

Guard – a position that facilitates offensive and defensive actions, while closing a particular line of attack. Guards are adjusted to cope with the relative height of the attacking blade.

The *stance* is the position the fencer adopts for his legs when on guard, to ensure balance and equal mobility forward and backward.

- Feet about the width of the shoulders apart.
- Lead foot (same side as sword arm) pointing at opponent.
- Back foot at right angles to front one, with heels in line.
- Swat down, with knees in line with insteps and weight equally distributed between the legs.
- Body turned at 45° to line between heels.
- Head, upright and steady, with a slight lean forward.
- Rear arm, generally upper arm in line with shoulders, and forearm near-vertical with a relaxed hand.
- Sword arm – see the guard positions below.

The 8 standard guards can be usefully divided into the more popular 4 supinated or semi-supinated position of the hand (that is, finger-nails upwards) and the pronated or quasi-pronated (that is, knuckle upwards).

Sixte

- Point pointing upwards breast of opponent's (sword-arm side).
- Elbow at a handspan from body, with straight-line from forearm along blade and point higher than hand.
- Hand at breast height.
- Blade held wide enough to cover high outside line of sword-arm.
- Hand in supination, with thumb at about 1 or 2 o'clock.

Octave

- From sixte, pivot wrist so hand now in supination and point pointing downwards towards advanced knee of opponent.
- Forearm near-horizontal.
- Back of hand in line with forearm.
- Blade held wide enough to cover low outside line of sword-arm.
- Elbow at a handspan from body.

Quarte

- Point pointing upwards at breast of opponent (sword-arm side).
- Hand at breast height, with back of hand at obtuse angle with forearm.
- Blade held wide enough to cover high outside line of sword-arm.
- Elbow at a handspan from body, with straight-line from forearm along blade and point higher than hand.

- Grip is loose with aids as end sits away from palm, with thumb at about 12 o'clock.

Septime

- From quarte, pivot wrist so hand is in supination and blade pointing downwards.
- Blade held wide enough to cover low outside line.
- Elbow at a handspan from body.
- Forearm near-horizontal.
- Back of hand at an obtuse angle to forearm.

Prime

- From sixte, pivot arm and wrist to read time on watch.
- Blade points down and slightly forward, closing outside line.
- Sword arm is at shoulder height, guard level with rear shoulder.
- Forearm and hand well forward in hand and almost at a right angle to forearm.

Seconde

- From octave, rotate wrist anticlockwise so that knuckles on top and thumb at 9 o'clock.
- Forearm near-horizontal.
- Back of hand in line with forearm, blade points at opponent's knee.
- Blade held wide enough to cover low outside line of sword-arm.
- Elbow at a handspan from body.

Tierce

- From sixte, rotate wrist anticlockwise so that knuckles on top and thumb at 9 o'clock.
- Point pointing towards breast of opponent's (sword-arm side).
- Elbow at a handspan from body, with straight-line from forearm along blade and point higher than hand.
- Hand at breast height, in line with forearm and blade.
- Blade held wide enough to cover high outside line of sword-arm.

Quinte

- Not used much in epee as difficult to form a riposte (popular in sabre).
- Blade level with head, with thumb underneath so knuckles up.
- Point pointing towards side of piste.

- ❖ Practice 1: Go from sixte to octave and back again, with point sweeping in semi-circle.
- ❖ Practice 2: Go from sixte to quarte and back again, with blade parallel to starting position.
- ❖ Practice 3: Move from any guard to any other, sweeping the blade to collect an attacking blade.