, but goal oriented. One thing that is important to remember is that it is very unsatisfying to only train a small part of a whole (for example only footwork). Therefore it is good if you can make complete movement patterns instead of only separate parts, and that you train specifics only if necessary. Pay attention to this and adjust the training based on the need.

3. Fine coordination stage

This is the stage where the movements are adjusted in detail and adapted to the individual. Here it works well to separate parts of techniques and repeat them several times. Many people experience that fine coordination is frustrating to achieve, and that can be because HEMA is generally not about an exact movement but about adaptability. When you adjust the movement based on your own conditions, it takes a while to get it right. It also takes a while to be able to apply the movement different situations.

4. Automation stage

The automation stage is based on repetition. But repetition is not without variation. Automation means a movement that is well coordinated and uses the right muscle power, with the student not having to think about the details. On this level it is the objective that is in focus, not how it is executed. It is again important to train the whole movement in context and also to give the student feedback. Automation training becomes pointless if it is made without a concentrated effort from the instructor and it is the instructor's job to motivate and tune the student's attention to the movement. This is done best by words and challenges that demand further attention. Such challenges must be relevant for the training result and not change the conditions so much that the movement is automated on the wrong grounds.

5. Generalisation stage

The generalisation stage means that you can apply your techniques in varied and even untested situations. When training on this level the focus is on adjusting the training based on personal inner conditions (for example mental aspects, such as the student's self-image), and outer conditions (for example equipment). It is obvious that the individual coaching is important during this stage and the role of the instructor is therefore to encourage varied training based on new circumstances.

To teach technique

Teaching technique is both challenging and rewarding, and provides an opportunity for the instructor to learn from his students as much as the students learn from their instructor.

Technique exercise has two cornerstones. The first is to teach the students the purpose of the technique (for the reasons we have covered previously). If you don't know why you are performing a technique then it is hard to do it right. The second is about body/hand/foot coordination. In order to connect these two parts the focus should be on making pair drills, especially in the beginning. The pair setup makes it possible to train technique in context.

There are of course situations where it is appropriate to make a movement without a partner. Initially it could be that the student needs to learn the names of the movements in order to understand the instructor, but then the purpose is just that and not on learning the technique. It could also be that the student has run into a problem that the instructor believes can be solved more easily if the student is not exposed the stress of facing a partner who might be irritated and actively working against the student. However, most drills are done in pairs.

Basic steps for technique learning

1. Explain the purpose of the technique (formulate the problem that the technique is supposed to solve).
2. Explain the reasoning behind the different parts of the technique (mechanisms).
3. Show the technique from several angles while you break down the different parts of it.
4. Show the complete technique.
5. Show the technique at full speed.
6. Let the students perform the technique (solve the problem from given conditions).
7. Give feedback.
8. Change practice partners.

Development staircase for teaching technique

The following list is a description of the different pedagogical elements that can be used by the instructor in teaching depending on how well the student is internalising the understanding of the techniques and their context. This list is generally built on the stages described earlier (*How to learn technique)*.

1. Slow tempo

The first learning element concerns going through the techniques in a slow tempo, to get an opportunity to get familiar with the movement patterns. In this phase it is important not to make too many variations of the original movements. What you cannot do slowly you cannot do at speed.

2. Speed increase

The next element is simply an escalation of speed. We repeat the movements, but at a higher speed, as soon as safety and control allows. Every student must decide himself on how quick this escalation should be before it is time to practice at full speed. It is suitable to very slightly exceed the limit of what one is comfortable with (while still keeping safety in mind) in order to speed up development.

3. Varied speed

In order to avoid learning to become static and to build on false premises, it is important to vary the speed of training. If two students perform the same technique at a given moment, it is possible that they later cannot repeat the same technique in sparring or while competing, because they then don't know when the opponent will attack and at what speed, or the exact placement of the attack. It is necessary that that the technique does not follow a completely set pattern, but that the counter technique must adapt and be executed immediately after the attack is discovered.

Therefore, vary speed and timing in technique training.

4. Full speed

With protective gear and common sense it is possible to practice techniques at full speed, and it is then that you can see if the techniques are really performed in a way that works. Often we put together several different defences against a specific attack, in order to see how to succeed with the technique.

5. Changing practice partners

Different height, experience and movement patterns amongst the fellow students means facing different opponents is never exactly the same. Often you discover that a technique is not working in the exact same way when you change practice partners. Varying practice partners is a way to check the quality of technique performance; therefore we make our students train with all available training partners.

6. Varying the theme

In sparring you quickly realise that techniques rarely come out exactly as they happen in technique training. By varying attacks and counters you learn to adapt your movements to the situation at hand. When drilling you can, for example, initiate with several different attacks and after that perform the technique that you are training. Another method is to have the students train several techniques from the same situation, for example a bind. Depending on how the bind occurs, the students try to perform the technique that best solves the problem. In this way the exercise is varied in a sparring-like way.

7. Sparring

Sparring must be adapted to the martial art that you train. It is a good thing to hold back on free full-contact sparring until the student has the skill to understand what is happening and can control force and speed in his movements. However, it is possible and positive to introduce lighter or slower sparring earlier, or sparring that restricts the available movements – for example, sparring with only cuts from above, or only thrusts, though it is dependent on the martial art that the course teaches.

8. Discussion and sharing experiences

By sharing experiences we all learn more, and faster. Problems experienced by some can be given a simple solution by asking someone else. Often an outsider can see from a different perspective, so it is a good idea to train in groups of three, where one observes and gives feedback while the other two train the technique or spar.

9. Individual training

We all have different things at which we are better or worse. During training it can be appropriate for an instructor to choose a student and work on his specific needs. Beyond that, the instructor should also give advice to a student about what to work on outside of class. It can be anything from agility, strength, movements, stamina, etc. The individual coaching should not be taken lightly, it is often easy for an outsider to see someone's flaws, and by focusing on these the scope of training is narrowed, and results can be achieved more quickly. In the same way it can be a good idea to focus on strengths to get even further ahead in your development.

10. Evaluation

It is our opinion that evaluation of students if very important. The evaluations are not belts or grades like in many other martial arts. Instead it is simply a summary of the students' knowledge and skill, so that he can see his own progress. Evaluation can be done in several ways, but focus should be on the development of the particular student.

To correct a technique

It may sound strange to talk about correcting technique when we have just said that you should focus on the purpose of the technique, not on exactly how it should be performed, and that the principles behind a technique are the most important thing. The problem is that it is not always the case that a student, due to lack of experience, understands the context of a technique. We are not talking about making the student do exactly as the instructor does, but helping him understand the whole of the technique and the context of which it is part.

For example, it is easy to hit an opponent with a cut if the opponent is a beginner, but the same cut would not work against an experienced fencer. The student therefore might think he is solving the problem (hitting the opponent), but has in reality not understood the problem, since the problem is presented incorrectly in the form of an inexperienced opponent.

Another aspect is proprioception (the ability to decide the position of one's own body). It works like the other senses (smell, sight, hearing etc.) and can be more or less developed in different individuals. If one has an undeveloped sense of his body, it is often the case that he cannot decide on his own what is an effective movement, or even understand what it is he is doing.

When correcting techniques with students who are doing something for the first time, it is important to remember that the person who positions himself incorrectly often does not have a natural approach to (or understanding of) what is correct. The student might not even see the difference between what the instructor does and what he does himself, and lacks the knowledge to decide what is effective.

Step one is always to explain the purpose of the technique and make the student internalise why the technique is performed. Step two is to help the student to develop his motor skills. This can be done by physically manipulating the student's arms, legs, hips etc.

There are a number of tricks to use in order to create an understanding in the student for the techniques, and to understand yourself why a technique is not working for a student.

DESCRIBE THE TECHNIQUE: Begin with describing the technique again. Formulate and show what the technique is supposed to do, its context and what it looks like.

MECHANICAL ANALYSIS: Describe why the technique has to be done in a certain way, why the body is moving in a particular way and what effects this results in.

ORGANIC ANALYSIS: DESCRIBE relevant muscular and psychological aspects. For example: "unless you bend your legs those muscles cannot give you additional power", or "I think you do this because you are afraid to injure your partner", etc. By describing psychological aspects you make the student aware of them, and they become possible to process.

Break down the problems

In GHFS we train a given technique several times in order to internalise them properly, but it is also important not to focus on empty repetition, but always to show how the technique is used in context, how to move on from the technique and how to improvise based on the circumstances – and maybe above all, how to activate your students' own thoughts regarding all of this. It is more important to be able to improvise and have a direct understanding of what is possible, rather than being able to perform every technique perfectly. Remember, the techniques are manifestations of principles that can work in many different situations, not isolated motions that only exist in a particular situation.

Since we do not follow movement patterns slavishly, sometimes it can be difficult to see or explain why a student does not succeed with his objective. The technique is simply not working. In order to solve this we have to break down the problem into smaller parts. Here is a checklist that can function as a guideline for this.

When you encounter problems

- Break it down into smaller parts.
- Activate the student's own thoughts about why things go wrong.
- Correct one thing at the time, not everything at once.

Checklist for problems

- Lower the speed.
- Are the weapons in line?
- Are the students really trying to hit each other (and with the right attack)?
- How is the hip placed?
- How are the feet placed?
- Is the distance correct for the situation?
- How are hands and arms placed?
- Are the conditions right for the technique to work?
- Are the students helping each other, or opposing each other?
- Are there major differences in the students' physiology?

When you then correct a technique or a position based on the analysis you have made, don't just begin from the incorrect position, but let the student begin from the starting

position. This way the student learns not only the fraction of a motor skill, but to take responsibility for the whole action.

EXAMPLE: The student has an incorrect hip position, incorrect elbow bend, incorrect angle of the sword, feet in line and toes pointed inwards.

1. Correct one thing at the time. Move the hips, arms, sword, legs etc. by taking hold of the student and make him move to the right position.

2. Ask the student to look at you and compare.

3. Let the student start from scratch and perform the technique.

4. Correct in the same way as before.

5. Go back to starting position and try again. Ask the student to comment on his mistakes himself.

6. Repeat until the student is performing the movement without having to think about the different parts of it.

Observe that different people need different amount of time to learn. Never reveal that you are frustrated, but make sure that the situation is comfortable for the student. Talk encouragingly and instruct as clearly and simply as possible. Let it take the time it needs, without compromising with the training time for the rest of the class. Also try and make the student analyse his technique himself by formulating your feedback in questions like: “Are your feet in line?” and “How is your balance affected if you turn your hip?”

Definitions of coordination and motor skills

Coordination is of course important when training HEMA. An instructor who can analyse coordination skills has a much better chance to help his student. It can also be good to know how motor skills are classified, so you as an instructor can understand and communicate why different students learn in different ways.

The student’s coordination skills can be expressed in four different skills, that all are possible to enhance:

1. THE MOTOR LEARNING ABILITY, the student’s ability to learn new movements and control them.

2. THE MOTOR MANOEUVRE ABILITY, the student’s ability to manoeuvre and control the movements.

3. THE MOTOR ADAPTATION ABILITY, the student’s ability to adapt learn movements to new situations

4. THE MOTOR ADJUSTMENT ABILITY, the student’s ability to transfer from one movement to another.

Sparring as a teaching tool

It is especially important to point out that sparring is an important part of our training. Since it is our most competitive form of practice, there exists a great risk that students find themselves in a situation where ego, competitive instinct and striving for status assert themselves at the expense of humility, technical focus and comradeship. But the purpose of sparring is not to grow egos or compete, but to:

1. Test new techniques under pressure.

2. Learn new things.

3. Learn to improvise.

4. Put techniques into context.

At the same time sparring can cause some problems, or more commonly, that the student behaves in a way that destroys the learning objective of sparring. Besides the risk of injuries, a common problem with sparring is becoming so comfortable that one does not take it seriously; in other words sparring ends up not preparing the student in any way, but instead he falls back on already comfortable patterns. As has already been mentioned, another problem is that some students want to win rather than develop. Another behaviour that can be reinforced through sparring is that the students do not try to carry over the context of the techniques from the manuals into sparring, but fall into what can be seen as a competitive behaviour.

Different forms of sparring

In order to solve these problems we use different types of sparring.

MISSION SPARRING can solve many of the problems that can occur during sparring and put focus on the right things. In practice it means that the students are given problems to solve or restrictions on what they are allowed to do. It can be to keep a certain distance, to succeed in performing a specific technique or simply to avoid being hit.

LOW INTENSITY SPARRING. Learning new things can be difficult during full contact sparring. To lower the speed and force during sparring is a way to enable application of new techniques. Sparring at around 70% speed and force is reasonable during a relatively large part of the allocated sparring time in the club. Even during high intensity sparring you can still of course hold back and control how hard your strike lands, even if it is not necessarily done every time.

HIGH INTENSITY SPARRING. It is impossible to prepare yourself for full contact fighting without training full contact. It should be obvious that you from time to time have to go 100% in your sparring in order to develop insight of what that means and to create a new understanding for that type of situation. At the same time you have to bear in mind that it is only training and you need to maintain respect for your training partners. As an instructor you will often have to lower your own intensity while your student comes at you swinging for king and country.

COACHED SPARRING. To have a third person to give instructions is ideal, especially if it is an instructor, but also regular students gain from observing sparring and analysing fencing. Taking turns to spar and give feedback is a good way to receive objective criticism and learn to analyse fighting

SPARRING-DRILL-SPARRING. This sparring method is about finding holes in your students' fencing and then creating drills to cover them up. The easiest way of doing it is that the students help each other and let their partners know when they have found an opening. Say for example that A hits B repeatedly with a cut to the lower left opening after a feint to the right. They then halt the sparring and together figure out the best way for B to defend against that attack. They isolate the manoeuvre and turn it into a drill (A makes the same attack repeatedly) that they first practice slowly and thereafter faster and faster and in a more and more complex situation (A makes the attack randomly intermixed with other attacks). Finally the drill turns into regular sparring again, where A, from time to time, tests B's defence by applying the specific attack they practiced against earlier. This way you can systematically remove weaknesses and holes in your students' fencing.

The role of the instructor during sparring

As an instructor you can also act in the following ways in order to put sparring and other elements in their proper context. Apply the different parts of the following list as needed.

1. Inform and repeat for the students what we mean by "a good fencer". If they don't know what they are working towards, they can never get there.

2. Remove competitive elements from sparring and give each student areas to focus on (for example, one student is to integrate a particular technique into sparring while his partner receives another objective according to his own needs).

3. Make individual evaluations and help the students with the parts that are outside of their immediate interest.

4. Immediately deal with behaviour that can lead to an orientation away from the focus on the whole, i.e. gaming of rules and a student turning into a one trick pony.

5. Let the students frame their reasoning and thoughts about sparring in words. It is important that both sparring partners have the same idea of what their sparring should result in so that they may both get something out of it.

6. Explain the psychological aspects involved in martial arts training in general as well as in sharp situations historically.

To analyse sparring

The ability to analyse sparring and give positive feedback is to a large extent about being able to see patterns in someone's fencing. The more you analyse, the better you become

at seeing these patterns, so let your students do this often. There are also methods that can help and it is of course important for an instructor to be able to analyse and give feedback when he is to create constructive drills and help the student move forwards in his development. Of course the students must do the most of the job themselves, but they will develop quicker if they receive a correct analysis and meaningful drills from their instructor.

Here is a list that you as an instructor (and as a student for that matter) can keep in mind when you try to find patterns in your students' sparring behaviour.

Checklist for finding patterns in sparring

- Who is hitting whom?
- Who is moving and controlling the movements in the bout?
- How are they moving (straight, circular, clockwise or counter clockwise)? Are they changing direction?
- How long are the exchanges? How do they unfold?
- Who has the initiative and who is following?
- Are correct techniques used to solve problems or are they used in the wrong situations?
- Are there differences in size, skill or experience to take into account?
- Are there any double hits and if so why do they occur?

Double hits

Double hits in fencing deserve some extra mentioning here since they are a curse and a clear indication of bad fencing. Even if double hits are an historical problem, we can never accept them, and if you end up doing just that then you have forgotten what sparring with a sword is about. The idea of the art of fencing is to learn how to hit the other person without being hit yourself.

For the analysis of the double hit, you might want to ask the following questions:

- Are any of the students "suicidal" in his fencing?
- Are the students "closing the lines"? In other words, are they attacking in a way that would also stop an incoming counter attack?
- Are the students withdrawing from an exchange in a way that also covers them?
- Do they stop immediately after landing a valid attack or are they protecting themselves from the afterblow?

To break patterns

Once you have found a pattern, the goal is to find ways to break that pattern. It almost does not matter how this is done; often it is enough to become aware of what you are doing, and once you see it being repeated, simply do something else. But even this is difficult for many students, since it means that they have to move outside their comfort zone.

The reason one behaves in a certain way often has purely psychological reasons. A human in a stressful situation acts like a deer caught in the headlights of a car; since you do not have a good way to tackle the problem, you continue to do what you were doing even if it means getting hit by the car. The result therefore repeats itself. You act instinctively on what occurs in sparring and in that way a pattern is created that your opponent can exploit.

As the instructor it is your job to help the student break this pattern. With some help it is often considerably easier for the student to do this, especially if he has confidence in you, and he can continue to develop quickly. This type of learning during sparring is therefore rewarding for both student and instructor.

Voice command

A drill that develops the student's ability to break patterns is to fence with voice commands. When the coach calls out a specific command, like "go go go!", the student must perform an action agreed upon in advance. Such an action could be to move to the side, to attack with a specific technique, to get to grappling or anything else deemed appropriate.

It is not always important exactly what the student is supposed to do. The idea is to encourage him to do something new in a specific situation. It is important that the student has confidence in you and is willing to abandon the responsibility to decide when it is best to do what. The benefit of the drill is great, since so many opportunities are lost when a student hesitates. Now he receives confirmation that it is time to act and as a result it becomes easier to step over the mental hurdle.

3. PEDAGOGY FOR HEMA

HEMA is different from other sports and martial arts since it has an eternal search for a truth that we will never know if we have found. This means that our perspective on the historical material will change from time to time. It can be about both smaller and larger changes. If the instructor then has built his authority on claiming an absolute truth it means that eventually he will have to back down from that position (and therefore lose authority) or stick to an out-dated version of the art. Both of these scenarios are destructive for the development of HEMA, for the students and for the instructor. Instead we want to encourage students to think actively about HEMA. The role of the instructor is more to guide the students into the martial art rather than control every step, movement and thought.

This model of guidance and encouragement is demanding on both the instructor and the students. And it does not mean that students are allowed to interrupt class with unnecessary comments at the expense of other people's training time. In this chapter we will attempt to show how you can have a structured training that at the same time builds upon effective individual learning. We also hope that we can contribute with a terminology so that we as instructors learn how to talk about our method.

If we were to describe our overarching goal of the training in GHFS then it is that it should be fun. Not in such a way that the training does not contain tough aspects and hard training, rather the opposite, but the purpose is never to make students suffer just for the sake of it. There must always be relevance in what we do. Fun in this context therefore means rewarding and engaging.

To set goals

The pedagogy in GHFS should be tied directly to learning – in other words, teaching is direct and always focused on development of the student. Setting goals is important as it provides points of reference where the student can see how he is developing. Goals give purpose to the training, as long as the goal is relevant.

The best goals can be measured in a concrete way. When you help the student set up a goal, make sure it is on an appropriate level that can be measured, experienced and achieved within a reasonable time period. Having too abstract goals might be fun, but as time passes and the goal is still far away, motivation disappears.

DAILY GOALS: Explain for the students what the goal is with today's training. You can also give specific goals to individual students, things they should think about. Additionally, don't forget to explain the purpose of reaching the goal, for example why a technique is important.

PARTIAL GOALS: A partial goal is a long-term goal, though still within close enough time that it is manageable, for example a month.

MAIN GOALS: Main goals functions as long-term motivational forces. It can be tournaments, test examinations, grades or similar.

Methods for training technique

We have already gone through the training methodology for GHFS, but it can be useful to put names on the different training methods. We use all of the following methods baked into the different courses in the ways that have been discussed in the chapter *Teaching HEMA as an athletic discipline.*

The Whole and Part methods:

The Whole method means that the student trains whole movements, while the Part method divides the movement into smaller parts. The weakness of the Whole method is that it is difficult and sometimes frustrating for the students to learn a movement that contains too many aspects. The weakness of the Part method is that it can be difficult to assemble the smaller parts to a functioning whole. Generally speaking it can be said that the Part method is appropriate when learning complicated technique combinations or when trying to solve a problem, but the goal should be to train by the Whole method.

The problem solving method:

The student is given objectives that must be solved based on the disposition of the student. This is mostly for individual pedagogy and has the advantage that it helps the student to formulate thoughts around his own training and technique. The problem solving method makes it easier for the students to understand the principles behind the whole, rather than learning empty movements that are hard to apply.

The instruction method:

- visual

Visual instruction is a part of almost all or training and exists as a fundamental part of demonstration, for example when the instructor demonstrates a technique. But you can also expand the definition to include filming the student and doing analysis of the video.

Visual instruction never stands on its own, but the student also receives feedback and other types of instructions. When you give a visual instruction you should also ask questions to the student: “Do you see how I position my rear foot? Do you see how I hold my hands?” This creates good conditions for the student to analyse his technique by himself; it also awakens the student’s attention and helps a more active learning. At the same time the student learns how to ask the right questions.

- manual

Since it is difficult for many, especially new students, to transform a visual image into practice, it is suitable from time to time that the instructor actively moves the student's body to the right movement or position. You can read more on this type of instruction in the chapter *To correct a technique.*

Systematic variation:

Variation is important to understand the context of a technique and to develop the technique so that can be applied under varying conditions. It can be to change the side of attack, perform it in a similar but slightly different situation, etc.

Feedback:

Feedback is an important part of the job of the instructor, since the student develops by it and is also "seen". It can be a few quick encouraging words or taking the time to give individual guidance to the student (see "*Coaching talks*"). When giving feedback it is critical that the student is also formulating his thoughts around his training and his own performance. Many have trouble to take it further than simply positive or negative comments about their ability or a specific technique, for example "No it just won't work". It is the instructor's job to help the student learn to formulate these thoughts, for example by using follow up questions like: "Why is it not working?" "What distance are you at when you try the technique?", "How is your body framed" etc.

Remember that positive words are almost always better than negative ones. For example: "You will become even faster in your sideways movement if you bend your leg" instead of "Don't position your leg straight like that, you are too slow".

Motivation to learn

People come to HEMA and to us for many different reasons and with varying ideas of what it is that we do. What motivates these people is something we should value, even if it also must be mentioned that some misconceptions need to be erased in order for us to grow as an activity.

To strengthen motivational forces is important, since a student with an inner desire to learn, who trains and studies on his own outside of class, will progress quicker and further than all those who do not. To strengthen that drive it is important that the instructor builds up confidence and goals, so that such a will can exist. In other words, remember not to focus on the flaws of your students, but let them know when you have noticed that they are improving. Finally, let the student take responsibility for his own learning by having him form opinions on various problems.

Three points that help motivate the student:

1. Motivation in the club – good comradeship, one for all and all for one

2. Motivation in training – drills are connected to the training and give result

3. Motivation by development – clear, attainable goals

When it comes to motivation in general there are a couple of positive things you can do as an instructor:

- Give encouragement, guidance and direction
- Create a positive group dynamic
- Give recognition for achievements
- Give space for individual development
- Encourage students to take on positive roles (in the club, during activities, etc.)

Confidence and community – one for all, all for one

The student's self-perception is a central part of training. With a negative self-perception you aim lower than with a positive self-perception, and you risk settling for performing below your actual ability. Fear of failure can be a stronger negative motivation than the hope to succeed. Here it is up to the instructor to visualise, motivate and change the self-perception of the student. What is satisfying about this is that students who think little of themselves are often positively surprised when they succeed, and thereby gain a stronger motivation to continue since the experience is pleasant.

Low self-confidence can be based on a number of things. One such factor can be poor bodily self-confidence due to, for example, obesity. Do not expose your students to tasks they will perceive as humiliating if they fail. A person with a negative self-perception will fail automatically since fear of losing will form a mental image. This is similar (but a negative mirror image) to elite athletes who use positive visualisation techniques to perform better.

Acceptance zone

A person with a negative self-perception, like the one with an inflated self-perception, often has a small so-called acceptance zone. A large acceptance zone means that you accept that you, and others, can perform well or poorly. If you do not accept bad results you risk ending up in a situation where you avoid performing well or raising your level, since you are afraid of the risk of failure. The instructor can encourage a larger acceptance zone by increasing the feeling of security in the individual and in the training environment.

A sense of context

To give the student a sense of context is an important part of creating confidence and improving self-perception. We humans are dependent on others valuing us in order for us to perceive ourselves in a positive light. Therefore it is important that the instructor strengthens the bonds within the group and enforces positive behaviours.

It happens that individuals break the coherence in the group by always calling for attention, trying to assert themselves or claiming roles in the group that no one else wants them to have. It is then important to remember that the reason for this is the individual's insecurity, and it is the instructor's responsibility to deal with the problem. One way of doing it is the individual talk. But it is also important to be clear and direct in front of the group.

A student with an overgrown need of asserting himself does not only harm the group, but also enters a negative spiral since the feeling of context disappears. The others do not confirm the roles he will try to take and therefore he feels he has to defend them. It is not always easy to deal with these situations, but you should be aware that these are the mechanisms behind it.

In other words it can be positive to actually give encouragement to individuals who are perceived to be too inflated, when they deserve it. At the same it is important not to confirm a role that has been claimed erroneously. If the student gets encouragement at the right times he will hopefully find his proper place and can also enjoy a newfound feeling of security. It need hardly be said, but for the coach to lead developments in this direction, it is required that he has the group's respect and trust.

Coaching talks

The individual talk and coaching can be, for a practitioner, one of the most valuable aspects of studying these arts, especially when he is standing in front of a challenge of some sort. The basis for the talk is that you have already grown a culture of confidence with the practitioner.

The coaching talk is largely a way to help the student help himself, there are of course no magical words that can make an athlete perform better. Instead it is about giving the practitioner tools to change his mental image of the situation or his ability. To coach means that you develop the training that a student already possesses, to do the most with the resources available and hopefully move him up to the next level.

To know what you want

All development starts with an idea and from there it can be realised. The point of talking with a student about his training is to understand what he wants. And to want something is absolutely central to being able to progress and become better. If you do not know what your goal is, it is also impossible to get there. Since people are different,

they are facing different kind of problems when trying to formulate their goals. Some have too many goals and become unfocused, while others hardly know what they want. In many cases they are not aware of their goals, or able to formulate them. As an instructor you can help the student find out what he wants, or help order his priorities.

Finding out what you want is not easy. Training is a part of life and for most of us our hopes in ordinary life also affects our training. The coaching talk is therefore not only limited to training. As a coach you should try to help the student formulate goals, driving forces and conflicts and problems that should be dealt with, even when the talk goes outside of training and into everyday life, the great questions of life, personal problems etc.

One way of getting close to the student is to ask questions about pleasant things.

Things that are motivating can help identify the real goals. A series of good questions could be:

1. What are your three happiest HEMA-moments?

2. What parts of training do you like the most?

3. What do you think that you are good at?

4. If you could control your life completely, how much space would HEMA get?

5. What do you enjoy the most in life in general?

6. Is there a person that you really admire?

This type of questions leads to the kind of answers that create an image of a personality and aspirations in life. The immediate follow-up question to all of the questions above is "why?" Why was that a happy moment? Why is it fun to train this specific thing? Why are you good at that? Why would you want your life to look like that? With these questions you are free to dream, without setting up obstacles for yourself…

Setting up obstacles for yourself

In the coaching talk there are two elements that you need to be aware of: *motivational forces* and *oppositions*. A motivational force is something that works as an engine for development, while an opposition is something that works as a brake. As we have seen, all development starts with finding out what you want. If the instructor then asks questions that help formulating what you want, contradictions often appear. Why else have you not already reached your goal? An example of this can be that you ask the question "how would you want to be able to fence?" An answer could be: "With more flow and agility, but I'm too inflexible". All of a sudden we have a goal (getting more flow in fencing) and an opposition (I'm too inflexible). It is now easier to develop a training programme to increase flexibility and flow.

If you go deeper there are however often less concrete oppositions blocking the path. For example a student that wants to win a competition, but does not think that he is able

to. As a coach you can try to break down the two elements in parts. In the situation with the competition it could mean that the reason your student wants to win is to gain respect and be in the spotlight (motivational force), but is afraid to look ridiculous or get injured (opposition). Such oppositions often demands more in depth support, talk and training, since they are based on a combination of low self-confidence (overly concerned with other people's opinion) and actual risks (injuries).

The objective of the instructor in this situation is to incorporate these parts in the acceptance zone and to make the student aware of the actual motivational forces and oppositions, so that it becomes possible to work with them. A secure person does not let himself be limited by the opinions others, and understands that you have to risk something to get where you want to be.

What can you affect?

Why is it that some people manage to have a demanding job, spend time with their family, keep in shape, maintain a large social network and still not feel stressed, while others find the same things difficult and stressful? To a varying degree we all use excuses and sometimes they are relevant explanations for why we have not done something (I did not get to the store in time to buy milk because my bike broke), but often they work as a sort of protective wall that prevents us from succeeding in the things in which we want to succeed. If you rely on excuses, it easily becomes a bad habit. In the same way you can learn not to use excuses. If you are clear on what you want, excuses often appear irrelevant or ridiculous. What earlier might have looked impossible becomes possible.

If you are someone who regularly works out you have probably heard excuses from those who do not train that sound completely irrelevant to you. For example: "I cannot get in shape right now since the weather is bad, and I don't like to go to the gym", often combined with a wish that there would be specific gyms that fit their ideals perfectly... With just the right tools, no free weights, only free weights, only for women, only for fat people, only for skinny people or (a personal favourite) a gym with better music.

To wean the process of developing maturity away from all excuses, you can help the student to break down the problems into smaller parts. When problems are bunched together they often appear insurmountable, but when they are broken down into smaller parts they suddenly become easier to manage. A good way to break problems down is to divide them into two categories: what you can do something about, and what you cannot do anything about.

You cannot change the bad weather, but you can run indoors or get better clothes and train outdoors. A lot of the excuses are formulated in a way that that makes it almost impossible to overcome them, like saying that you could never train at any of the available gyms. This type of excuse is a little like the emperor's new clothes: if you point out that they are just bad excuses, the illusion of their validity disappears. But from time to time we stick to our illusions with an iron grip since the alternative is that we actually have to change. As an instructor you can investigate why we need our excuses. Why is it so sensitive to be seen at a gym? What do you think that the people watching you work

out are thinking? Why do you care? Have you ever spoken to any of them? This kind of questions makes it clear that the problem lies in something within the student. To use what you cannot change (like the available gyms) as an excuse becomes impossible and instead you start to focus on what you can change (your self-perception).

By separating what you cannot influence from what you can influence, you can move towards a training that focuses on the right things. The world and the conditions will never be perfect. There are things you cannot change, like what others do and how they perform. You cannot change the mat you train on, the other people at the gym or your opponents in a competition. It is waste of energy to try, when you really should be focusing on the things that you can affect: your training, your ability, your training schedule, your life and your performance. As a coach you can help the student minimise how important the things he cannot influence are for his training, and help him realise that if he lets these things stand in his way, he has already lost.

Asking questions that lead to awareness

The coaching talk works best when it results in goals and a positive roadmap to get there. It is not a comforting talk or a way to cover up problems. Rather the opposite, it is about becoming aware of problems and motivational forces, and putting them in perspective.

There is almost always a solution to all problems we face within our martial arts and most often that solution can be found within the individual. If the individual does not want to do something, it does not matter what the instructor says. The way to reach a solution is to ask questions that put things in their proper perspective. And since the purpose is to get the student to talk it is prudent to use open questions. For example: can you tell me about your previous competitions? Instead of asking: How many times have you competed? The open question cannot be answered without some reasoning from the student, it demands that he explains and thinks about his reply. In this case the closed question can be answered by a number, and nothing more.

When you have a coaching talk you can use three basic questions that can be varied in different ways: What works well? What can be improved? How should we go about it? These three questions work in a circle and it is always possible to keep on asking them. Once you reach one level, there is another one right above.

Asking questions is a tool for you to get the practitioner to put words on things. Aside from asking open questions based on the three-step model, it can also be a good idea to ask questions that are visualising, for example how things would be if the student succeeded in reaching his goals. Such questions often lead to the practitioner being able to formulate himself around his goal and also to become clearer about his motivational forces.

1. How would you look if you became stronger?

2. How would you move with the sword if you reached your goal?

3. How would you answer to threats if you were stronger/weaker in the body?

4. Who would you be if you succeeded with what you want?

5. How would others see you? How important is that?

Before and after competitions

Competitions deserve a special mentioning when talking about coaching. Not because competitions in themselves are the purpose of what we do, but because they expose the practitioner to a large degree of stress. Regardless of what you think about it, competitions have always been a part of fencing, both historically and today.

In GHFS we train as we always do regardless if someone is about to compete or not. The only difference is that most practitioners will train more and more intensely before they are about to compete, and the instructors will have coaching talks with them as they prepare.

Right before a competition all of those who will participate usually gather together, sit down and share with each other their feelings. It can be about what feels good or not, but it can also just be to note and explain feelings and find some comfort of sharing with comrades. As the instructor you don't have to do anything special during these talks, you can simply tell your students your own feelings and maybe explain what is about to happen in the competition.

During the bouts the instructor can coach, but the ball is in hands of the fencer. If you have done your job, your student has enough confidence in you that he will listen to what you say. It is mostly very concrete things, like spotting an opening in the opponent's defence or reminding the student to do certain moves, etc. It is rarely appropriate to talk about anything deeper than basic things during the actual bout (maintain sideways motion, follow up on attacks, don't get stuck in patterns, your opponent is doing X, maintain a threat, etc.) – simply the things your student has drilled for hours and hours but can still forget easily when put under pressure.

After fights and competitions you should also gather and debrief. These moments are often sensitive since emotions can be strong and fresh and there are a lot of thoughts swirling in the heads of your student. The goal is to get the student to channel his experiences into something positive. In this situation you can use the same basic questions we discussed earlier: what was good, what can be done better, how should we go about it?

4. Training structure and development

Structure for courses

Basic course

In the chapter *How to learn techniques* we went through a number of steps that show how we learn new movements. Practically, the training of course has to relate to this learning process, and the courses in GHFS should therefore build on an understanding of the learning process. Every sport or martial art has a series of movements that you have to learn in some way before you can move on. In football you must be able to run before you can dribble with the ball; in boxing you need to be able to perform the different punches before you can spar; in hockey you need to know how to skate before you can tackle. In other words every athletic activity has basic conditions and in the art of fencing this means some relatively complicated motor skills that need to be developed, like being able to move with the sword, first without opposition and then with opposition.

For the longsword we have structured these basic conditions according to the following model:

1. Cutting through all eight angles with footwork and with both edges. In other words, cutting and thrusting drills.

2. Being able to perform the basic parries – for example, having a fellow student attack an opening, and responding by closing that opening with a parry.

3. Being able to perform a series of simple attacks. In other words, being able to make more than one consecutive attack against an actively defending partner.

4. Transition between guards, and basic body mechanical foundations (bending the legs, movement in all directions etc.).

5. Fitness. Building the foundation for training and create conditions that allow you to fence.

The basic course for the longsword is aimed at giving the student the ability to move, attack and defend with a certain ”flow”. More complicated techniques are not the mainstay of the basic course, even if the instructors occasionally teach them in order to challenge the students and create interest through variation and showing the depth of longsword fencing.

A basic course for wrestling would of course look different; you would for example include drills for moving between different distances, getting out of a clinch, falling safely etc.

The drills that we use in the Longsword course for training motor movement patterns are simple. We mostly rely on:

1. Flow drills where the students are cutting through certain angles using specific cuts in a pattern that is endless, i.e. there is no ”start” and ”stop” in the drill. Examples include cutting “eights”, two cuts from the right followed by two cuts from the left, etc.; this can be varied endlessly and be combined with different footwork. More advanced drills can be used in pairs, from the basic “parry-counter” drill up to drills with several predefined consecutive moves.

2. Simple attacks and parries and counters are trained with protective gear where one student attacks another who parries. Basic drills can be to cut from right to left etc. Another is the 1-5 drill, that increases the number of attacks and parries done consecutively starting from 1 going up to 5, where the attacking and defending is switched between the students without pausing the drill.

3. Simple footwork drills like mirroring the partner’s moves, trying to keep distance, etc.

4. Slow sparring. The speed as well as the allowed techniques and targets can be varied according to need.

An important principle is that the instructors show all their demonstrations of techniques with proper guards and footwork, in order to give the students an image to follow. They also correct the students if they do something wrong. In some cases the instructor can overdo his body and guard position, like training with very bent legs, in order to build up supporting muscles and make the students comfortable with new body positions.

Continuation course

When the student has internalised the basic motor skills it is time to move on to more contextual training. This means that we are moving closer to what we call martial arts, it is partly the context of the fencing hall (that is, fencing with someone in a modern training environment) and partly the historical context (where you find techniques and context that are hard to train without hurting each other).

Many of the more complicated principles, like distance management, space control, time etc. are impossible to learn unless you are first familiar with the format of combat with the sword. Since we do not fight for life or death it is important to point out this is about simulating the principles, not actually duelling. The purpose of sparring is to provide the student the opportunity to train the relevant principles in historical fencing and it is important to relate to the situation in which the techniques were meant to be used, i.e. combat with sharp steel weapons.

The contextual training is a combination of:

1. Sparring

2. Drills for principles (timing, distance, etc)

3. Technique training

4. Repetition and biomechanical fine-tuning

5. Improving the physical conditions

6. Manuscript studies

Put together these points form a foundation for the students. The purpose of contextual training is to create fencers who have the skills that are useful in a fight for life or death, but that does not mean that the drills themselves simulate such a fight. Some parts (like sparring) are often mistaken for simulating combat, but is not their purpose.

The idea that sparring always needs to look like a duel comes from misconceptions regarding fencing and how to build skills. The purpose of sparring is that, in the end, the students will incorporate skills that would be useful in fencing in historical times. It is of course important from time to time to make drills and sparring as realistic as possible, but in the end sparring is just another aspect among many in your training. It is important that the students understand the purpose with the different parts of their training and that they themselves gain an understanding of the historical context where their skills are supposed to function.

Parallel with this it can be good to change the conditions of the training. If the students start lacking in respect for the sword, it can be a good idea to remove protective gear that is only meant to prevent pain (such as padded jackets and forearm guards), or use single drills with sharp weapons etc. Such training is not so much about building new skills as they are about creating ideas about the context in which the martial art should be viewed.

Training principles – the example of distance

All martial arts are built on principles that hopefully have a foundation in the laws of physics and the conditions of the martial art in question. For the advanced practitioner, who has learnt the basic movements, the understanding of principles is necessary in order to apply techniques. Some principles are described in the original sources, others are not clearly defined but are natural. Such a principle is the understanding of distance.

Gaining an understanding of distance is related to several things, like having good spatial awareness, being able to foresee a chain of events, being able to affect the movements of the opponent, psychological advantage and physical conditions such as length, strength and agility. Some principles regarding distance are general. For example, a shorter fencer should not stay in a distance where he cannot reach his opponent but the opponent can reach him. A person with a longer reach is in the opposite situation, even if it in this case is a truth with modification (in fencing your arms are always in reach when you attack, regardless of how short the other person is).

Distance is also something abstract and relative, it is not always precise. Training distance is therefore somewhat subjective. Here are a few examples on how to arrange this kind of training:

* Simple distance training, like moving up to maximum distance and cutting from there, or moving up to the distance where the opponent can reach you with an attack. This is a simple drill.

* Distance control. This drill is about the ability to control space, to move the opponent using your own movements and to approach him without him noticing. An example of such a drill is having one person trying to move within distance without the partner noticing. The partner's objective is to maintain distance, while the first student's objective is to close in. In his arsenal there are several methods, like moving in a circle and making the circle in to an ellipse that he then breaks, by retreating and then suddenly moving forward (so that the opponent walks into distance), or moving in a circle and slowly making the circle smaller.

Biomechanics

We have already talked about the fact that it is only when you can perform the basic movements that it is meaningful to fine-tune biomechanics. The training in the continuation course is more aimed at adjusting details than in the training in the basic course, even though basic drills are still used even by the most senior students and instructors.

In GHFS we don't believe that there is one answer to how every technique should be performed, and therefore we don't believe that it is relevant to simply copy the movements of the instructor or to try to transfer them directly to a student. Sometimes a technique works in a certain way just for you, and it can be difficult to know precisely why this is the case. Maybe you have more developed muscles in one part of your body, or you have a reaction pattern that supports your own way of moving. Since no person is exactly like another, it is rather impossible to build good fighters by trying to create exact copies of yourself. Besides, it is boring.

When we adjust biomechanics in a student, it is important that we are checking that the student is achieving his goals with the adjustment. You can give tips and advice on how the student should do things, but if you don't follow up and see if it actually works then it is a failure. This is a challenge for the instructor, since you are always faced with unique problems with only the most overarching biomechanical principles to rely on.

In order to make a biomechanical analysis we look at the following things:

- Is the movement performed with the entire body?

In fencing it is common that students focus only on the arms, not on how the movement engages the entire body.

- Is the motion needlessly large and can it be made smaller?

Unnecessarily large movements are common and can be helped by drilling the specific movement until it is sufficiently small.

- Is the movement following the principles of the martial art?

Is it closing the line, is the edge alignment correct, etc.

- Can it be performed faster? More precisely? With more force?

By applying hip movement, lowering the body, bending the knees, using another grip etc., attributes such as speed, strength and precision can be adjusted.

- Is the motion stable?

How is the student standing and moving? What happens in the next moment? Often problems can be attributed to the hip not being in a good position in comparison to the feet and that the upper body is being moved backwards or to the side.

All of these aspects are not necessarily relevant in an analysis of the student's biomechanics, but it is usually worth it to think about them.

Reading aloud from the manuscripts

Another aspect of HEMA that we also work on more continuously with students in the continuation course is the original sources. We consider it important to put rather high demands on advanced students to do self-studies with the manuscripts. At the same time it is worth remembering that many people have difficulties understanding the type of texts we use as foundation for our martial art, or at least that is how they see their own ability. By having instructors read aloud from the manuscript and explaining them to the students, we help them understand the texts and also incorporate them into ordinary training time. When the student then picks up the manuscripts himself it will be easier for him to decode the sources and understand what they are about. This also means that the student is on his way to taking his first steps with analysing the sources himself and contributing to the development of our interpretations.

Even if not all students can (or should) analyse every single technique in the sources, it is positive if they do regularly think about the sources. It enhances their knowledge and understanding of fencing. Besides, we have observed a clear connection between studying the manuscripts and fencing well in both sparring and competition. You could even say that almost all of the most prominent HEMA-practitioners work on a rather deep level with the sources. Furthermore, the fact is that HEMA only remains HEMA as long as the sources or the few living lineages are an organic part of what we do.

The importance of fitness

GHFS training consists of several forms of strength and conditioning elements, and this is for very good reasons. In this document we will not talk about the specific drills or setups, those can be varied endlessly and can be adjusted depending on the disposition of the specific martial art. For example, the strength training in wrestling might differ from that of fencing, depending on the specific demands of the different disciplines. But

all forms of martial arts have in common that strength and endurance have a distinct impact on technique and form, after all it is the body that is supposed to perform the movements, and the better it is suited to do so, the better it will perform. Technique and fitness belong together.

In GHFS we have people of different age and with varying abilities. There is room for everyone and the training must be rewarding for all. When it comes to strength and conditioning, it is important to create drills that can be varied so that they are accessible to all practitioners. For high-level practitioners, it is worth mentioning that a lot of strength and conditioning training must take place outside of regular training time.

Aside from the pure martial arts focused training, to train your body has a lot of benefits. Here are a few:

- Decreased risk of injuries
- Enhanced performance
- Increased body control
- Easier to get past plateaus in your training
- Increased wellbeing and health

5. To be an instructor

In GHFS we strive to have good relations between the instructor, the group and the individual student. The behaviour of the instructor and his personality of course has a major influence on how well we succeed with this.

Many different and complicated situations can appear in a group, especially one that trains an adrenaline packed individual sport like HEMA. From time to time, the instructor has to face students who have a great need to assert themselves, private issues, personalities that do not work well with the rest of the group. And that is on top of the daily training, with all what that means in terms of motivating, coaching, etc. It is therefore important that the individuals and the group have a profound confidence in the instructor, and that the instructor is a person that they respect and take seriously.

We can all be caught by hubris, low self-confidence, and we can all have bad days. But the starting point must be that we are secure in what we do and that we are aware of our shortcomings and that we are honest.

Instructor types

Normally instructors are divided into four categories:

1. The authoritarian, who decides everything, who needs to enforce his will and cannot stand criticism.

2. The democrat, who allows the majority in the group to make the decision.

3. The lenient instructor, who allows every student to do his own thing.

4. The "situationally aware" instructor, who lets the situation determine whether the practitioner, instructor or club will make the decision.

In GHFS we want our instructors to be situationally aware. This means the instructor understands any situation and can demand things of his students when needed, but can also adapt. There is little space for wounded pride in the instructors of GHFS. Who you are as a person naturally decides what kind of instructor you are, but you can also strive to become a better instructor. Then, as always, it is important that you are humble and accept your flaws, and can be open about them when needed. Remember that there are other instructors and coaches to get support from and who can give you advice and maybe also new perspectives.

Why become an instructor?

Ask yourself this question, why you are an instructor. Regardless of reason it is important that you know your motivation. Is it because you want status, to boss people around, to train something you would not train otherwise, or is it because you think that

you would be a good instructor for some specific reason? Or is it a combination of different reasons? Regardless of your answer it is better to be aware of your motivations than to try to hide them from yourself. And maybe you will find new motivations as you go.

Guiding words for instructors in GHFS:

- Accept varying skill levels in each individual, everyone trains according to their abilities.
- Challenge the students to develop.
- Give clear answers and directions.
- Be fair.
- Do not pick favourites.
- Be a supporting pillar, not an adversary.
- Give constructive criticism and guidance. Do not impose yourself at the expense of others.
- Let your knowledge speak for you, not your ego.
- Be positive in your encouragement.
- Stick to our rules and be consistent.

The roles of the instructors relative to each other

Of course, the relations between the instructors are also very important. If we cooperate and support each other, the teaching will be strengthened, as well as the club; but if we oppose each other, we get the opposite effect.

As instructors it is important that we enjoy the respect of the students. Not an erroneous or aggrandised respect, but a respect that allows you to lead the training. That kind of respect is often gained by building up mutual trust with the students so that they can be sure that they are safe in your hands.

Therefore it is important that other instructors do not undermine that position. If an instructor holds a class, no other instructor has the right to interrupt or interfere, unless it is for safety reasons. Even if you are instructors for the same group you should not correct or contradict your fellow instructors in front of the group or interfere with training.

If you spot flaws in another instructor's teaching, take it up with him in private, or with the Head Instructor.

To interpret the sources

We are all painfully aware that we interpret from sources and that in most cases we do not have an unbroken lineage to lean on for support. This is what makes studying and interpreting the original sources a core part of every HEMA-practitioner's training. As an instructor, you are often faced with the problem that manuscript studies have to take place outside of regular training time. You are forced to simply encourage self-studies. But if you integrate references and passages from the sources in everyday practice, you also give the students simple entryways to the manuscripts. When they go on to read the sources, they will find them easier to understand.

You could argue that not everyone needs to study the sources, and that is true, it is after all enough that the instructor teaches the techniques from them. At the same time, the ability to interpret the old texts and put it into practice shows that the student has gained insights about how fencing works. He can "think fencing".

Aside from that, students can be encouraged to study manuscripts as a part of their identification as historical fencers. The manuscripts and their practical application are the two pillars of HEMA, and anyone who wants to say "I am a fencer" should be expected to also study the manuscripts on a regular basis. The study of old fighting manuscripts is exciting and very unique, use it as a way to get your students involved and take pride in their own abilities and their involvement in our community.

The goal is to get the students to interpret the source material themselves. But it is not critically important that they will understand what a Fencing Master meant with any specific sentence – absolutely the most important goal is that they start to reflect on fencing, and how they can use their insights to solve fencing problems.

As an instructor it is slightly different. We also need to be able to defend and explain our interpretation. A method for deciding if an interpretation is reasonable is by using the following model:

1. Is the technique following the text or picture?

2. Is the technique following any principles laid out in the text in general? Is it breaking any of those principles?

3. Is the technique mentioned in other manuscripts? What do they say about it?

4. Is the technique similar to any other techniques in the manuscript?

5. Can you perform it against a cooperative training partner?

6. Can you perform it against an un-cooperative training partner?

7. Can you perform it in sparring?

8. Can you perform it in competition or have you seen other fencers perform it in competition?

9. Does it work against different opponents?

10. Can others perform it?

11. What happens when conditions are changed (distance, binding, etc.)?

12. What other interpretations is possible from the text and the picture? Why is this interpretation more reasonable?

If you have answered all of these questions, you often have a clearer picture of how well the interpretation holds up, even if it might not score on all questions. It is worth pointing out that these types of questions should not be posed during class time, since it will probably interfere with training. If you want a student to work with these kinds of thoughts, you should schedule specific training time for it, or simply do it when training on your own.

One way to encourage thoughts and analysis of the source material is to have a "question of the week" or similar, where you ask the students to find the answers in the manuscripts and have a discussion about it on your Internet forum or similar medium. Once you get such a discussion going, the probability is high that sooner or later you will have grown a few good fencing academics. Regardless or whether this happens or not, the students will have developed their understanding for the art of fencing.

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