

BRITISH FENCING REFEREE EDUCATION LEVEL 1&2 PRELIMINARY READING

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1. PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is to provide those wishing to attend a level 1&2 referee course with the appropriate background reading in order to provide the initial skills and knowledge to pass both the theoretical and practical aspects of the basic refereeing exams. Please note that Levels 1&2 are managed by the Home Nations.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO PRELIMINARY READING

Refereeing allows you to be involved to the highest level of our sport. British referees have been involved in every modern World Championships and Olympic Games. Whether you have experience refereeing at your club, local competitions or you have little or no experience, this preliminary reading will provide you with an initiation to the basic safety and technical responsibilities you have as a referee.

We will break down the reading into the following sections;

- Duties of the referee
- Checks before the bout
- Starting the bout
- The field of play
- Timing the bout
- Calling halt
- Referee hand signals and phrases
- The 'right of way'/priority – foil and sabre only
- Epee
- Paperwork
- Penalties
- Ending the bout
- Sample test

Many of the answers will be found in the preliminary reading. However, reading and familiarising yourself with the FIE [rulebook](#) (found on the British Fencing policy zone of the website) especially the technical and material sections) and attending a

refereeing course will give you the best chance of success. British Fencing recently launched a [FIE Rules App](#) which can be downloaded onto your phone.

It is also worth noting this is not a guide to refereeing -especially regarding 'right-of-way' in foil or sabre. You cannot learn from a book. This is best learnt by primarily practice, attending a refereeing course and being mentored by experienced referees.

We recommend you should attend an accredited seminar run by an approved British Fencing Referee Educator (examiner). All the tutors have significant domestic and often international experience. Take advantage of the time you have with them and use the opportunity to ask as many questions as you can.

Following the seminar there will be a practical assessment. This will allow you to apply the theory you have learned from both the preliminary reading and the work carried out in the seminar.

We wish you every success for your upcoming course.

2. DUTIES OF THE REFEREE (t.47)

- Calls the roll of competitors
- Directs the bout
- Checks the weapons, clothing and equipment
- Superintends the proper functioning of the electrical apparatus
- Positions him/herself and moves in such a way to be able to follow the bout
- Penalises faults
- Awards hits
- Maintains order
- Consults the expert concerning electrical apparatus when necessary

2.1 CHECKS BEFORE THE BOUT

Clothing checks;

- All clothing, including the glove must be in good condition without holes or tears
- Minimum safety standards are determined by the type of competition – protection levels are usually either Level 1 (350N) or Level 2 (800N clothes, 1600N masks)¹ – you should check the requirements at the beginning of any competition.
- Pay close attention to the under-plastron by checking the label on the front and that it is worn correctly.

¹ The British Fencing Safety Committee allow non-350N or 800N breeches/ trousers on young competitors. See page 10 of the [Standards and Safety Guidelines](#)

Wearing the kit;

- Jackets and breeches must overlap by at least 10cm when on guard and the shoulder braces should be worn correctly
- All female fencers must wear a chest protector². In foil chest protectors must be underneath the under-plastron
- In foil, the lame jacket must cover the target area. In simple terms, for foil, it should cover at least until the top of the hips and the entire shoulder.
- In sabre, the lame jacket must cover any part of the body above a horizontal line drawn between the tops of the hip bones and then continued around the fencer's trunk (see [t.77.2](#) for foil & [t.97.1](#) for sabre)
- The body wire should be clipped on the back of the sword arm aside of the lame to prevent tampering.
- Masks must be free of dents and soft spots; all seams must be intact, and a back strap fitted and in good condition.
- Body wires and mask wires must be clipped on correctly and have no large loops of wire hanging loose.
- Visor masks are no longer approved and must not be used.

Blade and point checks;

Epee

- Blade must be bent no more than 1cm in the vertical plane (either up or down)
- Check that the barrel is fixed and doesn't unscrew
- Check that the tip has both grub screws or is the approved screw-less types. Plastic tips are currently not allowed
- Make sure the 1.5mm gauge fits between the tip and barrel
- Insert a 0.5mm gauge between the tip and barrel and then depress the tip to test the travel (it should not register a hit)
- Point spring must push up a 750g weight
- A security device for the body wire must be inside the guard and at the spool end. You can use tape if this is missing

Foil

- Blade must be bent no more than 1cm, in the vertical plane (up or down)
- The top 15cm of the blade from the bottom of the tip must be insulated (usually with tape)
- Point spring must push up a 500g weight

² It is recommended that girls wear a chest protector from the age of ten.

Sabre

- Blade must be bent less than 4cm, in the horizontal plane (left or right)

2.2 STARTING THE BOUT

- Call the two fencers onto the piste, check names to ensure you have the correct people on the piste
- Test fencers' weapons
- Fencers must salute spectators, the referee and each other (t.122)
- Satisfy yourself it is safe to proceed
- Call "On Guard" fencers should be behind the on-guard lines (t.22.2)
- "Are you Ready?" (t.22.10)
- "Play" (t.22.10)

2.3 THE FIELD OF PLAY (t. 16 to t. 19)

Size of the piste;

- A piste is 14m long and between 1.5m to 2m wide. The piste must have a run-off at each end of 1.5m to 2m
- If any part of the fencer's foot is on a line, then the foot is on the piste
- The entire foot must completely leave the piste³
- It helps to consider the piste to be a volume. The boundaries extend vertically upwards. A fencer can be on the piste even if a foot is raised.

2.4 CROSSING THE BOUNDARIES (t.33 to t.36)

When a fencer crosses the REAR line with both feet a hit will be scored against him

When a fencer crosses one of the LATERAL BORDERS with one or both feet the referee must call "Halt!"

- A hit scored by a fencer who has left the piste with only one foot is valid provided the action was started before the "Halt!" call.
- A hit scored by a fencer who has left the piste with both feet is annulled if it arrived after the boundary was crossed.
- If any part of a foot remains on the piste, even if it is only by millimetres, then that foot is still on the piste.
- If one fencer leaves the piste with both feet only a hit made by the fencer who remains on the piste with at least one foot can be counted as valid. At foil and sabre

³ For an infringement to have been committed

the convention of priority must be followed. At epee, in the event of a double hit, the fencer with one foot on the piste will be awarded the hit and the hit of the fencer who has both feet off of the piste will be annulled.

- If a fencer leaves the piste and no hits have been scored, that fencer is penalised by the loss of a metre of ground from where he left the piste. If the fencer left the piste during an attack he must return to the position that he occupied when he started his action and then will step back one metre.
- If the exercise of this penalty places the fencer with both feet behind the rear line then that fencer is considered as having been hit.
- If no hit has been scored, then the fencers are placed “on guard” with the correct distance between them being such that when in the “point in line” position, the points of the two blades cannot make contact.

If a fencer crosses one of the lateral boundaries with both feet to avoid being hit, he will be penalised with a GROUP 1 offence penalty (i.e. a YELLOW Card for a first offence and a RED Card for subsequent offenses in the same bout)

If a fencer involuntarily crosses one of the boundaries (lateral or rear) as a result of an accidental cause e.g. after having been subjected to Corps a Corps or jostling then there is NO penalty⁴

Your tutor will demonstrate these situations.

2.5 TIMING THE BOUT (t.37 TO t.44)

Keeping the timing may seem easy but it is absolutely vital to get it right every single time

- Even if you have time-keepers, YOU are ultimately responsible
- Especially using a box without a remote control, this can require you to make very close calls as time expires, as many fights are won or lost in the closing seconds or because of time expiring
- If the clock fails, you have to estimate how much time is left and tell the fencers

The basic rules

- A hit may not be scored after time has expired, even if the action started before
- If the scores are tied at the end of the normal time the fencers fence for a deciding hit, with a maximum time limit of one minute
- Before the extra time starts the referee draws lots (coin toss/box random lights) to decide who has priority i.e. who will win if no hit is scored in the extra minute

⁴ If during normal fencing, the competitors should be replaced on guard at fencing distance, a competitor cannot be placed behind the rear line. The opponent then must give ground.

A fencer may not stop the bout to ask how much time is left, but they can ask when the bout is interrupted for some other reason

2.6 CALLING “HALT!”

The referee calls “Halt!” at;

- The end of time
- If a fencer leaves the piste (as covered in the previous section)
- If there are any safety issues, hits or penalties that need awarding
- Fencers pass each other
- Fencers cannot wield their weapons
- Non-combativity (DE bouts only) **t.124**

Other reasons for calling halt is corps-à-corps

- Corps-à-corps is any bodily contact between the two fencers
- **If a fencer is subject to corps-à-corps then the referee calls in all three weapons. Simple corps-à-corps is no longer a card-able offense in foil or sabre**
- Corps-à-corps is still a penalty offense when carried out to avoid being hit and/or when jostling the opponent, see **t.25.2 (t.170.1.2)** and **t.121.2 (t.170.1.15)** – yellow/red section
- The fencer then holds their ground, the offending fencer must give distance (however, this situation cannot force a fencer beyond their back line).
- Only a distance penalty for leaving the piste can result in a penalty hit

2.7 REFEREE SIGNALS AND PHRASES

See associated sheet and **t.63**

2.8 THE RIGHT OF WAY (PRIORITY) FOIL AND SABRE ONLY

- Try to understand the theory of how one gains and regains priority
- The theory of what an attack is
- What is a parry
- What is a riposte
- What are the renewals of attack
- What is a counter-attack
- Point in line
- Fencing time
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Reading the following sections of the rule book can help but attending a refereeing course where your tutor will explain and demonstrate these situations is the best solution along with plenty of practise

- t.8 through to t.15
- t.82 through to t.89 for foil
- t.100 through to t.106 for sabre

2.9 EPEE

- Try to understand the theory of annulling of hits through weapon and equipment failure
- Hits on other than the opponent or their equipment
- When you do not up-hold an appeal by a fencer for annulling a hit

Reading the following sections of the rule book can help but attending a refereeing course where your tutor will explain and demonstrate these situations is the best solution along with plenty of practise

- t.8 through to t.15
- t.92 through to t.95

2.10 PAPERWORK

- It may seem obvious, but it is absolutely crucial that you record the outcome of a bout correctly on the score sheet
- You must follow the bout sequence, record the final score and any penalties awarded
- Ensure you enter your name as referee on the poule/score sheet
- Ensure that any penalties given are written on the poule/score sheet

2.11 BOUT SEQUENCE

- A poule sheet will have the order of the bouts shown on it in two or three columns of figures such as **1v2, 2v4, 2v3**. These are read vertically do that you complete the first column before starting the second. An example is on the next page.
- The bout scores are written in the part of a poule sheet in the grid with the fencers' names, two series of numbers, and a set of blank squares

2.12 RECORDING PENALTIES (t. 163)

- On each score sheet there should be a blank area below the results grid and the order of the bouts. It is on this area that you record the details of every penalty that you award
- For each penalty you must record the bout in which it occurred, the name of the fencer penalized and the group of the offence (the colour of the card awarded)
- You do not need to record the precise offence, although you may if you wish
- It is important that you do note penalties on the score sheet

If you don't write it down, it never happened

- For example, if (in foil) you penalize a fencer for covering and award a yellow card, but fail to write this on the score sheet and later in the bout the fencer again cover and you award a red card; the fencer could appeal against the imposition of a red card because this is his Group 1 offence. By failing to write the first penalty down on the sheet you will have denied the fencers opponent a hit
- To save time, this can be recorded in a form of shorthand (YC, RC. BC)

2.13 BLACK CARD PROTOCOL

- If you award a black card you **must** make a more detailed note on the sheet
- Write down the full name of the person penalised and a brief description of what happened
- When you get a break in the fencing you **must** prepare a full report of the incident, together with any ensuing aftermath, for the competition organisers to forward to British Fencing's Disciplinary Committee

2.14 OFFENSES AND PENALTIES (t. 170)

See attached sheet

2.15 ENDING THE BOUT

The fencers must:

- Return to the en-guard lines
- Salute their opponent, the referee and the audience
- Referee must indicate the winner of the fight (see hand signals)
- Fencers then shake hands with each other

The match is not complete until this is all done

3. SAMPLE QUESTIONS OF THE WRITTEN TEST

Question 1

Which card would you award if the following occur? (take each in isolation)

- i) A fencer causes corps-a-corps to avoid being hit (Yellow / Red / Black)
- ii) A fencer's body wire is not working at the start of a fight (Yellow / Red / Black)
- iii) A fencer deliberately strikes his opponent with his guard (Yellow / Red / Black)

Question 2

How long is the run-off at the end of the piste required to be? (Hint: it is the same as the required width)

- a) 1 metre

b) Between 1.5 and 2 metres

Club	Name		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	V	HS	HR	IND	PL
		1													
		2													
		3													
		4													
		5													
		6													
		7													
		8													

c) 2 metres

Question 3

Fencer Thompson arrives to the piste for his first match at the Bristol Open with a hole in his glove. After replacing it, when doing the initial test it is found that his weapon is not working. Furthermore, on checking his under plastron it is found to be 350N. Before the match begins you notice his socks are not pulled up.

- i) What cards do you give him?
- ii) What is the score when the match begins?

Example of a poule sheet

*HS Hits Scored

**HR Hits Received

Version History (can be placed at end)

Version Number	Date Updated	Updated by	Comments
v0.1	01.06.2014		First draft
V0.2	08.03.2017	PH/NB	Update for re-publication
V2.0	05.12.2018	PH/NB	Updated to include new t.170 rules and re-formatted to BF branding
V2.01	17.01.2019	PH/NB	Updated to correct t.33-t.36