FIGHTING FOR FUN

A Set of Helpful Reminders About Fighting for Film and Stage

RICHARD BUSWELL

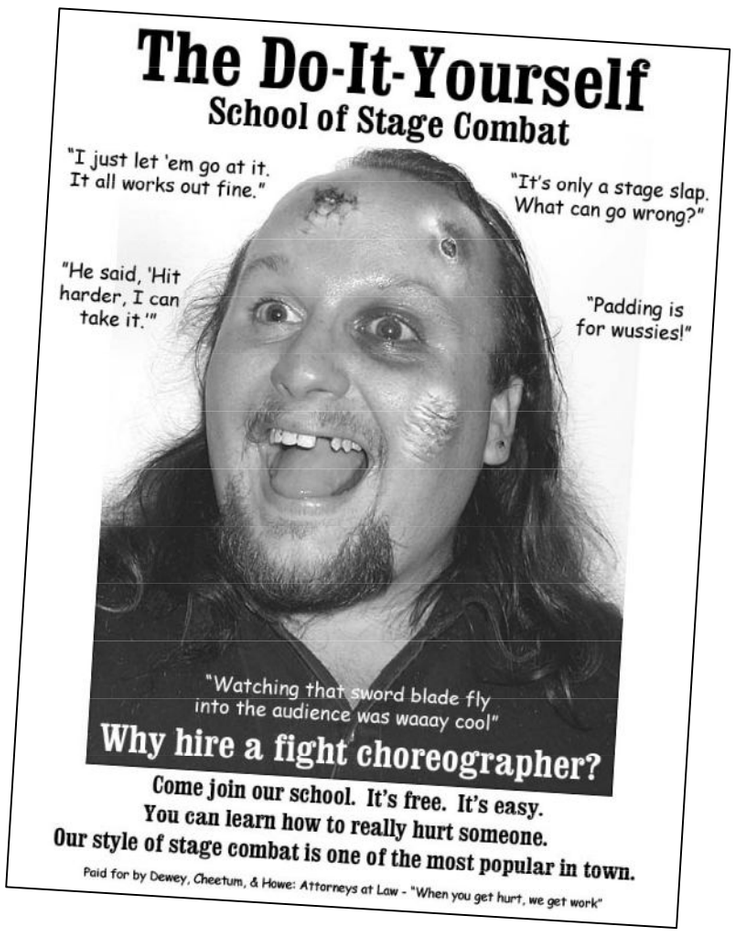
(Selected Excerpts)

1 READ THIS FIRST! NO REALLY, READ IT!

You didn't seriously buy this book thinking you were going to teach yourself stage combat, did you? If you did, I thank you for your contribution to my financial survival. Hold on to this book. It will come in handy later, I promise. For now read this section, especially the next sentence, very, very carefully, and take it to heart.

You can't learn to perform stage combat from a book.

Find an experienced fight choreographer to teach you. No matter how in-depth I try to be describing the correct way to perform a specific move, there will be something I overlooked or didn't make clear enough to you. In my experience as a fight choreographer, I have had to find multiple ways of describing a single move, simply because people learn differently. While I can be extremely detailed in my descriptions, the more I explain, the more boring it gets.



Your best bet for finding an experienced teacher is to contact one of the many stage combat societies around the world. These societies are listed in APPENDIX C of this manual. An experienced teacher can watch what you are doing and make any necessary adjustments to your technique.

Do not try to learn from someone who was in a fight scene once. As a fight choreographer, I teach actors just enough to get through the scene safely. I don't teach them everything *I* know. Different shows require different versions of a particular technique. I once taught a high school class a basic stage slap. They were working on a script written by the students, similar to *The Laramie Project*, and one of the scenes required a stage slap. I worked with that single scene and developed a slap that was organically connected to the presentation. When I watched the show in production, nearly half the scenes had added a stage slap using the technique they learned in class. Unfortunately, the slaps in the other scenes didn't work right, because they were all employing the same technique and were not connected to the emotional content of the scene. Why? I didn't have time to cover "acting the fight" in the class session, so the additions by the students were extremely technical.

Like what you see? Buy the book.

2 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Stage combat, also known as stage violence, is not about fighting. It's not about violence. It is a mixture of dance and illusion. The dance is the technique you employ with a partner to perform the mechanics of a stage fight. The illusion is making the audience believe you are trying to hurt each other. The reality is you are doing everything in your power to protect yourself, your partner, and everyone else around you.

No matter what style of combat you are engaged in, there are fundamental principles that apply to all situations. Let's cover those principles in a little more detail..

Safety First, Safety Last, Safety Always

It's the first rule of stage combat.

Stage combat is used for any form of violent action on stage or in film. It isn't about fighting. Slipping on a banana peel is not considered a fight, but it is violent action. The whole reason for choreographing these actions is to ensure the safety of the actor. Simply put, if you aren't safe, you'll get hurt. If you get hurt, you can't perform. If you can't perform, you won't get paid.

Stage combat is not rocket science. It takes practice and a certain degree of conditioning. Most of what you learn about safety is going to sound just like common sense, because it is. Your first consideration when participating in any sort of combat choreography should be, "Is it safe for me to perform?" If you don't feel safe, you should discuss it with your fight choreographer.

If you are a producer or director and you have violent action in your production, you should hire a fight choreographer to ensure the safety of the members of your cast. Even for something as simple as a stage slap, performing due diligence by hiring a fight choreographer goes a long way to averting a lawsuit if something should go wrong.

The Fight Choreographer

In simplest terms, the fight choreographer is responsible for creating fight scenes that fit the director's vision. Artistically, the fight choreographer must create a fight scene that meets with the director's approval. The only time a fight choreographer can override the director is for safety reasons. Otherwise, the fight choreographer is answerable to the director.

Most fight choreographers welcome input from the actors. However, when a fight scene is choreographed to the *director's* satisfaction, it is set in stone. A good fight choreographer creates fights that are consistent with the characters, moves the plot line forward, and are within the abilities of the performers.

Furthermore, every show has a certain style. The fight choreographer creates fights that are stylistically consistent with the show. A well done fight scene should not stand out from the overall production, but should fit into it as a whole. If the fight scene takes the audience out of their suspension of disbelief because they are afraid for the actors' safety or because they aren't buying into the given circumstances (what a friend of mine calls "polite fight choreography"), then the fight choreographer isn't doing the job.

A fight scene is a performance, just as much as a dialogue scene. The fight choreographer not only provides the series of moves, teaches the technique of performing those moves, but also aids in the acting of the fight by analyzing character traits that influence fighting choices.

A good fight scene flows naturally through the script. It shouldn't be "acting" then "fighting" then "acting" again. It should be "acting during which a fight breaks out." The fight choreographer's job is to achieve this state or performance.

Another misconception about fight choreographers is that they eliminate the risk to the actor. Any fight choreographer who says he can make a fight "perfectly safe" is lying. The fight choreographer uses techniques to reduce risk to an acceptable and survivable level. Risk will always exist. We're human. The unexpected occurs. Murphy's Law must be obeyed. If a fight choreographer is doing the job well, when things go wrong, the actors walk away from what could have been a much greater disaster.

A fight choreographer's success is dependent on the ability of the actor to learn and follow the rules of staged violence at all times. Even then, there is an element of risk. Expect to get bruises from time to time. Expect to get

scratched or scraped. Expect to get sprains. In the world of fight choreography, these kinds of injuries are to be avoided if at all possible, but they fall within the range of what is considered acceptable.

To give you an idea of the injury rate in stage combat, as of this writing I estimate I have choreographed fights for well over 100 productions, averaging 3 to 5 fight scenes per production. That's somewhere between 300 to 500 fights with 20 or so rehearsals and performances per fight, roughly 6,000 to 10,000 chances for something to go wrong. Not counting bruises and scrapes, the complete injury list for fights I have choreographed consists of two sprained ankles, one sprained neck, one mild concussion, and one dislocated pinky. If you like statistics, that's an injury rate of less than 0.08 percent.

That kind of safety record is the reason to hire a fight choreographer and why I say fight choreographers don't eliminate risk, they reduce it to an acceptable level.

Want to read more? Buy the book.

3 FIGHTING FUNDAMENTALS

There are certain important elements to every kind of fight choreography you perform, whether it is unarmed or with weapons. We'll cover these before going into specifics of each particular move.

Balance

Unless choreographed to do otherwise, you should always keep your weight evenly distributed between your feet. This allows you to move in any direction at any time. The feet should be at least shoulder width apart, with one foot forward. Keep the knees bent to lower your center of gravity. Keep your back straight and vertical to keep yourself centered. This also has the effect of making you look a lot better in a fight. (Here's a secret to remember. Stage combat is not about how good you *are*; it's about how good you *look*.)

This basic stance provides you with the most stability. The bigger the stance, the more stable the combatant. Typically, you will widen your stance when you employ weapons, the heavier the weapon, the wider the stance.

We tend to refer to this stance as the "ready," "en garde," or "neutral" stance.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is used for a variety of reasons, all dealing with non-verbal communication.

When you are ready to perform a fight, you first establish eye contact with your partner. If you avoid eye contact, this is your way to say, "I'm not ready for whatever reason." You should make eye contact at the beginning of the fight and at the beginning of each move or series of moves, whenever it makes practical sense.

Eye contact is also the first indicator that something is wrong. If your partner has a "deer in the headlights" look, you know they are lost and can help them find their way back into the fight scene, or skip the fight altogether.

Never maintain constant eye contact. The hand tends to go wherever the eyes are looking, so a blow to the shoulder could easily transfer to the head if eye contact is maintained. After making the initial eye contact to say "I'm ready," look at the target you are attempting to hit. This helps you to stay on target and is an additional reminder to your partner of where the next move is going.

Remember that shifting your eyes is much less noticeable to an audience than moving your whole head. Look where you're going and use your peripheral vision where appropriate.

Want to know more? Buy the book.

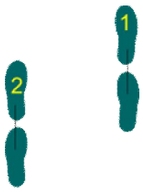
4 COMBAT MECHANICS - FOOTWORK

These are basic footwork steps. They all begin using the basic "en garde" stance, feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart, one foot forward, with the heel of the front foot in line with the toe of the back foot. Hips should face forward, as if you have a flashlight attached to each hip, lighting your way.

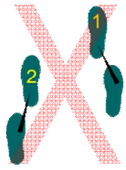
Advances and Retreats

The advance is a way to move forward a short distance without sacrificing your balance. Place the front foot one foot-length forward. Bring the back foot forward one foot-length as well. You should now be in the en garde stance again, just one foot-length ahead of where you started.

En Garde
(Right Foot Forward)



Advance



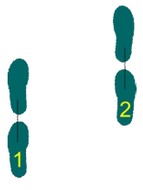
Advance
WRONG

Advance En Garde.

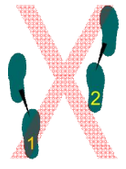
Advance Move Front Foot.

Advance Move Back Foot.

The retreat is the opposite of the advance. Move the back foot one foot-length backward, and then bring the front foot one foot-length backward. You are in the same en garde stance as before, one foot-length back from where you started.



Retreat



Retreat
WRONG

Retreat Starting En Garde.

Retreat Move Back Foot.

Retreat Move Front Foot.

For both advance and retreat, be sure that you are stepping and not dragging either foot. Don't allow your head to bob up and down. From hips to head, the movement is smooth and even, like a duck moving across a pond.

Finally, be sure that you don't allow your feet to come closer together. Make sure they stay a little more than shoulder width apart, like moving along railroad tracks.

Want to learn more? Buy the book.

5 COMBAT MECHANICS - PUNCHES

What's the difference between a punch and a slap? A punch uses a fist. A slap uses an open hand. Otherwise, mechanically it's pretty much the same action. If you are punching, and your punching hand is used to make the knap, remember to open the fist for the knap and close it again for the follow-through. You don't knap with fists.

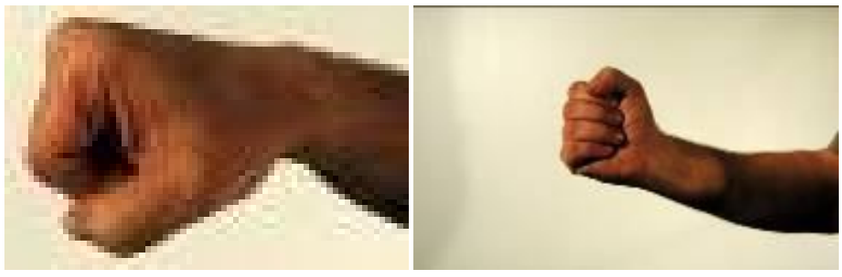
Scene from Lee's Summit High School's production of *Rashomon*.

Making a Fist

Remembering the principle of muscle-to-muscle contact, a stage combat fist is not like a real fist. A real fist is hard as bone. A stage combat fist is mushy and will collapse on itself. To make a stage combat fist, take the forefinger of one hand, for this example let's say the left hand. Wrap the fingers of the right hand around the forefinger of the left hand. Wrap your right thumb around the left forefinger as well, but keep it outside the other fingers of the right hand. You should be able to easily slide your forefinger in and out of the space in the center of your right fist. This is a stage combat fist.

Making a Fist.

Good Fist



Bad Fist

Keep the nails flat against the palm of the right hand, so when you press against the fist, the fingers will slide back and the whole fist collapses on itself. This mushiness is how we simulate muscle where there is very little muscle to be had. Even in non-contact blows, the stage combat fist should be used, just in case you miss and actually hit your partner. It softens the blow and reduces the chance of injury.

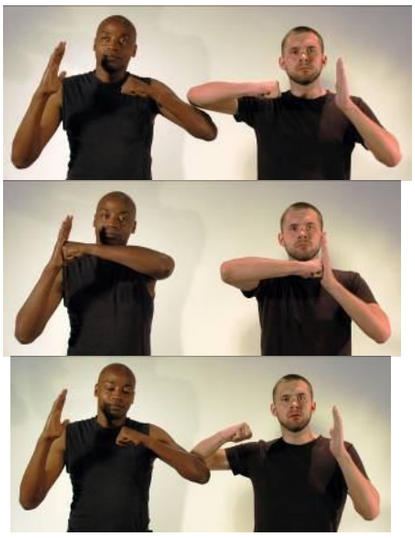
Pulling a Punch

Focus on your target; relax your arm as you throw the punch. If you make contact on purpose or by accident, this will decrease the force of the blow. If you are deliberately trying to make contact, then you need to pull the punch.

Your target is about 1 inch in front of the surface you are hitting. You stop the punch when it strikes the target and pull the energy away from the victim. Here's a simple way to explain what I mean.

Hold up your non-punching hand, palm open. Make your stage combat fist with the other hand and punch your own palm. Not hard. Just get a feel of what it's like to be hit by your stage combat fist.

Punch your palm.



Now hit your palm again, only stop the punch the moment it makes contact and try pulling as much energy out of the palm as you can on the recoil. Once you can hit your own palm with a consistent lack of force, while still making contact, speed up your punch. Throw the punch faster, but don't hit any harder.

Once you can hit your own palm with as much speed as you can muster and it still feels like a gentle kiss, you are ready to try targeting something else. If you can, find a padded surface to punch as fast and gently as you can, like a sofa cushion or a tumbling mat. Once you feel confident you can control your own punch, and if your partner trusts your ability, practice on the *muscled* parts of your partner's body. Your partner should be able to tell you if you are hitting too hard.

If your partner says your punch is too hard, *believe them*. Remember, everyone has a different threshold of pain. What doesn't hurt you may be excruciating to someone else. Err on the side of being too gentle.

Want to get slap-happy? Buy the book.

6 COMBAT MECHANICS - KICKS

When fighting we don't want to forget about the lower half of the body. Essentially, kicks require a certain ability to balance on one leg and finitely control the foot and leg muscles. Since most people aren't used to using their legs for finite control, these maneuvers require a bit of practice.

First of all, the leg contains some of our most powerful muscles. To lessen the impact of those muscles, we break the kick down. Instead of kicking from the hip, which generates enormous power, we kick from the knee.

Step one. Lift the knee.

Lift Knee, point toe

Important to note is that hitting with toes hurts the victim. It also tends to break the toes of the attacker. Point your foot as much as your footwear and flexibility will allow. If you are going to make contact with the foot, you want that contact to be either with the sole of the foot, or with the top of the foot, just in front of the ankle joint. An easy way to remember is to make contact where the laces of a tennis shoe are located.

Step two. Point the toe.

The actual kick comes from the knee. Since you have already shortened the distance by lifting the knee, you've cut down the ability to build up speed. Instead of swinging your foot, extend your lower leg until it forms a straight line with the knee.

Step three. Extend the lower leg.

Extend Leg

If you are making contact with the kick, the same rule about pulling the energy out of the target applies, just as in contact punches. You just want to barely touch the target with your foot and then draw the foot back.

You can practice this with a partner by having your partner hold out an open hand, palm down at a level you can comfortably reach with your foot. Practice targeting the hand with the "laces" portion of your foot and pulling the energy out of the hand. Your partner should keep the arm and hand relaxed to absorb any wild kicks you might make.

Take this opportunity to learn your kicking distance. Whenever you learn a new kick, start by checking the distance to the target, take a couple of steps back, then slowly step in and kick to make sure your judgment of distance is accurate. Don't speed up until you are absolutely certain of your accuracy.

Balance is crucial for kicks. Never perform a kick if you can't maintain your balance during the kick.

Stomping mad to read the rest? Buy the book.

7 COMBAT MECHANICS – FALLING DOWN

Andrew Herndon, Erik Pratt and Robbie Moritz from "COOKIE!" segment of *...and they fight!*

There are several specific methods for falling down, but I really prefer falls to look as un-choreographed as possible. I call it falling down organically. One side benefit I have found from learning stage combat falls is that when I *actually* trip, my body takes over and makes my fall more controlled and gentle.

You should practice falling down on a soft surface, like a tumbling mat. Remember, a wooden stage is 10 times harder than a tumbling mat. A concrete floor is 10 times harder than a wooden stage. This means that while you learn to fall on something soft, when you get into the real world, you are going to be landing on something that is 10 to 100 times harder than on what you practiced.

The main thing to remember when falling down is to fall like a dishrag, not like a brick. Do your best to control the fall until you are within 4 inches of the ground. A fall from 4 inches is extremely survivable for just about anyone. The following techniques are designed to teach you how to control the fall.

Organic Falls

These falls are non-specific. It's really a technique to discover your own fall for any given situation. As one of my instructors once said, "The best way to learn to fall down is to fall up." Keeping that in mind, here's the exercise you need to perform.

Lay down on the ground in the position you want to be in after the fall is over. Now, on a slow count of 10, come to a standing position, following these rules:

1. Only allow the muscled parts of your body to touch the ground. Avoid bones, joints, or any part of your body that will cause sharp pain if hit too hard.

2. Do NOT use your hands.

3. Use the FULL 10 COUNTS. Start moving on 1. Stop moving on 10. Keep moving in between.

4. Don't be afraid to experiment to find the best way to come to a standing position.

Once you have stood up, fall down by reversing the way you got up on a slow count of 10, using the first three rules for falling up.

Repeat this process until you feel comfortable about the way you are going down. Using the full 10 counts ensures that you are controlling the fall and that the fall is not controlling you.

Once you are comfortable with the count of 10, do it again on a slow count of 5. If you find that you aren't as comfortable with the fall as you thought you were, make adjustments until you are comfortable.

Once you are comfortable with a 5-count, try again on a slow 3-count.

Once comfortable with a 3-count, do it on the count of 1.

Here are the advantages of learning to fall this way:

1. If you need to faint, you can fall on a 3 or 5 count. If you need to die violently, you can use the 1 count fall.

2. A major danger when falling is people trying to catch themselves with their hands and breaking their wrists. Also, when performing a stage fight, you may have weapons or other items in your hands. By learning to fall without using your hands, you learn not to depend on them and don't risk injuring them.

3. Your fall will be unique and look more realistic and unrehearsed. I think these falls play better for an audience.

Falling all over yourself to find out more? Buy the book.

8 COMBAT MECHANICS – SWORDS

What All Swords Have In Common

I have a personal theory about swords. The only difference between any given sword is the weight, length, and which parts of it are "sharpened." This is in defiance of the accepted standards of nearly all the fight societies. If you want to be certified to fight with all swords, there are three certifications you require: Broadsword, Rapier, and Smallsword.

Think of it this way. It's the difference between driving an 18-wheeler, a car with a manual transmission and a motorcycle. The rules of the road are the same for all vehicles, they all operate under the same principles applied to internal combustion engines, but they each require you to become familiar with their specific ways of shifting gears and experience learning to handle the way they move in traffic. If you learn to drive one well, then moving to something larger or smaller is a matter of adapting to the differences rather than reinventing the wheel.

Fabio Monzon, Robbie Moritz and Micia Bektal in "(S)he's a Pirate" segment of *...and they fight!*

The basic technique is the same for all swords. There are five target areas for sword attacks: The legs just above the knee, the arms at nipple level and the top of the head. It doesn't matter what kind of sword you are using, these are the attack points for stage combat purposes.

Sword Targets Marked

There are nine parry positions you can choose from to defend the five target areas. Why nine, you ask? Because with two exceptions, each parry can be made with the sword hand supinated or pronated.

Supinated = palm up.
Pronated = palm down.

Supinated hand

Pronated hand

What are the exceptions? Parry 4 is always a supinated parry. The wrist won't bend to give you a pronated version. Parry 5 and 5a are the parries for the head. The difference between these two parries is which side of the head the wrist is on.

There are two basic approaches to each parry position: Sweeping parries and blocking parries. Sweeping parries are used to deflect the blade away from the target and are most effective against thrust attacks. Blocking parries use the strength of the blade and the sword arm to stop a blow in its tracks.

I'll get into detail about the parries a little later. Right now I'm going to focus on what's common for all swords.

There are two types of sword attacks: Cuts and thrusts. A cut is an attempt to slice through the opponent, like cutting a piece of bread. A thrust is an attempt to poke the opponent, like preparing to toast a marshmallow.

Every sword has a hilt assembly which consists of a grip (what you hold on to), a pommel (to counterbalance the weight of the blade) and a guard (which varies widely but is designed to protect the hand). Every sword has a blade

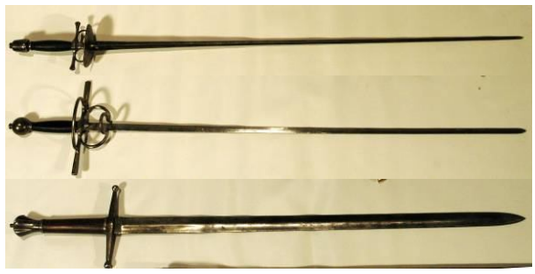
which should extend through the hilt if you plan to use it safely. The blade has three sections: The Forte, the Foible, and the Middle.

Forte: The third of the blade closest to the hilt assembly. The strongest part of the blade with the best leverage, used for defense.

Foible: The third of the blade consisting of the pointy end. The weakest part of the blade with the worst leverage, used for attacking.

Middle: The third of the blade between the forte and foible without a fancy French name. It fills the gap between the weakest and strongest parts of the blade and can be used somewhat effectively for defense and Errol Flynn-like sword fighting (over the heads and not really realistic).

Sword Parts Labeled



Let me emphasize right now: STAGE SWORDS ARE NOT SHARP! When I talk about the sharp edge of a sword, I am talking in historical terms. An actor has no business using a sharpened weapon for stage fighting. The edges and point are blunted for the safety of the performers.

The front (also called cutting) edge of the sword is the edge that is in line with your knuckles when properly holding the sword. If you were to punch someone with the sword in your hand, you would be punching that person with the cutting edge.

The back edge of the sword is the edge closest to your wrist. Historically speaking, the back edge was usually dull along most of its length. Some swords sharpened the full back edge, some sharpened the top third of the back edge, and others didn't sharpen the back edge at all. Since the only resistance to a blow to the back edge of the sword was provided by the thumb, it is a weak defense. Parries were carried out along the cutting edge.

There is an argument about whether or not parries were performed with the cutting edge (which would nick the hell out of the sharp edge) or the flat of the blade. While I understand the argument against using the cutting edge of the sword for parries, I have to side with physics on this one. Your attacker is trying to attack you with the sharp edge of the sword, concentrating the force along a very thin line. If you parry with the flat of the blade, you have a defense that is wider but much, much thinner. It is very likely that the concentrated force of the attack would break the defending blade if you parried with the flat. While parrying with the cutting edge is your strongest defense, the nicks are hitting at a part of the blade you probably don't use much. Besides, if you are trying to kill someone with a sword, do you care if the cuts are made smooth as from a razor, or ragged as from a saw?

The upshot for me is this: Parry with the edge of the blade, not the flat.

When holding a sword, use the dominant hand as your sword hand (are you right or left handed?) The sword hand holds the sword directly behind the guard on the hilt. Don't put your fingers past the guard unless you want them cut off. If you use a second hand on the weapon, it will be placed behind the sword hand.

To borrow a line from *Scaramouche*, hold the sword like a little bird. Grip it too tightly, you kill it; too loosely, and it will fly away.

Ready to sharpen your knowledge? Buy the book.

9 COMBAT MECHANICS – QUARTERSTAFF

Big long sticks banging away at each other. Conjures up images of Robin Hood and Little John, doesn't it? Quarterstaff technique isn't just for long branches of wood. It applies to spears, halberds, pole-axes, or any other weapon with a really long handle. While putting a hacking or stabbing weapon on the end of a staff adds another layer of fighting style, I won't cover them here. Just be aware that what you do with a quarterstaff can be done with a variety of weapons you may not have considered.

It also brings up the anatomy of the staff. A staff is typically a long, cylindrical piece of wood about 5 or 6 feet long. One end is the point, the other end is the butt. If all you have is a piece of wood, what difference does it make which end is which? None, really. But if your staff is a spear, it begins to make a difference.

Angela Meyers fighting Alex Paxton with Robbie Moritz and Angela Zieber in "We Got Rhythm" segment of *...and they fight!*

Long Form and Short Form

There are two forms for quarterstaff work: Long form and short form. Long form utilizes the full length of the staff and requires shifting the hand positions from one end to another. Short form keeps the hands around the middle of the staff and allows for quicker movement at closer range. Fundamentally, the targets and attacks are the same.

In long form, place one hand pronated (palm down) at the butt of the staff and the other hand supinated (palm up) a third of the length from the butt end. Which is the butt end? You decide. If it helps to remember, you can place a piece of colored tape at one end to indicate which is the butt and which is the point.

In most cases, if you want to switch ends in long form, you will slide the inside hand to the far end of the staff and slide the other hand to one-third distance from the new end. The end result is the inside hand becomes the end hand and the end hand becomes the inside hand. To clarify, if the left hand is at the butt end of the staff and the right hand is at the near third, slide the right hand to the point of the staff and the left hand to the third closest to the point.

To attack in long form, pull the end hand toward you and push the inside hand toward the target. Redirecting the energy forward applies to staff work just as it does with the sword. To redirect the energy forward, extend the arm pushing to the target fully, so your arm points at the intended target. The extension of your arm will cause the redirection to occur naturally, as long as your arm extension is aiming offline.

In short form, you place your hands on the staff so that it is divided evenly into thirds. In short form, there is no need to shift your hands along the staff. It is equally appropriate to hold the staff with either one palm up and one palm down or with both palms down. I prefer using both palms down for one simple reason. I can switch quickly between short form and long form simply by turning one wrist and releasing my grip with the other hand, then catching the nearest end.

The attacks for short form go to the same targets as long form without moving the hands. The technique is the same. Pull one end toward you as you extend your attack with the other hand. Redirecting the energy forward follows the same principle as long form.

Ready to bash someone to learn more? Buy the book.

APPENDIX A - CHOREOGRAPHY

Choreography possibilities are endless. If you want to perform choreographed fights, you need to find someone who has a greater wealth of experience and knowledge than this manual provides. That said, sometimes the best way to learn how to fight is to start making it up yourselves. As long as you follow the safety guidelines listed in this manual you can begin to create your own routines.

If you have any doubts about how something should be done, don't try it out without consulting someone with enough experience and knowledge to answer your questions. I say that mostly to appease the lawyers. Mostly, but *not entirely*.

Fight choreography is not a risk-free process. It is a reduced-risk process. Part of reducing that risk is to refuse to attempt something you are unsure of. But people are people, and I have done some stupid things in my time. I have violated every rule I have listed here in my youth and survived. It is not a testament to how good I am. It is a testament to the fact that I got lucky.

I know people. If you read this manual, I can pretty much guarantee that you will take everything to heart except the statement that **you can't learn stage combat from a book**. If you don't have someone with experience you can call on, you will try this at home anyway.

My telling you not to is to absolve myself of legal responsibility. Since you are going to ignore my warnings anyway, at least be responsible. Only choreograph what you know you can do repeatedly. Listen to your partner and don't apply that peer pressure to get others to do what is outside their comfort zone. That's my job. If you get injured, even slightly, stop. The fact that you got injured at all is a sign that you're doing something wrong. You need to figure out what that is before attempting to continue.

Study your physics. Become familiar with basic human physiology and medicine. These topics will help you figure out what your common sense doesn't know.

Reread this manual. I presented stage combat in terms of basic principles before covering the specific mechanics of a move. I hope it was entertaining. I did it this way to keep from repeating myself. Be sure when executing each move that the principles I mentioned in the beginning of the manual are being applied to your execution.

So, while I recommend you find proper guidance before coming up with your own choreography, fight safe.

Stage combat is a lot of fun. It's even more fun when nobody gets hurt.

Safety First, Safety Last, Safety Always.

Apoplectic to read more? Buy the book.

APPENDIX B – FIGHT SEQUENCE CHECKLIST

Here is the sequence of steps you should follow no matter what kind of fight you are performing.

1. Warm up before the fight. Stretch out and get your body relaxed and ready to move.
2. Establish distance.
3. Make eye contact before each move or each sequence of moves.
4. Cue the attack.
5. Start the reaction.
6. Complete the attack.
7. Maintain the consequences of the attack. If you are wounded, don't magically "heal" by the next sequence of moves.

Walk through each fight scene before each rehearsal and before every performance. Even if you are not rehearsing a fight scene that day, make a point of walking through the fight to refresh the muscle memory and help ingrain the moves into your subconscious.

Here are a few questions you should always ask after each time you run the fight.

- Are you maintaining distance? If not, fix it.
- Are your attacks on target? If not, fix it.
- Are you being safe? If not, fix it.
- Are you looking safe? If YES, fix it. You don't want to *look* safe, you want to *be* safe.
- Are you in control of your part of the fight? If not, you need more practice.
- Are you hiding the tricks from the audience? If not, adjust your positions to hide them.
- Are you improvising choreography? If yes, SHAME ON YOU! Never improvise fight choreography. Never "improve" the fight without the choreographer's knowledge, permission and guidance. Things happen. If something goes wrong, your choices are to abort the fight, start the phrase over again, or start the next phrase. There are *NO* other options.

Appendix acting up? Buy the book.

APPENDIX C – ADDITIONAL TRAINING

You can get more training from both established societies and individuals with experience. I recommend learning from as many people as you can to find the explanations and methods that work best for you.

Combat Societies

The following societies around the world provide training in the arena of stage combat.

The Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD) – http://www.safd.org

The British Academy Of Stage & Screen Combat (BASSC) - http://www.bassc.org

Fight Directors Canada (FDC) - http://fdc.ca

Society of Australian Fight Directors Inc. (SAuFD) - http://www.safdi.org.au

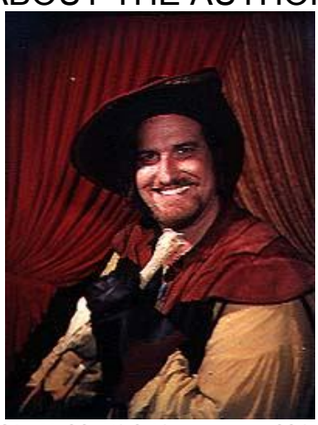
New Zealand Stage Combat Society – (No Website)

The British Academy of Dramatic Combat (BADC) - http://www.badc.co.uk/home/

Nordic Stage Fight Society (NSFS) - http://nordicstagefight.com/

Want your train to come in? Buy the book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



The author as *Naughty Noble* Dick Limpone and his pet rubber chicken.

Richard Buswell started his stage combat career when he took an elective stage combat class at the University of Oklahoma, "because it's something every actor should know." After receiving his BFA in Drama, he began his theatrical career in the Oklahoma City area as an actor. It soon became evident that as far as stage fighting was concerened, he was the only one in the region who actually knew what he was doing. So he became a *de facto* fight choreographer for 10 years until he moved to Iowa, where he got in touch with the Society of American Fight Directors. He attended the National Stage Combat Workshop in Las Vegas and was pleased to learn that everything he had been doing up to that point was absolutely correct. He also discovered how much more there was to learn about stage combat.

Bolstered by his success, Richard jumped into fight choreography as a profession with renewed vigor and confidence. He was asked if he could put together a 20-minute Shakespeare show for a newly formed Renaissance festival opening in a month. He responded, "Of course not. Shakespeare's too difficult to do properly in that time frame. But I can put together a 20-minute fight show." With those words he turned to fellow actor Jason Grubbe and asked, "Do you want to do a fight show with me?" They formed what became The Naughty Nobles, a 5-year partnership with Richard playing Richard Limpone (pronounced Limp-oh-nay, not Dick Limp-one) and Jason playing Lugie (first name Hacha. He's Flemish).

Richard currently resides in Kansas City where he runs KC Stage magazine, produces stage shows and videos under the banner of Merry BanD Productions, choreographs fight scenes for all levels of theatre and film, from junior high to Equity productions, from small independent shorts you probably wouldn't know to feature length films you might have seen such as *C.S.A.: Confederate States of America* and *Fight Night*. Richard also conducts workshops in stage combat, from hour-long introductory sessions for schools and libraries to detailed in-depth weekend sessions for performers.

In addition to his credentials as a fight choreographer and combatant, Richard works professionally as an actor, director, videographer, video editor, technical writer, magazine editor and computer programmer. The two questions he has a hard time answering are: "Where are you from" and "What do you do?" Richard has lived all over the place, from Alaska to Georgia, California to Virginia, and lots of places in between. He has worked on a variety of jobs, frequently at the same time. He humbly bills himself as a "Jack of all trades, master of half of them."

If you are interested in hiring Richard to choreograph or teach, he requires the following: A couch to sleep on, food to eat, cover his travel expenses and a little extra to pay bills. You can get a message to him through the following web sites:

http://www.kcstage.com
http://merrybandproductions.com

Buy the book.