



# **USA Fencing Parent Guidebook**

# Introduction

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Welcome to USA Fencing!

This Parent Guidebook is geared towards beginning and youth fencers. It provides information pertaining to joining a club, equipment needs, competition checklists, and supporting your child.

Fencing is a challenging sport that builds self-discipline, quick decision making skills, and respect for others. Athletes also develop sportsmanship while learning to manage stress, success, and failure. Youth Programs are the foundation of fencing in the United States and the pipeline to the USA Fencing National Teams.

USA Fencing suggests starting your child in group lessons. Group lessons enable your child to learn the basics in a fun, non-pressure environment. Make sure fencing is something your child wishes to pursue on a long-term basis before seeking private instruction.

A USA Fencing membership is necessary in order to compete in sanctioned events. The membership provides fencers with the quarterly American Fencing Magazine and USA Fencing national newsletters. Member registration can be accessed at [www.usfencing.org](http://www.usfencing.org), the official website of USA Fencing.



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# Sport Basics

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## The Bout

Competitors win a fencing bout (what an individual “game” is called) by being the first to score 15 points (in direct elimination play) or 5 points (in preliminary pool play) against their opponent, or by having a higher score than their opponent when the time limit expires. Each time a fencer lands a valid hit - a touch - on their opponent, they receive one point. The time limit for direct elimination matches is nine minutes – (3) three-minute periods with a one-minute break between each.

Team matches feature three fencers squaring off against another team of three in a "relay" format. Each team member fences every member of the opposing team in sequence over 9 rounds until one team reaches 45 touches or has the higher score when time expires in the final round.



## The Weapons

Foil, epee and saber are the three weapons used in the sport of fencing. While some fencers compete in all three events, elite generally choose to focus their energies on mastering one weapon.

### Foil

The foil has a flexible, rectangular blade approximately 35 inches in length and weighing less than one pound. Points are scored with the tip of the blade and must land on a valid target: torso from shoulders to groin in the front and to the waist in the back. The arms, neck, head and legs are considered off-target. Hits to this non-valid target temporarily halts the fencing action, but does not result in any points being awarded. Although top foil fencers still employ classical techniques of parries and thrusts, the flexible nature of the foil blade permits the modern elite foil fencer to attack an opponent from seemingly impossible angles.

### Epee

The epee (pronounced “EPP-pay” - literally meaning "sword" in French) is heavier, weighing approximately 27 ounces, with a stiffer, thicker blade and a larger guard. As in foil, touches are scored only with the point of the blade. However, in epee the entire body, head-to-toe, is valid target, much like in an actual duel.

### Saber

The saber is the modern version of the slashing cavalry sword. The major difference between saber and the other two weapons is that saberists can score with the edge of their blade as well as their point. In saber, the target area is the entire body above the waist, excluding the hands. It is a fast, aggressive game with fencers rushing their opponent from the moment their referee gives the instruction to fence.

# Electric Scoring

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## Electric Scoring

Electric scoring is used in all major national, international, and most local sports competitions. The scoring system requires additional clothing for foil and saber: Foil fencers wear a conducting vest which covers the torso and groin. Saber fencers wear a conducting jacket, gauntlet and mask. In both weapons, the fencers' weapons are also wired. When a fencer scores a touch on an opponent, this completes an electric circuit which turns on a light and an audible alarm to notify the referee that a touch has been scored. The referee observes the fencers and the scoring machine to determine which fencer has the right-of-way. Depending on which side of the strip the fencer is on, he/she will have either a green or red light go on when placing a hit to a valid target.

In foil and saber, which are right-of-way weapons, if both lights go on indicating valid hits, the referee makes a determination as to which fencer has the right of way and awards the touch accordingly.

There is no right-of-way in epee, so any valid touch scores a point, and both fencers can score a point with a double touch.

# Questions to Ask When Joining a Club

## Financial:

- What are the total club dues per year for a member?
- How are payments broken down?
- What equipment and uniform will my child need and how much does it cost?
- Where can I purchase equipment?
- What is the average cost per season for competition entrees for my child's level?
- Will my child and I be expected to participate in fundraising?

## Competition:

- Do I chose the events my child participates in?
- How far does the club travel to for competitions?
- Who is responsible for travel logistics to the competition?
- What do parents do at tournaments?

## Practice:

- Which days of the week will my child practice and how long is each session?
- What is the attendance policy? Can my child arrive late or leave early if necessary?
- Who will be coaching my child? What is the coach's background?
- What is your coaching philosophy?
- How many other fencers will my child be training with?
- Do I drop my child off or can I stay and watch practice?



## Other:

How can I contribute to the club if I don't know very much about fencing?

Who can I ask when I have questions?

What is expected or required of parents?

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## Levels of Fencing

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**Recreational Fencing:** Those who enjoy fencing and want to develop physical skills and fence for fun. Typically they train once a week and do the occasional local tournament for variety. Depending on the type of tournament (electric or novice) chosen, they may or may not need electric fencing equipment.

**Competitive Fencing- Local:** This is for children who want to compete on a limited basis in the local area (within 1 ½ hour drive). On average, they train two days a week, and will need a basic set of electric equipment.

**Competitive Fencing- Regional:** Fencers who are interested in regional competitions (typically within a 3 to 4 hour drive) should train two to three days a week. These fencers will need electric equipment and should have several weapons, plus some basic tools to check and do minor adjustments on those weapons.

**Competitive Fencing- National:** For children interested in fencing at the national level, the training requirements are a minimum of three to four times a week, depending on the goal. Fencers seeking a top 16 ranking need to regularly fence quality events against good opponents as often as possible. These fencers need multiple weapons for each weapon they fence. They should have basic test and repair equipment to take on trips. A financial commitment is required to send the child to national level events including airfare, hotel, registration fees, coach's fees, rental car, etc.

**Competitive Fencing- International:** For those athletes and parents that are ready to make the commitment, requires five to six training days a week (including suitable cross-training). Equipment costs increase substantially as athletes must have Federation Internationale d'Escrime (FIE) equipment for international events, which can more than double the cost to outfit the fencer. In addition, the financial travel costs amplify dramatically as the fencer travels to different countries to compete. A valid FIE license and passport are necessary for these competitions. USA Fencing strongly recommends having a parent travel with minors to events.

## Classification

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DIV 1A, DIV II, DIV III, are non-point generating categories that are designed to help improve their current USA Fencing ratings. USA Fencing ratings are A, B, C, D, E, and Unclassified. "A" is the top rating and Unclassified is the lowest rating. All new fencers start out as Unclassified. The number following the letter of classification indicates the year in which the letter was earned (ex: B08 was earned in 2008).

At the age of 13, the fencer may fence "Opens" and other events for which he/she is qualified. However, there are restrictions on fencing in higher or older categories. Find out the rules before your child tries to enter such events to avoid financial costs. Athletes may not fence down an age category either.

# Equipment

FIE equipment is only required for international events. For local and/or national tournaments, the fencer must have full regulation gear. For national events, the fencer's name must be on the lamé, knickers, and/or jacket. Wash equipment before taking to tournaments.

The following is a list of minimum equipment. Check equipment before departure for a competition to make sure everything is working properly. Double check again upon arrival as weapons may be damaged by travel.

## Checklist

- Mask (sewn-in bib, must pass 12k punch test)
- Underarm protector
- Breast protector (mandatory for women)
- Jacket (no holes, must close in back or opposite weapon arm)
- Lamé
- Knickers (no holes, must close in back opposite weapon arm, must be overlapped by jacket by at least 4 inches)
- Glove (no holes except for body cord., must cover approx. half your forearm)
- Long socks (white, must reach bottom of knickers)
- Fencing shoes or sneakers
- MINIMUM** two working weapons (epees must pass weight and shim test)
- MINIMUM** two working body cords
- Fencing bag (to carry equipment in)
- Tool kit (screwdrivers for tip and pommel, spare screws, springs, Allen wrench, small white cloth to use as base, small magnet, flashlight)
- Test box and weight and shims will help avoid penalties on strip for non-working equipment



**PUT IDENTIFICATION ON ALL EQUIPMENT!**

## Washing Equipment

- Wash as you would any other whites, EXCEPT do not use chlorine bleach
- Lamés may be hung in the shower. Spray rinse and drip dry. Some people use blow dryers
- Masks may be washed in dishwashers (make sure to wash by itself)
- Washable gloves and socks per normal wash

# Parent Responsibilities

## Do's and Don'ts for Sport Parents\*

### Do:

- Be a positive role model by demonstrating positive support for all fencers, coaches, and officials at every practice and competition
- Inform the coach of any illness or circumstances at home that may affect your child at practice or an event
- Teach your child to be gracious in defeat
- Leave the coaching to the coaches
- Have realistic expectations of your child's ability
- Get your child to practice and events on time
- Volunteer as much as you can. Youth sports depend upon the time and energy of involved parents

### Don't:

- Think of your child's sport participation as an investment for which you want a return
- Impose your goals of success onto your child
- Compare your child's performance to that of other children
- Ignore your child's behavior when it's inappropriate. Deal with it constructively so it doesn't happen again
- Do anything that will cause your child to be embarrassed
- Live out your dreams through your child
- Make skating everything in your child's life; make it a part of life



## Sending Unaccompanied Fencers to Competitions

If your child goes to an event unaccompanied by a parent, he/she must carry a emergency contact list, medical insurance card, and enough money to pay for the unexpected. The chaperone should have a copy of the above information.

Check with the hotel prior to sending your child. Many hotels do not allow children to check-in without a parent or chaperone present. Clarify the use of the credit card with the hotel in advance. Faxing a photocopy of both sides of the credit card with a note as to what charges are allowed may be required.

Make sure your child understands that he/she must tell a coach or chaperone where he/she is going at all times. Fencers should know their remaining competition schedule before leaving the venue. Remind your child of hotel etiquette: no running in the halls, playing on elevators, making a mess in the room, etc.

# Enhancing Your Child's Experience

## Help your child become a better competitor:\*

- Emphasize and reward effort rather than outcome
- Understand that your child may need an occasional break from sports
- Emphasize the importance of having fun, learning, and developing new skills
- Show interest in their training and ask questions
- Give unconditional love and support, regardless of the outcome of the day's event
- Look relaxed, calm, and positive when watching your child compete
- Realize that your attitude and behavior influence your child's performance
- Have a balanced life of your own outside of sports
- Remember you are at your child's event to support them; they aren't there to perform for you

## Goal Setting:

Have your child create realistic goals with his/her coach. Goals should be based on performance rather than winning. They should include short term goals, goals for the current competitive season, and long term goals.

Understand that success does not happen overnight. Improvements are made in small, consistent increments. Small victories lead to large triumphs.

Communicate with the coach on which tournaments are appropriate for your child's skill level.

## Educate yourself:

- Learn fencing terminology (glossary available on pg 10)
- Study the referee hand signals and know when a touch is rewarded to each fencer (see pg 11)
- Volunteer at local tournaments to find out what is involved in events
- Learn how to keep time and score for pools as well as direct eliminations
- Learn basic armoring



# Competition Information

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Current USA Fencing members are automatically enrolled with their division to receive e-newsletters. Make sure you read them carefully since contain important information related to your division and tournaments offered.

Pay attention to the schedule of division/section qualifiers for national events. USA Fencing Junior Olympics, Division I, and Summer Nationals all require prior qualification. Only those fencers who have qualified and have sent in their registration materials are eligible to participate. Refer to the Athlete Handbook for more information. Communicate with the coach on who is responsible for entering your child in events.

## North American Cups/ National Championships

A fencer should be competing at a consistent level at local events before entering national events. Athletes new to national competitions should begin in his/her age category. Discuss with the coach which events fit best in the overall training scheme.

Check the USA Fencing North American Cup schedule. There is information linked to each Cup including date, time, events offered, and local accommodations. Be sure to enter events far in advance and pay attention to the entry deadlines; they are strictly enforced. Registration instructions are listed with each event.

## Presentation of the Finalists

Fencers that finish in the top eight should be prepared to wear warm-ups or whites for the medal presentation. Finalists will be asked to supply a brief, legible biography on a form provided by the Bout Committee that includes club, coach's name, number of years fencing, and up to three most distinguished accomplishments to date. Sportsmanship is on display during the presentation with each fencer shaking hands with all competitors and medal presenters.

## Travel Arrangements

Make travel arrangements to arrive at least one full day early and leave the day after your child's last event. Events may run longer than expected, and leaving an event before the athlete has been eliminated results in a black card. This means that your child will not appear on the results list that is posted on the web.



# Tournament Day

## Prior to the Event...

- Use the Equipment Checklist on pg 4 to ensure you have all of the necessary gear for the tournament.
- Bring the **entry confirmation** and **USA Fencing card** for check-in.
- Money: enough for food, lodging, transportation, souvenirs, etc.
- Warm-up suit: If your child has a club warm-up, bring that. If not, pack a comfortable warm-up suit to keep warm between rounds.
- Weapons must be placed as checked luggage at airports. If an airline asks specific questions about the bag, **do NOT say “weapons”**. Say **“sporting equipment”**.

## Tournament Day...

- Registration opens one hour prior to each event. Fencers **MUST** wait until the specified times. Registration will close on time and those who have not checked-in will not be allowed to compete. Fencers need their membership card to check-in.
- Parents are not allowed to check-in for their child. Fencers must be present to verify his/her information and events. The fencer must check in for each event separately.
- Be sure to allow enough time for Weapons Check.

## What happens at Weapons Check?

1. Masks are checked for holes: breaks in the mesh, tears in the bib, and the bib must be sewn in and conform to regulation size.
2. Two body cords are tested to make sure they do not exceed 1ohm. If it passes, it will be tagged. Body cords should be unraveled before presentation to the armorer for inspection. If the tag comes off, the cord must be rechecked.
3. Lamés are checked for continuity, tears, and bad fasteners. If it passes, it will be stamped.
4. Saber fencers' over gloves and head cords are also checked for continuity.



Check pools as soon as they are posted. Be aware that pool numbers and strip assignments are not necessarily the same. Listen carefully to all announcements. If you are unsure that you heard something that pertains to your child's event, send the athlete to the Bout Committee to ask. Failure to show up to the strip results in a black card; an automatic exclusion from the event.

There are usually few seats available for spectators in venues. Personal folding chairs are allowed in most locations. Concessions may not be available at local tournaments, so bring plenty of water.

## Tips for the Athlete Handbook

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The USA Fencing Athlete Handbook is a great resource and is available at [www.usfencing.org](http://www.usfencing.org). The Handbook contains very valuable information regarding membership, domestic and international competitions, schedules, and tournament formats. It may seem overwhelming for both parents and fencers to read, so follow these tips to better navigate through the handbook.

Take a look through the Table of Contents.

If your child is participating in domestic tournaments only, chapters 7-12 and 16-17 are not necessary as those pertain to elite athletes competing in international events.

Rankings are determined by

A guidebook for parents of fencers competing internationally will be created soon with information related to filling out FIE forms, travel procedures, calculating points, etc.

The USA Fencing rulebook can also be accessed at [www.usfencing.org](http://www.usfencing.org). If you still have questions after referencing both the Athlete Handbook and USA Fencing rulebook, contact [info@usfencing.org](mailto:info@usfencing.org).

# Information Resources

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Websites, books, equipment, camp, etc.

## Camps

There are many quality camps throughout the country for further development, and is a great way for high school fencers to visit college campuses and learn more about the college coaching staff. Go to [www.usfencing.org](http://www.usfencing.org) and click on "Fencing in Camps" under the main tab "Resources" to access a list of NCAA sponsored programs. *American Fencing Magazine* also contains camp information.

[www.usfencing.org](http://www.usfencing.org)

[www.usoc.org](http://www.usoc.org)

[www.ths.com](http://www.ths.com)

[www.wheelchairfencer.org](http://www.wheelchairfencer.org)

## Official Suppliers of USA Fencing Teams



[www.leonpaulusa.com](http://www.leonpaulusa.com)



[www.blue-gauntlet.com](http://www.blue-gauntlet.com)



[www.sgfencingonline.com](http://www.sgfencingonline.com)

# Glossary

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**Advance:** Taking a step towards one's opponent.

**Attack:** Movement or series of movements by which a fencer tries to score a point. In foil and saber, the fencer who attacks first acquires the "right-of-way." In order to execute an attack properly (i.e. one that the referee will acknowledge), the fencer's hand must be clearly extending towards their opponent's valid target in a threatening manner.

**Beat:** Sharp tap on the opponent's blade to initiate an attack or provoke a reaction.

**Disengage:** Evasive action in which the fencer avoids the opponent's attempt to take their blade.

**Engagement:** Contact between the fencers' blades - often as the prelude to an attack.

**En Garde:** Position taken before fencing commences.

**Feint:** A false attack intended to get a defensive reaction from the opposing fencer, thus creating the opportunity for a genuine attack ("feint-disengage attack")

**Fleche:** Explosive, running attack (Foil and Epee only)

**Flunge:** Action unique to saber - a combination of a lunge and a fleche. Evolved recently after the FIE modified saber rules in 1992 to prohibit running attacks.

**Guard:** Part of the weapon between the blade and handle; protects the hand (also: "bell-guard")

**Parry, Counter-Parry:** Defensive action in which a fencer blocks his opponent's blade.

**Lunge:** Most common attacking technique, in which the fencer launches themselves at their opponent by pushing off from their back leg (which generally remains stationary).

**Opposition:** "Thrust with Opposition" - To simultaneously deflect the opponent's point with one's guard while making an attack of one's own. Commonly used in epee to avoid a double touch.

**Piste:** French term for the fencing strip.

**Point-in-Line:** Action in which the fencer, who is generally out of attacking range, points their weapon at their opponent with their arm fully extended. A fencer who establishes a point in line has right of way, and their opponent cannot attack until they remove the blade from line by executing a beat.

**Recover:** The return to the en garde position after lunging.

**Remise:** Attacking again immediately after the opponent's parry of an initial attack.

**Riposte:** Defender's offensive action immediately after parrying their opponent's attack.

**Second Intention:** A tactic in which a fencer executes a convincing, yet false, action in hopes of drawing a true, committed reaction from their opponent.

**Strip:** Fencing area, 14 meters long by 2 meters wide.



# Acronyms

BC	Bout Committee
DE	Direct Elimination
FIE	Federation Internationale d'Esgrime (International Fencing Federation)
IF	International Federation
JOs	Junior Olympics (held on President's Weekend in February)
LOC	Local Organizing Committee
NAC	North American Cup
NGB	National Governing Body (of a sport in the United States)
USAF	USA Fencing /United States Fencing Association
USOC	United States Olympic Committee

## Referee Signals

### Hand Signals for USFA Referees



On Guard!



Ready?



Fence!



Double Touch!



Point for Each Fencer!



Halt!



Point in Line!



Simultaneous Attack!



No Touch!



Attack!



Touch against Left!



Point for Right!



No!



Preparation!



Off Target!



Parry!



Yellow Card: Warning  
Red Card: 1 Touch Against  
Black Card: Exclusion