

Lines, distance, measure and timing in 30 minutes or your money back.

Amos Ironbeard, Barony of Innigard 04/03/2018

“...one is the straight line, which none but the artful knows how to do; the oblique lines are infinite, and anyone can do them.” - Ridolfo Capo Ferro da Cagli, The Art of Fencing

What is a line?

A line can be thought of as any line a sword tip traces between yourself and your opponent. Each thrust is a line drawn between two people, each cut is a line drawn that intersects the opponent midway.

In common fencing terms, we think of the ‘inside’ line as being from our opponents blade towards their offhand, and their ‘outside’ line being from their blade away from their body.

What is *the* line?

The line is the one we take when we first take guard against our opponent. It can be thought of as drawing a line from our leading foot to the leading foot of our opponent. It is the most efficient means of attack from ourselves, towards our opponent, travelling on a straight line.

Open and Closed lines

An open line is a line of attack from our opponent to ourselves that we have **not** prevented or placed an impediment in front of.

One line is from your opponent's sword to your chest. If you hold a rotella, buckler or cloak in between that line, you have closed it. If you hold a dagger or a sword on that line, you have gained the potential to close it via an action.

Closed lines are methods of attack that are somehow prevented without your opponent taking an additional action. If you close your opponents line by redirecting their sword tip, they can re-open the line, but they would need to disengage or perform another action to do so - assuming you did not open it for them. Lines can be simply closed by moving your tip from your opponents outside line, to their inside line, via a disengage.

“The measure is a just distance, from the point of my sword to the body of my adversary, in which I can strike him, according to which, is to be directed all the actions of my sword, and defense.” - Ridolfo Capo Ferro da Cagli, The Art of Fencing

What is distance (or measure)?

Distance/Measure is the term we use to determine if we are in striking distance of our opponent. Out of measure means exactly that, our opponent cannot strike us with a lunge or single passing step.

Wide measure means we can strike with a lunge. There are two variants of Narrow Measure. The first is ‘trigger distance’, we can strike our opponent without taking a step or moving our feet. This can include leaning our body towards our opponent. The second Narrow Measure is where we can strike our opponent with a short step or half-lunge.

The narrowest possible measure is when your opponent strikes at you, and you can strike their sword arm while taking a step back.

"The tempo is not other than the measure of the stillness and of the motion..." - **Ridolfo Capo Ferro da Cagli, The Art of Fencing**

What is time (or tempo)?

Time or tempo can best be thought of as the minimum time required to complete a move. Time in this regard is not referring to velocity and a 'slow' half-tempo action can beat a 'fast' time and a half action.

Capo Ferro uses the following measurements in regards to time (tempo):

- Striking from wide measure is time and a half
- Striking from narrow measure is single time
- Striking from the narrowest measure is half time
- Moving into (and out of) measure is single time

Viewing time via distance

Time/tempo can be thought of as a measurement of efficiency. An action that is the most efficient will 'beat' a motion that is less efficient. If your sword has to travel a longer path than your opponents, then it is the less efficient of the two motions.

This is not a perfect rock, paper, scissors system however. A fencer without experience or skill is more likely to make mistakes in their actions which can be exploited. A physically fit fencer will be better able to compensate for mistakes via body voiding than an unfit fencer.

Speed vs Velocity

We think of speed in a fight as a measure of how fast someone fights and reacts. When we think of a 'fast' fencer, we think of someone who acts and reacts quicker than we are used to, or can keep up with.

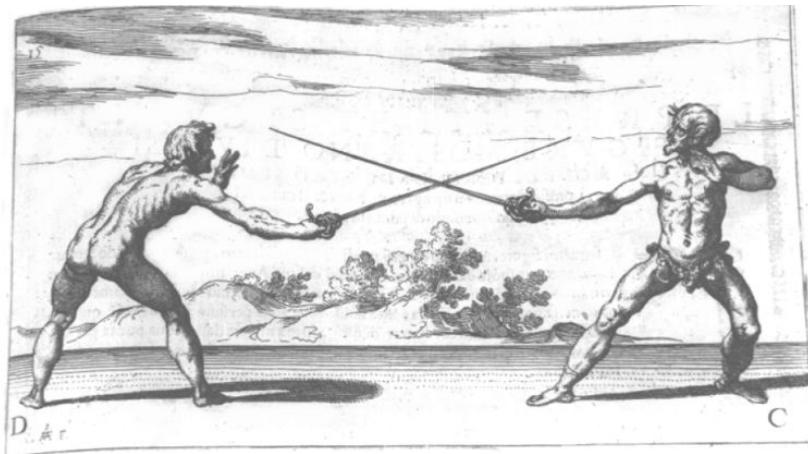
This has nothing to do with velocity and everything to do with efficiency.

Velocity is the measurement of how fast an object or point in space travels. We can measure the velocity of our rapier by measuring how fast our tip moves from starting position, in a thrust towards our opponent. This has less to do with good fencing than you may think.

A skilled & efficient fencer will beat one ramping up their velocity, because the core rules still apply. A shorter and more efficient action can and generally will beat one that covers a larger distance but at a higher velocity. It also stands to note that a fencer who practices their techniques on a regular basis will develop more efficiency than someone who picks up a sword once a week/fortnight.

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Exercises:

Exercise A (Distance) - Mask & Gorget recommended

Find a partner.

Fencer B stands in position with sword down, out of guard.

Fencer A takes at least ten long paces away from Fencer B, and then estimates by sight where their wide measure is. They walk to that guessed point, stop and perform a gentle lunge to their partner to check distance. Repeat until wide measure is found.

Fencer A will then advance to narrow measure of the foot (can strike with a single step or half lunge). This again will be done by estimation and may take several tries. Finally Fencer A will advance to narrow measure of the hand (can strike with an extension and no step).

Swap roles.

The objective of this drill is to find the point where you are *just* comfortably striking your target. If you have to overextend or fly right past them, you are not at your ideal distance.

This drill can be done at home against a tennis ball on a string/boxing bag/pell/wall.

Exercise B (Line Closure, defense) - Mask & Gorget required

Find a partner

Fencers A and B stand in guard in Narrow Measure of the Foot (can strike with a single step).

Fencer B extends arm and sword **but does not step**.

Fencer A closes the line - true edge against their blade, tip sitting just above their sword.

Once set, Fencer B will step with the extension to determine if the line has been closed.

Swap roles.

Exercise B part 2 (Line Closure, offence) - Mask & Gorget required

Fencers A and B stand in guard in Narrow Measure of the Foot (can strike with a single step).

Fencer B extends arm and sword **but does not step**.

Fencer A closes the line - true edge against their blade, tip sitting just above their sword.

Once set, Fencer A will step down their opponents closed line and determine if they can safely strike while maintaining the closed line.