

OFC Private Lesson Expectations

Overview

Private one-on-one lessons with a coach are a critical part of learning proper technique in epee fencing. In addition to technique, coaches focus on the proper distance and timing for actions to be completed successfully against an opponent. Lessons enable fencers to *learn by making errors* and by getting feedback from instructors on how to correct them. Fencers must internalize this feedback and focus their attention on some aspect of the action/sequence to improve it. In order to get the most out of a lesson, the fencer must come prepared to work hard with the proper attitude.

Expectations and Mindset

Lessons are meant to be challenging both mentally and physically. Fencers must come to the lesson with the proper attitude and motivation. Fencers who project disinterest, laziness, or lack of focus will be dismissed by the coach until they can return with the proper attitude (most likely at the next practice).

Fencers are expected to be in a low en garde position during every action, to hit the target as if they were fencing a real bout, and to focus on some aspect of the action they are working on. Coaches expect the fencer to push his/her limits physically during the lesson. The lesson is a controlled environment where the student is challenged to reach the limits of their power, speed, and stamina. As fencers' technique begins to improve, they should be sweating and out of breath during many portions of the lesson.

Students are expected to minimize delays between actions/sequences and focus on getting back en garde to continue. This is your time and it is in your best interest to be as efficient as possible to get the most out of the session.

Try to remove any judgment from a successful or incorrect action. The best mindset is 'detached observance' with a recognition of what went wrong and then to focus on how you are trying to fix it, not getting frustrated at yourself for making errors. When learning a new motor skill it is very important to focus on the physical actions. Once a fencer begins to gain some proficiency, then focusing on a specific aspect of the action, for instance the feeling of the final thrust, awareness of the position of the point, the feeling of the grip, or the position of the back foot, are beneficial to the learning process.

Errors and Repetition

It is important to try to do as many repetitions of a sequence as possible during the time allotted for each drill. Errors are expected and are a critical part of learning a new skill, especially in the beginning. Try to remove any judgment from a successful or incorrect action. Embrace the learning process and do not be too hard on yourself.

Learning Cycles

Learning a new skill requires a lot of repetition to fully internalize and automate it. Research suggests that at least 400 repetitions are required. Therefore, the more frequently a fencer is able to practice an action across multiple training sessions, the faster they will be able to master it and move on to the next skill. To fully optimize the learning cycle, coaches recommend taking at least 2 private lessons a week and increasing that to 3-4 times per week for competitive fencers seeking to obtain national points. Otherwise, the rate of learning and mastering new skills is too slow to achieve the age-specific skill levels required to attain national results.

Post-Lesson

Sitting after the lesson with the eyes closed for 1, 5, or 10 minutes allows the brain to replay the sequence that appears to be important for the more rapid consolidation of the motor sequence and for accelerated learning.

Good sleep the evening following a practice is very important to successful learning. Take all measures possible to ensure sufficient sleep to promote the learning process.

Deliberate Practice

After the fencer has completed their mindful debrief session immediately following a lesson he/she must plan out what they are going to focus on during open bouts and then attempt to execute that action. The action/sequence that a fencer chooses does not have to be the exact drills focused on during the private lesson. The actions could be something worked on during a previous lesson or is an area the fencer wants to try and improve. Focusing on executing the action correctly and making deliberate adjustments based upon failures is far more important to the learning process than winning a bout in practice.

Fencers with a championship mindset focus more on developing their skills, and failing in the process, than on winning every bout in practice.

In addition to deliberate practice during open bouts, fencers must repeat actions deliberately during other parts of practice, including during footwork, partner drills, fleche drills, and

especially target work, both guided and self-directed. For example, a fencer who wants to improve the speed, power, and fluidity of his/her step lunge attack should focus on it during footwork but should also do their own repetitions against the target during each practice. Remember, the goal is to get to at least 400 total repetitions to begin to start mastering an action. This can take place over several training sessions with good rest and sleep in between.

Conclusion

Fencers that have the right attitude and expectations, who embrace the learning process, do not judge themselves too harshly, and optimize the learning process will develop his/her fencing technical skills, speed, and stamina much faster than those without those attributes. Embrace the learning process and enjoy becoming a better fencer.