

Higher National Unit Specification

General information for centres

Unit title: Stage Combat: Hand to Hand and Blunt Instruments

Unit code: DG4D 34

Unit purpose: This unit is intended to give the candidate a grounding in the safe, effective and appropriate use of illusory force or combat in rehearsal and performance. Covering hand to hand fighting, stick work and blunt instruments, the unit serves as an invaluable movement skill for all performing students and a prerequisite for the companion *Stage combat; swords* Unit.

On completion of this Unit, the candidate should be able to:

1. Attack and defend using a range of unarmed blows, blocks, throws and falls
2. Attack and defend using a range of blunt instrument and stick blows, blocks, throws and falls
3. Demonstrate safe, effective and appropriate stage combat skills in performance

Credit value: 1 HN Credit at SCQF level 7: (8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7*)

**SCQF credit points are used to allocate credit to qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Each qualification in the Framework is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at an SCQF level. There are 12 SCQF levels, ranging from Access 1 to Doctorates.*

Recommended prior knowledge and skills: Access will be at the discretion of the centre and the following recommendations are for guidance only.

Where a candidate has achieved the course entry criteria for HNC/D Acting and Performance, they will have shown sufficient knowledge and skills for access to this unit. Health and safety must be a priority for this Unit. Candidates should be aware that a reasonable standard of physical fitness and basic tumbling abilities would be necessary. Anyone unable to accomplish simple forward and backward rolls should reconsider before beginning this training. Prior experience in martial arts or combat sports, however, is not always beneficial due to the complicity which is required between partners in the stage fight is not part of the competitive fight. Dancers and any candidate with stage movement experience will benefit.

Core skills: There may be opportunities to gather evidence towards core skills in this Unit, although there is no automatic certification of core skills or core skills components.

General information for centres (cont)

Context for delivery: This unit is included in the optional framework of HNC/D Acting and Performance. If this Unit is delivered as part of a group award, it is recommended that it should be taught and assessed within the subject area of the group award to which it contributes.

Assessment: This Unit requires the ongoing assessment of developing practical knowledge and/or skills. Assessment for all 3 Outcomes will be through observational checklists. Candidates must sample from a range of techniques offered, alongside prescribed knowledge and/or skills in all 3 Outcomes. In providing a list from which candidates will select their techniques, assessors should refer to the extended knowledge and skills list in the Guidance on Content and Context within the support notes of this unit.

Outcome 3 serves to allow the candidate to synthesize the learning into a devised, rehearsed and performed scenario. Whilst showings for Outcomes 1-2 are essentially in-house or in-class, the Outcome 3 assessment should be under performance conditions and can incorporate music, lighting and effects as long as these are developed in rehearsal and not simply added on. A simple text or scenario is needed to give the combat a context, but should not be allowed to overshadow the practical work.

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards

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The sections of the Unit stating the Outcomes, knowledge and/or skills, and evidence requirements are mandatory.

Where evidence for Outcomes is assessed on a sample basis, the whole of the content listed in the knowledge and/or skills section must be taught and available for assessment. Candidates should not know in advance the items on which they will be assessed and different items should be sampled on each assessment occasion.

Outcome 1

Attack and defend using a range of unarmed blows, blocks, throws and falls.

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ apply rigorous safety standards at all times
- ◆ ensure that the body is fully in control and safely balanced at all times
- ◆ give and take blows, kicks, blocks and throws in devised combat situations
- ◆ safely and appropriately apply reverse pressure techniques in grabs, pulls, strangles and throws
- ◆ appropriately act aggressive intention within the stage combat scenario
- ◆ ensure a logical sequence and outcome to the staged combat
- ◆ work collaboratively with a partner or partners
- ◆ take direction where appropriate
- ◆ devise and record accurate notation for the combat as presented.

Evidence requirements

Each candidate will need to show that they can select appropriate techniques to devise, choreograph and perform a safe, effective and appropriate combat for the stage. The candidate must demonstrate ability in utilising an agreed selection of blows, blocks, kicks, grappling and throws. They must detail the combat in written and/or graphic notation.

Assessment guidelines

Assessment should be by observational checklist. The assessment of this Outcome is intended to mark progress and check that essential basics are being overtaken.

In providing a list from which candidates will select their techniques, assessors should refer to the extended knowledge and skills list in the Guidance on Content and Context within the support notes of this unit.

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Hand to Hand and Blunt Instruments

Outcome 2

Attack and defend using a range of blunt instrument and stick blows, blocks, throws and falls.

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ apply rigorous safety standards at all times
- ◆ apply controlled techniques in attack and defence
- ◆ ensure that the body is fully in control and safely balanced at all times
- ◆ give and take blows, parries, blocks and throws in devised blunt instrument or slapstick combat situations
- ◆ appropriately act intention and aggression within the stage combat scenario
- ◆ ensure a logical sequence and outcome to the staged combat
- ◆ work collaboratively with a partner or partners
- ◆ take direction where appropriate
- ◆ devise and record accurate notation for the combat as presented.

Evidence requirements

Each candidate will need to show that they can select appropriate techniques to devise, choreograph and perform a safe, effective and appropriate combat for the stage. The candidate must demonstrate ability in utilising an agreed selection of blunt instrument or stick blows, blocks and throws. They must detail the combat in written and/or graphic notation.

Assessment guidelines

Assessment should be by observational checklist. The assessment of this Outcome is intended to mark progress and check that essential basics are being overtaken, alongside a general development and physical awareness.

In providing a list from which candidates will select their techniques, assessors should refer to the extended knowledge and skills list in the Guidance on Content and Context within the support notes of this unit.

Outcome 3

Demonstrate safe, effective and appropriate stage combat skills in performance.

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ apply rigorous safety standards at all times
- ◆ apply controlled techniques in attack and defence safely and appropriately at all times, whether armed or unarmed
- ◆ ensure that the body is fully in control and safely balanced at all times
- ◆ give and take blows, parries, blocks and throws in devised combat situations

- ◆ appropriately act intention and aggression within the stage combat scenario in character

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Hand to Hand and Blunt Instruments

- ◆ ensure a logical sequence and outcome to the staged combat
- ◆ work collaboratively with a partner or partners
- ◆ take direction where appropriate
- ◆ devise and record accurate notation for the combat as presented.

Evidence requirements

Each candidate will need to show that they can select appropriate techniques to devise, choreograph and perform a safe, effective and appropriate combat for the stage. Working with a partner or partners, the candidate must demonstrate ability in utilising an agreed selection of blows, blocks and throws which incorporate work with sticks and blunt instruments. The combat should be detailed in written and/or graphic notation and evaluated in a post-performance tutorial with the candidate.

Assessment guidelines

Outcome 3 serves to allow the candidate to synthesize their learning into a devised, rehearsed and performed scenario. Their techniques will be selected from Outcomes 1 and 2. Whilst showings for Outcomes 1 and 2 were essentially in-house or in-class, the Outcome 3 assessment should be under performance conditions and can incorporate music, lighting and effects as long as these are developed in rehearsal and not simply added on. Although the piece may fit into a production or be centred on a published text, the text often serves to distract and become an easy option and should be discouraged at this level. The onus should be on the practical application of the knowledge and skills rather than improvising or developing an acting scene.

Administrative Information

Unit code:	DG4D 34
Unit title:	Stage Combat: Hand to Hand and Blunt Instruments
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Higher National Unit specification: support notes

Unit title: Stage Combat: Hand to Hand and Blunt Instruments

This part of the Unit specification is offered as guidance. The support notes are not mandatory.

While the exact time allocated to this Unit is at the discretion of the centre, the notional design length is 40 hours.

Guidance on the content and context for this Unit

The Unit is primarily intended to prepare candidates for the most common type of stage violence they are likely to encounter in work as a professional or during higher/specialist training as performers. It aims to provide safe, effective and appropriate physical acting skills, which give the illusion of blows, kicks, grappling and throws, and can be repeated in rehearsal and performance without injury or fear. The qualified fight director is ultimately responsible for professional work on stage. The Unit does not intend to do anything other than use the fundamentals to develop knowledge and skills which will ensure safe non-professional work and make the performers better material to work with at drama school or in ‘the business.’

Given the nature of the work in this Unit, it is essential that safety is the paramount concern for staff and candidates at all times. Appropriate lighting and flooring, adequate well-heated space, appropriate safety mats or padding, safe prop weapons, time to warm-up and so on, must go hand in hand with an ethos of respect between all participants. Horseplay, unrehearsed sparring or wilfully unsafe work must be cause for dismissal from the class. Candidates must arrive punctually, dressed appropriately and be prepared to give their full attention to the work in hand.

It may be safer to have latecomers or anyone who does not feel or seem fully fit to observe the teaching and learning rather than join in.

It should be stressed to all candidates that stage combat is not strictly about ‘fighting’ but is, rather, about *acted* intention and aggression, about *acted* response to threat or physicality and, very much, about the *control* of one’s own body in seemingly uncontrolled circumstances. This awareness is often the most significant development for candidates and encourages a broader range of physical skill for many.

Learning to choreograph and notate stage combat is an essential safety need and must always be incorporated. Free play is never to be allowed unless combatants are wearing full protective fencing gear.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Hand to Hand and Blunt Instruments

Outcome 1 introduces the candidate to a full range of unarmed blows, blocks, throws and falls which can be employed in attack and defence on stage. Central to the knowledge and skills is an understanding of the need to give and take apparent impetus whilst retaining total body control and balance. A range of theatre games could be applied in the early stages to encourage this. **For example, partners** ‘throwing’ and ‘catching’ an imaginary beach ball with the pelvis or shoulder. Add in some grunting to indicate the effort involved or the weight of the caught ball and they have learned the first essentials of stage fight. Encouraging the candidate to mime powerful and seemingly aggressive movement, *acted intention and aggression*, whilst maintaining softness and control is vital for the safety of all concerned. Similarly, understanding reverse pressure techniques must be carefully learned through grabs or hair-pulling before the more complex moves such as strangling are tried.

Demonstrating the natural logic of how blows and defences might work will encourage candidates to develop short sequences as they overtake each new skill. They will, in time, devise and develop their own pieces for assessment and early work in understanding sequence and rhythm is time well spent. Partners should always learn both parts.

Extended Knowledge and skills list for Outcome 1:

- ◆ Theory of giving and taking
- ◆ Reverse pressure techniques (the attackers’ hands are held in place by the defender, contrary to what seems to be the case)
- ◆ Self, partner and clap knap
- ◆ Punching – straight/cross/hip/stomach/kidney/uppercut/haymaker/jab/‘hat’
- ◆ Elbow strike, back fist
- ◆ Blocking – forearm blocks low and high/scissor or X-blocks low and high/S-parries
- ◆ Block and crash leading to locks/throws/blows and kicks – stepping inside or outside
- ◆ Slapping – stroking slap/self and partner knap/interrogation slap
- ◆ Chops
- ◆ Rolls – forward, backward, diving, shoulder roll* **NB** All candidates should *understand* the method and use of the shoulder roll but need not necessarily *execute* it
- ◆ Falls – fainting, back, to knees, forward break fall
- ◆ Kicks – short arc kick/full on/side kick/crescent kick for attack and defence
- ◆ Kicks to groin/stomach/head/legs/ribs
- ◆ Blocks and parries for kicks
- ◆ Stamps to fingers and toes
- ◆ Hair pull
- ◆ Strangles from front / back /head chancery
- ◆ Grabs to all parts
- ◆ Throws – Irish whip / hip throw* **NB** All candidates should be able to execute these two simple throws but need not necessarily be the person who is thrown

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Hand to Hand and Blunt Instruments

Outcome 2 is intended to broaden the range of practical skills and encourage invention and comedy timing. Control of fists and feet mastered, this Outcome employs a wide range of blunt instruments as ‘weapons’ and demands co-ordinated ensemble work to ensure each performer is in the correct position, physically and mentally alert to give and receive blows. Appropriate acting skills must ensure that the dramatic purpose is well served by the illusion. Hence, candidates must choreograph the big actions of, and reactions to, the slams and blows with a feel for their best use in pantomime, broad comedy or commedia.

The stickwork gives the candidate hands-on knowledge and skills relating to a timeless weapon which has the potential to kill. Rigorous safety rules must be enforced from the beginning and revision of the fundamentals of body control is essential. Ensuring couples have sufficient space to work is vital and class numbers should reflect this. Controlled use of the quarterstaff, short stick(s) or baton and logical sequences which incorporate kicks, blows and throws where appropriate should encourage fluid movement, improved focus and developed balance – all to the good of the performing candidate.

Extended Knowledge and skills list for Outcome 2:

- ◆ Theory of giving and taking
- ◆ Reverse pressure techniques
- ◆ Contact knapping
- ◆ Elbows-in control for blows with box/bar-stool/tray/phone book
- ◆ Stroking delivery of blows with whip/chain/swung object
- ◆ Slam to table/wall/floor
- ◆ Head butt (**extra care!**)
- ◆ Slapstick blows and timing
- ◆ grip and stance relating to quarterstaff (2m)
- ◆ long and short attacks and blocks
- ◆ parries and ripostes
- ◆ disarms
- ◆ swinging attacks
- ◆ throws **NB** All candidates should *understand* the method and use of the shoulder roll but need not necessarily *execute* it in this instance
- ◆ point attacks – in and out of distance
- ◆ blows to stomach, face and back/toes/groin
- ◆ unarmed defence against stick attacker
- ◆ grip and stance for short stick (1.25 m)
- ◆ attacks and defences for same
- ◆ grip and stance for pair of short sticks or baton
- ◆ attacks and defences for same

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Hand to Hand and Blunt Instruments

Outcome 3 is the opportunity to sample from the work done and put together a ‘prize fight’ which allows candidates to apply their knowledge and skills. They should bring invention, technique, rehearsal and control together in a performance which has been nurtured and reviewed by their tutor and can be safely shown and enjoyed. The piece may fit into a production or be centred on a published text but the onus should be on the practical application of the knowledge and skills rather than improvising or developing an acting scene.

Guidance on the delivery and assessment of this Unit

This Unit is likely to form part of group award which is primarily designed to provide candidates with technical and professional knowledge and skills for use as theatre practitioners. Since the skills covered are fundamental to stage combat work and can be developed and applied across a range of practical Units, this Unit should be offered in Year One.

The assessment of this Unit requires observation of each candidate during their experiential learning and, as skills develop, in their devising, rehearsal and showing of combats. Written work should consist of simple choreographic notation, in a style agreed with the tutor, for the combats worked out by the candidate and partner. The notation should be clear, legible and informative so that it could be given to another pair of combatants and performed from the page. Accompanying marginal diagrams of footwork and positioning should be encouraged. **Notation skills are considered essential for safety.**

The professional fight director sets the fight, leaves notation with the combatants and stage manager and insists that the fight stays unchanged in performance. To reflect this standard, it is important that each fight stay as agreed and rehearsed and not changed in any way thereafter, unless safety is compromised. The rehearsal and development period is the time to sort problems so that performances can be safe, effective and accurate portrayals. NB: all combats should be cleared with the tutor before they can be allowed for independent rehearsal.

Sampling from the range of techniques for the assessment of Outcome 3 must be the product of discussion between combat partners and tutor and genuinely reflect the extensive skills base available. Imagination and creativity are to be encouraged to take the techniques fully into a dramatic context where the ebb and flow of the combat can sweep the favours and emotions of the audience. Candidates should be reminded to play a role, to act as they enact, to allow moments of suspension and drama into their fights and to do it all for the audience. The ‘prize fight’ for Outcome 3 should be followed by a short tutorial or group discussion by way of evaluation.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Hand to Hand and Blunt Instruments

Open learning

The Outcomes in this unit rely on developing skills through interaction with a lecturer and/or fellow candidates, and so the opportunities for distance learning are very limited. Centres may, however, find it possible to develop solutions, provided all unit and moderation requirements are met in full. Technological advances may make the possibility of such creative solutions more widespread in the future.

Because of the intensive nature of the training and the rehearsal requirements for this unit when taken as part of a course, part-time provision would be most unusual and difficult to achieve.

For information on normal open learning arrangements, please refer to the SQA guide *Assessment and Quality Assurance and Distance Learning (SQA 2000)*.

Special needs

This Unit specification is intended to ensure that there are no artificial barriers to learning or assessment. Special needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments or considering special alternative Outcomes for Units. For information on these, please refer to the SQA document *Guidance on Special Assessment Arrangements (SQA, 2001)*.

General information for candidates

Unit title: Stage Combat: Hand to Hand and Blunt Instruments

This Unit is designed to give you a grounding in the safe, effective and appropriate use of illusory force or combat in rehearsal and performance. Covering hand to hand fighting, stick work and blunt instruments, the unit serves as an invaluable movement skill for all performing students and a prerequisite for the advanced companion Unit *Stage Combat; Swords*. The Unit serves as a preparation for further training but should give sufficient background to allow performers to work under the tuition of a professional fight director with confidence.

On completion of this Unit, you will be able to attack and defend appropriately using a range of unarmed blows, blocks, throws and falls .It is important to be able to use them safely, effectively and appropriately in your stage work. You will also be able to incorporate attacks and defences with a range of sticks and blunt instruments which might be employed in pantomime or in crowd or riot scenes on stage. Some basic throws and falls will also be covered.

You should be aware that a reasonable standard of physical fitness and some basic tumbling abilities are necessary in order to approach this Unit with confidence.

Overall, you will be expected to work with respect and safety at all times, with an active regard for your peers and tutor and for the lethal potential in the weapons used. Stage weapons are designed to look and feel realistic but they can still cause injury if incorrectly used or mistreated. All the tuition, therefore, is to enable you to demonstrate **safe, effective and appropriate** stage combat skills in performance.

In order to complete the Unit successfully, you will need to progress steadily through a range of skills and knowledge technical and professional knowledge and skills for use as theatre practitioners. The assessment of this Unit requires observation of each candidate during their experiential learning and, as your skills develop, in your devising, rehearsal and showing of combats. Written work will consist of choreographic notation, in a style agreed with the tutor, for the combats worked out by you and your partner. The notation should be clear, legible and informative so that it could be given to another pair of combatants and performed from the page. Accompanying marginal diagrams of footwork and positioning will be encouraged.

The professional fight director sets the fight, leaves notation with the combatants and stage manager and insists that the fight stays unchanged in performance. To reflect this standard, it is important that each fight stay as agreed and rehearsed and not changed in any way thereafter unless safety is compromised. The rehearsal and development period is the time to sort problems so that performances can be safe, effective and accurate portrayals.

Assessment ‘showings’ for Outcomes 1-3 are essentially in-house or in-class and simply offer the opportunity to demonstrate skills and knowledge overtaken. Your Outcome 4 assessment will be under performance conditions and may incorporate music, lighting and effects as long as these are developed in rehearsal and not simply added on. Text often serves to distract and become an easy option and should be discouraged at this level.

General information for candidates (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Hand to Hand and Blunt Instruments

You will 'sample' from the range of techniques for the assessment of Outcome 4. This will involve discussion between combat partners and tutor and genuinely reflect the extensive skills base available. Imagination and creativity are to be encouraged to take the techniques fully into a dramatic context. You will play a role, acting as you enact, to allow moments of suspension and drama into your fight for the audience. This assessment will be followed by a short tutorial or group discussion after which you write up an evaluation of the performance focusing on your use of skills and knowledge and the process of devising/rehearsal/performance.