

Authorization of Fencers in Aethelmearc

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As standard procedure, no person may use any weapons form in any Period Fencing activity in the SCA unless that person has been properly authorized in that weapons form. A person who is not authorized in a particular weapons form may use that form at official practices at the discretion of the Marshal-in-Charge.

Conducting an Authorization:

1. Each fencer must authorize in Single Rapier before using any other weapons form, as all other forms build upon the skills and techniques of Single Rapier.
2. Authorizations may be conducted only at SCA events or official practices.
3. Authorizations must be performed by two warranted marshals who are themselves authorized in the weapons form being attempted. One marshal will fence the candidate for authorization in the form being attempted. The other marshal will observe. (Actually, it is often better if both of the marshals fence the candidate - in schlaeger both of the marshals -must- fence the candidate). Ideally, at least one of the marshals running the authorization should be unfamiliar with the fencing style of the candidate (i.e. an out of area marshal).
4. "Marshals-in-training" have no official status; while they may observe and comment on the candidate for authorization, they technically should not fence the candidate as part of the authorization process.
5. If primarily one person has taught the candidate, this person should not be one of the marshals running the authorization. The teacher is encouraged, however, to watch the authorization, though coaching is not allowed.

Criteria for Authorization:

The following criteria are intended to guide individual marshals in their assessment of a candidate. Each particular candidate for authorization should be assessed on his or her own merits, in light of his or her own performance at authorization, and in accordance with both the letter and spirit of the rules set forth in the Policies of the Marshal of Fence. No marshal should authorize a candidate unless the marshal truly believes that the candidate can and will fence safely (and this includes at tournaments - none of this "well they are under stress now so they are doing silly things" - you must determine how you believe they will fence in the high stress environment of a tournament) and within the rules. Due to the nature of Period Fencing, assessment of safety must include an assessment of the basic competence of the candidate with the weapons form being attempted.

In order to authorize in any weapons form, the candidate must demonstrate:

1. Knowledge and understanding of the Policies of the Marshal of Fence, especially those rules that apply to the particular weapons form being attempted;
2. The ability to safely execute and properly acknowledge blows;

3. The safe and effective execution of the offensive and defensive techniques appropriate to that weapons form, in the setting of an actual bout; and
4. The degree of competence and skill commensurate with the weapons form being attempted. Mere safety, without basic competence in the weapons form is insufficient for authorization. (i.e. if they defend like mad, do wonderful parries and never attack this is not enough)

- a. Single rapier:

The candidate should be able to demonstrate the following safely and competently:

- Basic footwork (advances, retreats), while maintaining balance and an awareness of distance;
- Simple straight line attacks;
- Basic parries;
- At least one complex attack, such as a feint or beat attack or a combination;
- Draw cuts;
- Reasonable point control;
- Reasonable calibration and blow-calling; and
- An understanding of the uses of the off-hand. (i.e. they must be able to defend with their off-hand)

- b. Rapier and rigid parry object:

The candidate should be able to demonstrate the following safely and competently:

- Parries (or blocks) of attacks with the rigid parry object;
- Preventing the rapier and the parry object from becoming entangled;
- Avoiding striking or attacking with the parry object;
- Making openings with the parry object; and
- Use of the parry object in concert with the rapier.

- c. Rapier and non-rigid parry object:

The candidate should be able to demonstrate the following safely and competently:

- Parries (or blocks) of attacks with the non-rigid parry object;
- Preventing the rapier and the parry object from becoming entangled;
- Avoiding striking or attacking with the parry object;
- Making openings with the parry object; and
- Use of the parry object in concert with the rapier.

d. Rapier and dagger:

The candidate should be able to demonstrate the following safely and competently:

- Knowledge of the legal target area for dagger attacks;
- Attacks with the dagger; (they need to at least attempt to attack with the dagger)
- Parries (or blocks) of attacks with the dagger;
- Preventing the rapier and the dagger from becoming entangled;
- Making openings with the dagger;
- Use of the dagger alone; and
- Use of the dagger in concert with the rapier.

e. Case of rapier:

The candidate should be able to demonstrate the following safely and competently:

- Attacks with both blades;
- Parries (or blocks) of attacks with both blades;
- Preventing the two blades from becoming entangled;
- Making openings with one blade while attacking with the other;
- Use of both blades in concert. (This is the big one - are they alternating hands or are they actually using both at the same time)

For all of the advanced weapons forms (b-e) the candidate must not only display safety and basic competence, they need to show some skill and understanding of the weapons form. If they walk out with a cloak and never move it, this is not displaying skill in the form. If they walk out with a dagger and only use it to block, see if they want to do a rigid parry qualification instead. It doesn't have to be great skill, just enough to show that they are using the form as it was meant to be used.

Recommended Authorization Procedures:

While there is no single correct way to conduct an authorization, there are several elements, which should be included in any thorough authorization:

1. The candidate's weapons and armor must be inspected to ensure that they comply with the required armor and weapons standards. (If there is something wrong with their arms or armor, try quizzing the candidate to see if they can figure out what is wrong - sometimes they get nervous and unintentionally forget something obvious.)
2. The candidate should respond to several questions about the Policies of the Marshal of Fence. For a first authorization, the candidate should be questioned about the rules and customs of combat in Period Fencing and the Kingdom of Aethelmearc. For later authorizations, the candidate should be questioned about rules applicable to the particular weapons form being attempted.

(This is not trivial pursuit time, like asking how many ounces of leather need to be in the gorget. This should be an honest attempt to make sure that they understand the basic rules of fencing. What are the valid target areas? What are the basic armor requirements? Try borrowing their blade and making one cut on their chest and then one cut on their back and ask if they are dead. Make sure they understand that the foot and the leg (and the hand and the arm) are separate. It is actually possible to fail someone here. If they can't figure out in a timely fashion whether they are dead or not they have obviously not had enough practice yet.)

3. The candidate should first spar with one marshal, starting at a slower than normal pace so that each of the fencers can get the feel of the other. Both the candidate and the marshal should verbally acknowledge valid hits, without taking them. This is just so that the marshal can get the general feel of their opponent and it allows the candidate (hopefully) to relax into the procedure.
4. During this phase the observing marshal should look for holes in the candidates fencing - are they not defending with their off-hand? Do they never back up? Can they parry? Sometimes it helps to break this into three phases -

1st is the candidate safe? Can they protect themselves? Are their opponents safe?
Are they doing anything obviously wrong (like whipping, or hopping around?)

2nd is the candidate defending themselves? Both with parries and with their off-hand?

3rd is the candidate attacking? Do they have more than one attack? Do they ever hit?

The marshal fencing the candidate is responsible for determining if the candidate's calibration (both giving and receiving) is good and whether they are responding appropriately to the shots. Are you having fun? Usually a fun fight means that the candidate is a safe fencer. Gradually increase your speed and see how they respond.

Some people break defense and offense into two separate stages, but this doesn't seem necessary. You want to see all of the components working smoothly together. If something looks wrong or something is missing in their style, then break things down into components to try and identify areas that further work is necessary, this usually means that they have already not passed the authorization.

5. The marshals should confer briefly at this point while sending the candidate to get a drink or just get them to pop their mask to get some air - is the observer seeing anything that worries them? Discuss the calibration and how well they are taking shots. Develop a plan to look at areas that seem weak. (If they don't attack often, leave big holes in your defense. What will they do if pressed? Are they really parrying or just swinging the sword around and never actually contacting the blade? Do you feel in danger of being struck by their buckler? What will they do if I really press them or speed up a lot?)
6. The candidate and the marshal should then engage in several bouts in the usual fashion, each attacking and defending, each properly acknowledging and accepting blows. Carry out your plans to check weak points. Are they accepting blows properly or do they seem not to have an abdomen? Is there a really big pause before they accept a blow? You MUST make sure they fence off-handed for a while - they must be as safe with their off-hand as their primary. Try to leg them and see what they do. Continue to fence until you are satisfied that this person is safe and authorizable, or you are satisfied that they are -not- safe or authorizable, but -you know why-. If things are really indeterminate ("I don't like this but I can't figure out why") have someone else fence them while you watch.

REMEMBER - THE MARSHAL IS NOT TRYING TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR
SUPERIORITY HERE!

In most cases the marshal's skill level is going to be much greater than the candidates, though not always, and the marshal needs to allow the candidate to show their skills. You need to leave openings in your defense. If this is a dagger authorization, step in close and allow them a chance to hit you with the dagger. Slow down the candidates pace. Open up your guard and allow them to hit you - see if they maintain good calibration while you leave your chest wide open and advance at them. Don't go just for kill shots on them - see if they are defending their arms, legs, and hands.

Outcome of the Authorization:

1. Advice and training may be given to the candidate by the marshals at any time during the authorization, but the candidate's primary teacher is not allowed to coach them during the authorization - you are testing their knowledge and skill not their teachers.
2. Once the authorization procedure is completed, the two marshals performing the authorization should then hold another discussion, aside from the candidate (again send them to get and drink and make sure they take off their mask), discussing the strengths and weakness demonstrated in the course of the authorization. The marshals who will be signing the card may accept suggestions and observations from other marshals or observers, but they must make the final decision as to whether or not the candidate is to be authorized.
3. Options available to the marshals include:
 - a. Declining to grant authorization:
It is the responsibility of the marshalls to decline authorization to those persons who are unable to demonstrate safe and competent fencing.
 - b. Authorization:
If the candidate is successful, the necessary paperwork must be completed.
 - c. Provisional authorization:
In certain instances, with the permission of the Marshal-in-Charge, a borderline candidate may be authorized for the purposes of the particular day, event, or tournament only, in order to provide the marshals with additional time to evaluate him or her. This option should be pursued only when the marshals are certain they will have adequate opportunity to observe the candidate throughout the rest of the day, event or tournament. And the candidate must sign a waiver with an MOL before they can be entered into the day's events.
4. The candidate should be informed of the outcome of the authorization by the marshals. The marshals should discuss the reasons for their decision and the strengths and weaknesses demonstrated by the candidate, as well as provide any suggestions for improvement. Always try to make sure that the candidate understands fully why they have not been authorized if it is declined - tell them what to work on, show them some drills and always point out things that they are doing well. Be as encouraging as possible.
5. A successful candidate for authorization must complete the authorization form and get the appropriate marshals signatures. Make sure that they sign the waiver on the back and that you circle or check the form they have successfully authorized for, while crossing out all of the other forms. Make sure that the candidate understands that it is their responsibility to get the lower half of the form to the Kingdom MOL in a timely fashion.

If you have any questions or comments about this article please let me know. Mail me at etb@geology.buffalo.edu.