



*Sala delle Tre Spade*

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## MEASURE

**Measure** [It. *misura*] or "distance" is the space between two fencers and is typically broken down into three major categories in the Italian tradition:

- out of distance: requires an advance lunge to reach target
- in distance: requires a lunge to reach target
- close distance: requires one to extend the arm to reach target

Manipulating measure requires that one knows one's reach, the length of one's lunge, and generally how quickly one is able to get in and out of distance. It is, like tempo, relative – the measure between oneself and a shorter or taller opponent will vary.

### BASIC DRILLS:\*

*Foil/Sabre or Mask Push* – This drill uses either a mask or weapon – fencers suspend the mask/foil between them and must keep it from dropping as they move. I normally start with a mask, and when people can do this with relative ease switch to a foil – this requires them to deal with an increased distance, and it's harder to hold up (unless the foil is particularly stiff).

*Glove Tag* – Much like the preceding drill, this one has each fencer attempt to reach target armed with a glove. I normally have them target the arm first, then deeper target (chest).

*Rope* – In this drill students each grab one end of a section of rope about 1m (3ft) long. Their task is to advance and retreat while maintaining a slight sag in the rope – too saggy and they're too close; too taught and they're not keeping more ideal distance. Their arms should be as they are in guard and more or less frozen – ALL distance is created with the feet. As they grow in ability and comfort, you can have them introduce lunges, etc.

*\*It often helps, at least at first, to designate one fencer as the leader who "drives" the drill. More advanced fencers can act much as they do in a bout and work at leading or following as they will.*

### MANIPULATING DISTANCE:

*Via Footwork* – The feet do the most to create distance, whether expanding it or contracting it, so much of the focus in any distance drill naturally is footwork. The basic



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drills impart working knowledge and skills, but once students can perform those drills with ease they need more. One approach is to restrict them to one attack, say a head cut or direct thrust. Fencer A, the attacker, works to get into distance to land that touch via extension only, then lunge, then advance lunge, all of which require different uses of measure. The trick is creating an opportunity to use a specific version. Start simple. Have Fencer A restricted to a direct thrust from close distance (extension). Fencer B attempts to deny them that distance. Then switch. It's a lot harder to do than it sounds. Once they can do this relatively well, you can have them mix in different attacks, or, call them per exchange – this keeps them on their toes, and it means they need to create the necessary measure fast, a decision/action process that only improves with drill and time.

*Via Varying Extension in Guardia* – This drill can be conducted from standing or with movement, but some amount of movement helps. If they're standing, then have them begin from a particular engagement. This affords them a chance to use false and/or concealed motions of the blade against the opponent's blade, the distraction of which allows one to shift distance with the feet while keeping them concerned with the supposed glide, envelopment, *sforzo*, beat, etc.

It works best with movement. As in the first drill, restrict Fencer A or Attacker to a specific action. If it's a direct cut to head from third, have them shift between a proper Italian third held further out and the more defensive Hungarian third held further back (like *terza bassa* only with less of a drop of the body). Combining the length of the arm in the distance between Fencers, and using the legs to accommodate the deceit, will prove extremely valuable not only with simple, but compound attacks.

*Creating Opportunities for Opponent to Fall Short (reactive; defensive/2<sup>nd</sup> intention)* – For historical fencers perhaps most of all, but Olympic as well, the ability to "sucker" someone in and exploit their over-extension is a vital part of the toolkit. As one example, those who like to make leg cuts often do so in less ideal set-ups. As a direct attack, for example, it is arguably a longer, slower attack that puts one's head in danger. Against these opponents, and they announce themselves pretty quickly, keeping measure, baiting them with the forward leg, and then rapidly retreating a step when they make the attack will allow one to bash them in the head or make a *rassemblement*. For variations on this, you can over extend as you the instructor attack them and have them counter with a stop-cut to any of the three lines on the arm, then parry riposte; this can be reactive or 2<sup>nd</sup> intention.

*Creating Opportunities to Stuff the Opponent's Defense (active/offensive)* – This is a more complicated and riskier approach, one with little to no application outside the context of





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historical fencing. In some ways you're looking for the same opportunities as in the previous drill. If for example your opponent draws back to cut exposing their arm, rather than stop cut/parry riposte, you can instead advance under guard and seize their arm/bell-guard, then strike. We often think of Silver's "Grips" as defensive, but timed right, against the right mistake in your opponent's set-up, they can be offensive as well.

A similar approach is to stuff the attack with an aggressive parry or molinello into their attack. As before, if they're telegraphing or winding up, it's easy to move in as well as out; it just depends on what you want to set up. Some opponents in mid-attack will freak out a bit if you move in and stuff their head cut with a pro-active parry and either halt or start back-peddling. Either way this can work to your advantage.

