

Quickie Foil Right-of-Way Rules

This is a short (and admittedly idiosyncratic) version of the foil right-of-way rules. Those wanting the full treatment can check the USFA rulebook available at usfencing.org. (Find the section on judging the priority of a touch in foil.) For the rest of us...

Why do we have right-of-way rules?

Right-of-way rules recall the logic of sharp weapons: attacks must be addressed, not ignored.

- **Then:** Right-of-way rules evolved to protect fencers practicing with imperfect protective gear (such as masks with eye slits). To avoid injury, you had to defend yourself if attacked, usually with an action preventing your opponent's blade from hitting you. In other words, the attacking fencer had right-of-way (or "priority"), which moved to the defending fencer with a successful parry.
- **Now:** Think of right-of-way as a tie-breaker. If both fencers hit, the one with right-of-way gets the point (or stops the action if the hit is off-target). The fencer without right-of-way gets nothing.

How do the right-of-way rules work?

- **When Attacking:** A fencer takes right of way by clearly being the first to attack - extending the blade and threatening target as part of an attempt to score a touch. (Advancing with a bent arm does not give right-of-way, nor does a blade pointing away from your opponent.)
- **When Defending:** Upon being attacked, the defender may:
 - get hit
 - retreat (or duck, or otherwise avoid the attack)
 - parry the attacker's blade
 - counterattack.

Only a proper parry switches right-of-way to the defender, giving him the chance to attack in return and possibly score. Counterattacking may or may not score, depending on whether the opponent hits on target, off target, or misses. (In addition, if scoring electronically, counterattacking may lock out the original attack, if the counterattack happens quickly enough.)

- **Simultaneous Attacks:** If both fencers attack properly at the same time, such that the director cannot determine who attacked first, the results of both attacks are examined. A touch is awarded only if one fencer cleanly hit the other, while the other fencer missed entirely. If both fencers hit (either on or off target), right-of-way cannot be established and no touch is awarded.
- **While Directing:** The director must be able to tell the difference between a parry, a beat attack, and incidental blade contact. This is one reason you will want to know (or figure out) your directors in addition to your opponents: to find out what they do and don't see and/or call. It is also a good reason for making your actions clear: easy for judges and directors to see and interpret.

Remember: Who *hits first* does *not* matter!

What matters is who has *right-of-way*. Example:

1. Fencer A attacks fencer B with a simple lunge, taking right of way.
2. Fencer B counterattacks with a simple lunge; there is no blade contact.
3. Fencer B is faster and hits first, on target.
4. Fencer A hits on target, after fencer B's hit lands.
5. Halt is called.

The touch is awarded to fencer A, despite hitting second. *He had right-of-way*. Fencer B would be awarded a touch only if fencer A's attack missed. (If fencer A hit off target, the action would stop at that point.)