

## COMBAT SWORDS - THINGS EVERY ACTOR SHOULD KNOW

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Since combat grade blades are all made of high carbon tempered steel, and have been blunted to remove the more obvious hazard, but they are still true weapons whose construction and design were predicated upon one goal: the taking of human life. Under the right conditions, even the “flimsy” blunted foil can pass through the human body, so please treat all weapons with great respect and a certain amount of fear.

They are also not impervious to damage, and even broadswords can snap in half without warning. For this reason we strongly urge that all fights be choreographed by someone recognized as a fight instructor by the Society of American Fight Directors, or others equally qualified. By this we do not mean a “certified” Actor/Combatant (they might have enough experience to perform the fight, but not to entrust with others’ safety) nor a fencing instructor (the techniques of fencing are unsafe to both actors and weapons). Also, many techniques appropriate for Renaissance Fair demonstrations are completely unsuitable for stage work.

If it should come to pass that a stage fight director is unavailable for your production, we suggest that the actor keep the following principles in mind:

1. There must never be even a fraction of a second in which any weapon is pointed at or crosses in front of anyone’s face under any circumstance.
2. Don’t focus your partner to block your weapon on your attack. If he is supposed to block your incoming thrust to outside of his left hip, then simply make sure that your target is outside of her left hip. Always thrust off-line and cut off-target.
3. Always parry (block) with the edge of the blade, never with the flat.
4. Cutting motions with the sword should not be confused with tree chopping.

Make sure that your arm, hand, and sword form a straight line at the every moment that your cut is blocked. This will both look far more real than the traditional “cut”, but also has the added benefit of completely dissipating the energy of the cut before it reaches your partner.

Remember the three P’s of cutting motions: point your elbow toward the target; push the pommel toward the target, and only then engage the point to the target using your wrist.

Keep the mental image of striking a crystal ball with your sword: if you come in chopping, you’ll shatter the bell; if you don’t flick your hand at the moment of impact, your strike will not resonate. (Imagine trying to reach *behind*

your partner with your sword tip.)

5. Always use gloves. It can mean the difference between a bruised finger or an infected and broken finger. Make sure that your tetanus vaccination is up-to-date.
6. Look at what you want to hit. We are built to do that automatically. Do you want to hit your partner in the face? Then stare at his eyes. Do you want to have your sword land two inches outside of your partner's right shoulder and one inch below the arm pit? Then I suggest you look there when you start your attack.