

Higher National Unit Specification

General information for centres

Unit title: Stage Combat: Introduction to Swords

Unit code: DG4E 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 using edged weapons. Covering stage fight with sword and companion weapon(s) the unit serves as an invaluable movement skill for all performing students and an advanced companion to the *Stage combat; unarmed and blunt instruments* Unit. 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, the candidate will be able to:

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

- 1 Attack and defend safely and appropriately using a range of sword and companion weapons.
- 2 Develop skills in a range of blows, blocks, throws and falls in edged weapon work.
- 3 Demonstrate effective stage combat skills appropriate to the context of a stimulus in a presentation.

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. For this unit, those who have skills or experience in fencing and/or aikido and those who have achieved a pass in the *Stage combat: unarmed and blunt instruments* Unit will be the most appropriate candidates for this Unit.

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. Outcomes 1 and 2 reflect this whilst Outcome 3 depends on formal assessment of a presentation from a stimulus. Observational checklists, alongside prescribed choreography for small sword and rapier and dagger fights are required for Outcomes 1-2. The candidate works with a partner or partners to devise, choreograph, notate and perform their fight for Outcome 3.

There is no universally agreed method of fight notation. A method which is simple to follow and accurate enough to be taken up by another group of knowledgeable and competent combatants should be agreed with candidates and adhered to. Candidates must select from lists of skills and techniques in developing their fights. The support notes contain extended lists of knowledge and skills which assessors should use for this purpose.

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 safely and appropriately using a range of sword and companion weapons

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Safe, skilful and correct handling of a sword AND a rapier and companion dagger in an historical context
- ◆ Step, attack and defend using a range of steps, cuts, thrusts and parries with a single sword (fencing sabre) for stage use
- ◆ Step, attack and defend using the a range of steps, thrusts and parries relevant to the small sword
- ◆ Step, attack and defend using a range of steps, cuts, thrusts and parries with a rapier and dagger for stage use
- ◆ Develop safe, fluid and effective combat choreography from given notation

Evidence requirements

Candidates must demonstrate safe and effective footwork and weapon handling whilst thinking and moving with precision in linear/lateral patterns. Candidates will generate evidence by learning and competently demonstrating a prescribed small sword combat with at least one invented phase added to the prescribed moves, to their own order. There is room for each pair of candidates to be inventive and original but within an agreed framework. The choreography/notation records their fight for assessment and safety purposes.

Assessment guidelines

The assessment of this Outcome is intended to mark progress and check that skills and knowledge are being overtaken. Learning a prescribed small sword combat which allows for an invented phase or two will ensure that combatants cover all relevant skills to a competent standard.

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Introduction to Swords

The recommended instrument of assessment is an observational checklist which requires the candidate to demonstrate competence and development in the range of knowledge and skills. Assessment should also ensure that the candidate is developing footwork and weapon handling whilst thinking and moving in circular rather than linear/lateral patterns. Assessment may be integrated with Outcome 2.

A long list of techniques is provided in the Guidance on Content and Context within the support notes of this unit.

Outcome 2

Develop skills in a range of blows, blocks, throws and falls in edged weapon work.

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Close quarter blows, blocks, throws and falls with edged weapons
- ◆ Combat choreography and notation

Evidence requirements

Candidates will produce evidence to demonstrate their knowledge and skills by showing that they can incorporate close quarter blows, blocks, throws and falls into a rapier and companion dagger combat safely, skilfully and correctly in an historical context. They must also develop safe, fluid and effective combat choreography for the rapier and companion weapon stage combat. This must be accurately notated.

Candidates must demonstrate that they can select appropriately from a range of close quarter blows, blocks, throws and falls in this Outcome. They must demonstrate:

- ◆ Safe use of skills and selected techniques
- ◆ Effective use of skills and chosen techniques in the context of the combat
- ◆ Appropriate use of skills and chosen techniques with regard to character and context.

Assessment guidelines

The recommended instrument of assessment for this Outcome is an observational checklist which will ensure that close quarter stage combat skills can be safely, effectively and appropriately incorporated into a single sword, small sword or rapier and dagger stage fight. It can be undertaken alongside work on Outcomes 1 and 3.

Candidates must select from a range of blows, blocks, throws and falls. In providing a list for this, 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)

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Outcome 3

Demonstrate effective stage combat skills appropriate to the context of a stimulus in a presentation

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Safe, skilful and correct handling of a sword in a presentation
- ◆ Justify choice of weapon and combat style within the context of the chosen text/scenario
- ◆ Apply combat skills to the rehearsal and presentation of a text-based stage fight
- ◆ Step, attack and defend using a range of steps, cuts, thrusts and parries
- ◆ Incorporate close quarter blows, blocks, throws and falls into a the chosen combat safely, skilfully and correctly in an historical context on stage
- ◆ Develop and notate safe, fluid and effective combat choreography for the stage combat

Evidence requirements

Candidates will produce evidence to demonstrate their knowledge and skills by showing that they can sample stage combat skills safely, effectively and appropriately, and incorporate them into a single sword, small sword or rapier and dagger stage fight. 6 phases, each lasting about a minute and a half, would in most cases be sufficient to incorporate the range of the skills and techniques required. At least two thirds of the techniques listed in the extended knowledge and skills list, in the support notes of this unit, must be incorporated into the fight, and shared between the partners. Each partner should take an equal share in the work shown.

The candidate must identify and justify the appropriate weapon and style for the text chosen and then apply the skills and knowledge in rehearsed performance, providing accurate written notation developed with the partner in rehearsal. It should be made available before the combat is shown in performance.

Assessment guidelines

The recommended assessment for this Outcome is an observation checklist which covers the devising, development and rehearsal phases, and requires safety, correct technique and comprehensive notation. The assessor must also be satisfied that the candidate has justified their choice of weapon, style and selection of techniques, with detailed reference to the text chosen.

A full list of techniques, from which the candidate may select, is provided in the Guidance on Content and Context within the support notes of this unit. Those labelled with an asterisk may be too advanced for the general student but could be taught to anyone who has previous experience or who shows particular aptitude.

Administrative Information

Unit code:	DG4E 34
Unit title:	Stage Combat: Introduction to Swords
Superclass category:	LC
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Higher National Unit specification: support notes

Unit title: Stage Combat: Introduction to Swords

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 which employs edged weapons that 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 armed attack and defence, strikes and kills, 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. Appropriate function and fitness for purpose must be central to the work. 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.

The Unit can integrate with acting, production, voice, movement, physical theatre and other practical Units, allowing additional and valuable rehearsal and development time. Since the Unit does include a range of styles, weapons and actions, the inclusion of some elements has been left to the discretion of the fight tutor – some students will progress further than others, and while everyone should be able to pass the Unit, some will be able to take on additional skills and knowledge. These are marked with an asterisk.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Introduction to Swords

Outcome 1 introduces the candidate to a full range of sword cuts, thrusts, parries and ripostes 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 and equal control over the weapon. 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 the importance of working in-distance and out-of-distance is essential for safe combat. 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, develop longer phases and pieces for assessment, so early work in understanding sequence and rhythm is time well spent. Partners should always learn both parts.

This Outcome is also intended to give the candidate the knowledge and skills associated with handling a sword and companion weapon. This requires careful development of the weaker hand to incorporate rapier and dagger posture, attacks and parries. Good balance, body and spatial awareness need to be developed and are always the product of precise instruction and a slow build-up of skills and understanding. Extra help should be offered to any left-handed candidates.

The range of skills and knowledge is extensive and the work in this Unit needs to develop and continue throughout the period of learning.

Extended Knowledge and skills list for Outcome 1:

- ◆ Edged weapon safety
- ◆ Warm-up and control
- ◆ Spatial awareness
- ◆ Historical context for rapier and small sword/etiquette
- ◆ Naming of parts/understanding the weapon
- ◆ Fight choreography and notation
- ◆ Grip and en garde stance
- ◆ Pronation and supination
- ◆ Finger play and feints
- ◆ Cutover / disengagement / beat
- ◆ The lunge
- ◆ Advance and retreat
- ◆ Passing steps
- ◆ Understanding of lines of attack and defence
- ◆ Thrust on a pass
- ◆ Simple attacks
- ◆ Compound attacks
- ◆ Simple parries- Prime, seconde, tierce, quarte, quinte (and 5A), sixte, 'hanging'
- ◆ Semi-circular parries

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Introduction to Swords

- ◆ Circular parries
- ◆ Ripostes – direct and indirect
- ◆ Bind and envelopment *
- ◆ Counter ripostes
- ◆ Renewed attack
- ◆ Sideways pass and sideways step
- ◆ Defensive and offensive sidesteps
- ◆ Horizontal cuts
- ◆ Ducking and avoidance
- ◆ Stop cuts and wounding
- ◆ kills
- ◆ Moulinet / Molinello
- ◆ Small sword posture
- ◆ Attacks, parries, ripostes and counter ripostes
- ◆ Additional parries of septime and octave*
- ◆ Coupe
- ◆ Double
- ◆ Ceding or yielding parries*
- ◆ Hand parries and disarms
- ◆ Volte
- ◆ Rapier and dagger posture and etiquette
- ◆ Sword and dagger attacks and parries
- ◆ Cross parry
- ◆ Punto reverso
- ◆ Corps a corps
- ◆ Pommel attack
- ◆ Blows, knaps, headbutts, kicks and throws
- ◆ Disarms of sword and dagger
- ◆ Use of cloak / buckler / lantern*

* Those labelled with an asterisk may be too advanced for the general student but could be taught to anyone who has previous experience or who shows particular aptitude.

Outcome 2 incorporates *corps a corps* work since pommel attacks, blows, knaps, headbutts, kicks, throws, disarms and use of cloak, buckler and lantern were all taught at the schools of fence and therefore can be employed in an historical context. The Unit also allows for the small sword to be worked in conjunction with a second weapon/prop.

Having covered the knowledge and skills, each candidate should be confident to develop safe, fluid and effective combat choreography for the small sword or rapier and companion weapon from given notation.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Introduction to Swords

This Outcome demands coordinated 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 actions of, and reactions to, the attacks and defences with a good awareness of character, context and position.

There is a particular skill in undertaking safe falls and rolls with weapons. 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 edged weapons 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:

- ◆ Corps a corps
- ◆ Pommel attack and blocks
- ◆ Blows including punches, elbow strikes, backfist, headbutt
- ◆ Knaps - self/ shared/ partner
- ◆ Defensive blocks
- ◆ kicks and use of knee to groin / legs / armed hand
- ◆ defensive grips and throws
- ◆ safe falls and rolls with weapons

Outcome 3 requires candidates to perform in order to demonstrate safe, effective and appropriate stage combat skills. Historical and textual context and justification should provide the stimulus for their work so that the prize fight has a ‘text’ or context and not simply a chance to have a fight. Rather, edged weapon safety, good control, spatial awareness and effective fight choreography are shown as an integral part of a stand-alone scene which has been selected by candidates, nurtured and reviewed by their tutor.

Extended Knowledge and skills list for Outcome 3:

- ◆ Edged weapon safety
- ◆ Warm-up and control
- ◆ Spatial awareness
- ◆ Historical context for rapier and small sword
- ◆ Naming of parts and understanding the weapon
- ◆ Fight choreography and notation
- ◆ Textual context and justification
- ◆ Grip and en garde stance
- ◆ Pronation and supination
- ◆ Fingerplay and feints
- ◆ Cutover / disengagement / beat

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Introduction to Swords

- ◆ The lunge
- ◆ Advance and retreat
- ◆ Passing steps
- ◆ Understanding of lines of attack and defence
- ◆ Thrust on a pass
- ◆ Simple attacks
- ◆ Compound attacks
- ◆ Simple parries- Prime, seconde, tierce, quarte, quinte (and 5A), sixte
- ◆ Semi-circular parries
- ◆ Circular parries
- ◆ Hanging parry
- ◆ Ripostes – direct and indirect
- ◆ Bind and envelopment*
- ◆ Counter ripostes
- ◆ Renewed attack
- ◆ Sideways pass and sideways step
- ◆ Defensive and offensive sidesteps
- ◆ Horizontal cuts
- ◆ Ducking and avoidance
- ◆ Stop cuts and wounding
- ◆ kills
- ◆ Moulinet / Molinello
- ◆ Small sword posture and etiquette
- ◆ Attacks, parries, ripostes and counter ripostes
- ◆ Additional parries septime and octave*
- ◆ Coupe
- ◆ Double
- ◆ Ceding or yielding parries*
- ◆ Hand parries and disarms
- ◆ Volte
- ◆ Rapier and dagger posture and etiquette
- ◆ Sword and dagger attacks and parries
- ◆ Cross parry
- ◆ Punto reverso
- ◆ Corps a corps
- ◆ Pommel attack
- ◆ Blows, knaps, headbutts, kicks and throws
- ◆ Disarms of sword and dagger
- ◆ Use of cloak / buckler / lantern*
- ◆ Corps a corps
- ◆ Pommel attack and blocks
- ◆ Blows including punches, elbow strikes, backfist, headbutt

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Introduction to Swords

- ◆ Knaps - self/ shared/ partner/ third party
- ◆ Defensive blocks
- ◆ kicks and use of knee to groin / legs / armed hand
- ◆ defensive grips and throws
- ◆ safe falls and rolls with weapons

* Those labelled with an asterisk may be too advanced for the general student but could be taught to anyone who has previous experience or who shows particular aptitude.

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 involve advanced stage combat work and can be developed and applied across a range of practical Units, this Unit should be offered in Year Two or after completion of the Unit, *Stage combat: Introduction to unarmed and blunt instruments*.

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 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.

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.

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 fight for Outcome 3 should be followed by a short tutorial or group discussion during should discuss the process by which the script was chosen, researched, rehearsed and performed with textual or contextual justification for weapons, particular moves and outcomes.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Introduction to Swords

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: Introduction to Swords

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 using edged weapons. Covering stage fight with sword and companion weapon(s) the unit serves as an invaluable movement skill for all performing students and an advanced companion to the *Stage combat; Introduction to unarmed and blunt instruments* Unit. 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 full stylistic range of cuts, thrusts, parries and ripostes using a sword and companion weapon. Bold, sweeping swordplay of the kind required in pantomime is covered, before moving on to the more delicate fingerplay and feinting of the small sword and the two handed, circular actions of the rapier and dagger.

You will be expected to employ a full range of blows, blocks, throws and falls in your edged weapon work, a natural follow-on from the *Stage combat; Introduction to hand to hand combat and blunt instruments* Unit. There is historical evidence for these skills having been taught at the 'schools of fence' and it is important to be able to use them safely, effectively and appropriately in your stage work.

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 technical and professional knowledge/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 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.

General information for candidates (cont)

Unit title: Stage Combat: Introduction to Swords

You will ‘sample’ from the range of techniques for the assessment of Outcome 3. 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 during which you discuss the process of devising/rehearsal/performance plus textual or contextual justification for script, weapons, particular moves and outcomes.