

GUY WINDSOR

THE SWORDSMAN'S
Quick Guide



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The Swordsman's Quick Guide Series

Hello, and welcome to *The Swordsman's Quick Guide* series of booklets on various aspects of life in general and training historical swordsmanship in particular. My name is Guy Windsor, and I have been working on historical European swordsmanship, mostly from medieval and renaissance Italian sources, since the early 1990s. In 2001 I opened my first proper school, and have been making my living as an instructor and writer on this topic ever since. Each instalment is intended to put my key ideas about a single subject together in one place for easy reference, and so they are not specific to one weapon, style, or system. As such, they should also be useful to most other martial artists.

In many cases, I cover the specific systems in detail in one or another of my books. For Fiore's longsword techniques, you will probably find my *The Medieval Longsword* and *Advanced Longsword, Form and Function* useful. For Capoferro's rapier plays, *The Duellist's Companion*. In this series I will do my best to stay general, so that the fundamental principles are not hidden behind system-specific jargon and examples.

The ideas for which topics to cover in this series mostly come from the questions I get asked by my readers and students, so if you think of a topic you'd like me to include please let me know! You can find me on the usual social networking sites, and also on my own website, www.guywindsor.net/blog

The rest of the series includes *The Seven Principles of Mastery*, available free in most ebook shops, *Preparing for Freeplay*, *Ethics*, *Teaching a Basic Class*, and *Fencing Theory*.

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Choosing a Sword

I have bad news for you. Buying a sword will not necessarily help your swordsmanship one iota. It will not turn you into Aragorn, or D'Artagnan, or Conan. It will do one thing only, in that direction; it will lower the barriers to training. Having a sword in your living room makes it that much more likely that you will do some sword practice. That's all. It is very common to mistake *having the same kit as the experts* with *becoming an expert*. Sure, there is usually some overlap, but I have lost count of the number of things I've bought that would help me be a better writer (pens, notebooks, software), and you know what? None of it has helped nearly as much as a) writing a lot b) reading a lot c) having people kindly tell me what's wrong with what I've written. I've been very lucky in that the sales of my other books justified the time saved by getting a decent laptop (this is a Macbook Air, and it's lovely; Linux users please shut up, and those of you on PC's, well, I hope you're happy), in that it can run my preferred writing software (Scrivener), and easily cope with really big photo files. But

Shakespeare didn't have one, and I don't think it was the way he sourced his quills from extra-fat geese (I just made that up) that made him the greatest writer in history. I have had literally hundreds of students coming through one or other branches of my school, and I have noticed no correlation at all between how quickly somebody buys a sword, and how good they get at using it. Indeed, it often seems to me that some people attend a beginners' course simply to give themselves permission to buy a sword; what they really wanted was not so much *to be a swordsman* as it was *to be a sword owner*. And that's fine: let me make things easier for you: you have my permission to go buy any sword you want, so long as you don't deliberately hurt anyone with it. Indeed, collecting swords is a skill and a pastime in its own right, and we owe a lot of what we know about swords today to the dedicated collectors of the past (I'm thinking right now of Mr Stibbert, Mr Wallace, and Mr Oakeshott in particular). So go ahead, buy a sword. You don't need my blessing, and this booklet is intended for people training in historical swordsmanship, not collectors. For many students, buying their first sword represents a serious commitment to practice. And that should be honoured, as indeed I am trying to do with this booklet. It's a big step, and for most people, a relatively expensive one. I will take it as my starting point that you are looking for a blunt steel practice weapon. There is a whole other book in why it should be steel, and another in how to choose a sharp steel sword. The basic tenets of this instalment will serve for choosing sharps, and by the time you need one, you will be experienced enough not to need a booklet of advice on the subject.

So, the questions to ask when choosing a sword for any given practice are:

- 1) Is it of the right type (rapier, longsword, foil, etc.)
- 2) Is it of the right construction (intended for use, not display, for example)
- 3) Does it handle as you feel it should?
- 4) Do you *want* to pick it up and play with it?

I will analyse the first question in detail below, giving you the approximate dimensions, weights and so on of the six most common sword types practised with today; it's the meat of this instalment. But by no means the most important bit. That would be the last of my four questions. Let's start with that.

Do you love me?

Imagine that every sword you pick up, or look at on the internet, was asking you that question. Only ever buy the ones that make you answer a loud and immediate "yes!" If you love it, it will sing for you. If you love it, it will call out to you every time a speck of dust falls on it, saying "why don't you ever play with me any more?" If you love it, you will pick it up every day and let it play. And so it will repay the money you spent on it a thousand times.

Think of it like this. Imagine your sword is properly made, and you use it appropriately. It should last at least a decade. That's 3650 days. Imagine you use it for two hours a day (I can dream, can't I?). That's 7300 hours.

Now let's imagine you spent 500 dollars on it (a bit above the median price for a usable sword). That's less than 7 cents per hour! And every extra hour you spend will lower that cost.

Now imagine you got a cheaper sword that you did not love. And in those ten years, you used it for only two hours a week (which is still more than most people do). That's 728 hours. If your sword cost only 200 dollars, that works out at over 27 cents per hour. Nearly four times as much per hour as the sword that cost more than twice as much!

Ok, I'm massaging the maths to make a point. Of course you have a budget, and of course there is no direct correlation between hours spent training and the cost of the sword. Many of the most expensive options on a sword have no effect on handling, durability, or any other measure of performance (do you *really* want a gold inlay on the pommel?). And my most expensive sword is one of my least-used. But in my experience, when faced with an oh-my-god-this-is-gorgeous sword and a this-will-do-the-job sword, it has never been cost-effective to settle for the cheaper option.

In general, those that know what they are doing tend to agree on what makes a good sword and what does not. That will be the bulk of this instalment. But give any six swordsmen the choice between any six swords of the same quality, and they tend not to all agree that one is the best. Pick the one you love.

Can you handle me?

The handling characteristics of a sword are like the handling on a car. For some uses, you want a Porsche 911, for others, a truck. And there are a million variations in between. I tend to like a sword that has a bit of weight in the blade, to power my cuts, because I tend to let gravity do most of the work of getting it to move. But my go-to rapier is very light in the hand.

For beginners (and I assume you are relatively new to this, or you probably wouldn't need this booklet), when in doubt, go light. As the excellent sword cutler (somebody who puts hilts on swords, but doesn't make blades) Dennis Graves once wrote (I have sadly forgotten where, but I'm sure it was him) "you wouldn't practice tennis with a frying pan, would you?". It is very common for beginners to confuse a heavy sword with a durable one; indeed, they often are, but one of the reasons that heavy swords last so long is you can't use them for very much time before you have to put them down!

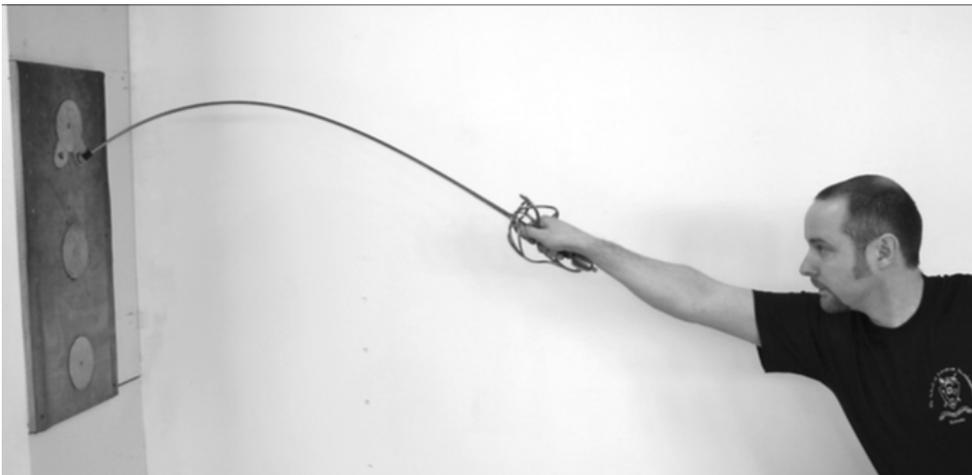
Am I fit for purpose?

It is important that you decide exactly what you want this weapon for. Is it for fighting, solo practice, pair practice, adornment, or all four? Will it be used for armoured or unarmoured fighting, for duelling or battle re-enactment? In any case, it must be sturdy enough for its most strenuous likely use. Light, fast weapons intended for unarmoured duelling should not go on the re-enactment battlefield, and too many

people come away from a practice session heartbroken when their shiny wall-hanger has been smashed to bits. There is also the consideration of exact historical accuracy. Always check with your supplier or the manufacturer that the weapon is intended for the use you want it for.

Important points to consider include:

Blade flex. Blades can vary from completely rigid, to floppy. In general, for more intense training with partners, a good flex is ideal. Put the point on the floor, or on a wall target, and lean on the sword with moderate force. The blade should bend in a smooth curve, starting from about the middle of the blade. If it bends nearer to the hilt, the blade will feel unstable on contact. You can see the ideal curve on a rapier blade in this image from *The Duellist's Companion*.



(Photo by Ilkka Hartikainen, from *The Duellist's Companion*.)

Rubber Blunts. I highly recommend rubber blunts on all training swords. It allows you to work harder on targets and with a partner, and greatly reduces the risk of penetrating wounds. Stage combat weapons, and historical re-enactment weapons usually don't have them because they look wrong. If possible, the point should also have a rebate or a nail head, which is then covered with the rubber.



(Image showing a nail headed rapier blade courtesy of www.armor.com)

Adding a blunt does change the handling a little, so you should use the smallest one you can fit onto the blade.

Sharp hilts: if you are going to be fencing with this weapon, you should avoid having a hilt or pommel that is too sharp and pointy. Think of striking with every part of the sword; every sticky-out bit of metal should be safe enough for at least minor contact.

Handle size: the handle is your interface with the weapon, and it should fit in your hand. Most weapons makers these days make them much too thick. For reference, your ring finger should be able to touch the muscle of your thumb, as you see here:



(Image by Jari Juslin, from *The Medieval Longsword*.)

Donald McBane, in his 1728 book *The Expert Sword-Man's Companion*, wrote that the little finger should be able to touch the palm, when holding a smallsword.

A Note on Specifications and Units

I am about to annoy the engineers and mathematicians among you; I will give all specs in inches (") centimetres (cm), pounds (lb) and grams (g) or kilograms (kg). There are 2.54 cm in the inch, and 2.2lb in 1000g. But I will round all numbers up or down as convenient, and without regard for consistency. This is because the soul of a sword is not in its data. A long, heavy sword might be a lovely peach to handle, and a short, light one might be a dog. Unlike in the sporting arena, where the weapons must be practically identical, in historical swordsmanship the specifications are not exact, because a) the historical record shows a huge amount of variety within any given sword type, and b) a centimetre here or there, a few ounces here or there, might make all the difference to the handling of a specific sword, but the effect is not predictable. So the specs are just guidelines.

What About the Hilts?

You might notice, as you read through this, that I barely mention hilt design. Should your longsword have a plain crossguard, or siderings? Should your rapier be a three-ring with shells or a two-poster? This is because, unless it's specified in the manual you are studying, these things make very little difference from a practical standpoint. On balance, I'd tend not to use a cup-hilt rapier to do an early 17th-century Italian rapier style, nor would it feel right to use a gloriously gothic-hilted longsword to study Fiore. But these things do not really matter in the way that for instance the length of the blade does. I'll give general guidelines, of course, but that's it.

The test is, does it look right? If the crossguard looks too long, it probably is. If the handle looks too thick, it probably is. And so on. Crossguards should be *in proportion*, which of course changes with every other detail of the weapon.

Types of Sword:

Arming Sword



(Image courtesy of www.armor.com)

This kind of sword was popular in Europe in one form or another for centuries. It was usually used with some kind of shield or buckler. In today's historical swordsmanship community it's most often used for practising the system of sword and buckler shown in Royal Armouries Manuscript I.33, so I am making the assumption that you are likely to need it for that system. Different practitioners use quite widely different blade lengths for the style, from a long 38" sword to a short 33". The advantage of a shorter sword is that it is stronger in binding actions; your opponent has a shorter lever to use against you. Longer swords obviously reach farther.

Specs Summary:

Hilt type: a simple crossguard only.

Total Length: 33" - 38"; 84 - 97cm.

Blade Length: 27" - 31" 68 - 79cm

Weight: 2 lb - 2.5lb, 900 - 1150g

Point of Balance: 2 - 4", 5 - 10cm down the blade.

Falchion, Messer, or Storta

There is a huge range of weapons that fit into the category of short cutting sword; I could add to the title cutlass, hanger, hunting sword, machete, and so on.

My falchion, by JT Pälkkö:



This is a gorgeous beast, loosely based on the Conyers falchion in Durham Cathedral. Perhaps the most famous storta is the one in the Wallace Collection, once owned by Cosimo de' Medici. It's rather pretty, as this copy by Arms and Armor shows:



(Image courtesy of www.armor.com)

At present, we only have sources for one historical style, which is the German messer. Strictly speaking, messers tend to have straight blades, and are defined by their hilt construction.



(Image courtesy of www.armor.com)

Thanks to an odd medieval German law, anyone could carry a knife, but only certain high-born folk could carry a sword. A knife had a handle made of scales riveted to the tang. So you could carry a sword of any length, and if it had a knife-style handle, you were ok. For the purposes of messer training, I'd recommend the following stats:

Hilt type: a simple crossguard, possibly with a "nail" or sidering.

Total length: 34" - 38", 86 - 97 cm

Blade length: 26" - 30", 66 - 76 cm

Weight: about 2 lbs, 1kg.

Point of Balance: 3- 4.5", 8-12 cm from the crossguard.



Longsword (for Fiore)

(Image courtesy of www.armor.com)

Your first sword should be blunt, for training with partners and against durable targets. The blade should be of heat-treated spring steel, and the sword should measure between 110 and 130 centimetres (about 43 to 51 inches) from pommel to point. The weight should be absolutely no more than 1.8kg (just under 4 pounds) for even the longest sword in that range. For most people, a length of 120cm (47") and a weight of 1.6kg (3 1/2 pounds) is about right, with the balance point about 5cm (2 inches) from the crossguard. The handle ought to be at least three of your hand's breadths long. Any shorter and it's not optimum for this style (we know this because Fiore has us at times grab our opponent's sword handle between his hands, so there must be space for three hands there!). Much longer and it starts to behave like a two-hander (and looks nothing like Fiore's illustrations).

My preferred suppliers for training longswords are Pavel Moc (www.swords.cz) in Europe, and Arms and Armor (www.armor.com) in America. My students in Asia and Australia tend to go for the European suppliers, which has more to do with shipping costs than anything else, I think.

Specs Summary:

Hilt type: a simple crossguard, possibly with siderings.

Total Length: 43" - 51", 110-130cm

Blade Length: 34" - 42", 87- 105cm

Weight: 3.5lb - 4lb, 1.6 -1.8kg

Point of Balance: 2.5" - 4", 6 -10cm from the cross.

Longsword (for Liechtenauer)

The problem (and the glorious opportunity) with Liechtenauer is that his art is represented in dozens of manuals spread out over about 200 years. Unsurprisingly, this means that we see lots of different blade lengths, and especially a tendency towards longer handles. As a general rule, I think that Liechtenauer's system makes most sense with a somewhat longer sword; a total length of about 120cm-140cm and a handle length (not including pommel) of a minimum of 24cm should be ok. I am not a Liechtenauer specialist, so do check with your instructor if you have one. A lot of practitioners use a "feder" type sword, a kind of practise weapon based on an early 17th century original. I've included it below as a special case.

Specs Summary:

Hilt type: a simple crossguard, possibly with siderings.

Total Length: 47" - 55", 120-140cm

Blade Length: 37" - 45", 96 - 114cm

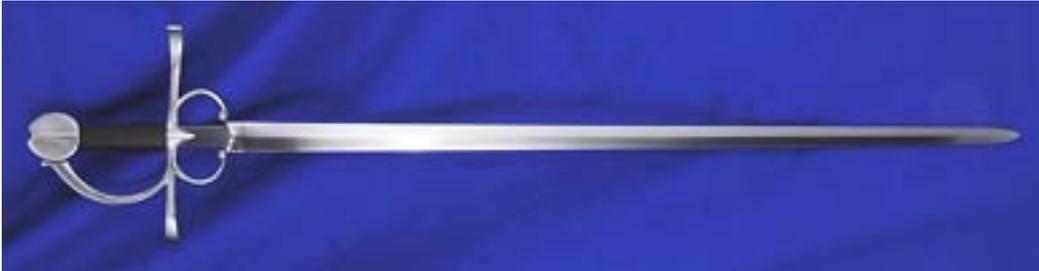
Weight: 3.7- 4.4lb, 1.7- 2.0kg

Point of Balance: 2.5" - 4", 6 -10cm from the cross.

Feder specs taken from Peter Regenyeyi's website:

Hilt type: a simple crossguard, possibly with siderings.
Total Length: 52", 132cm
Blade Length: 39", 100cm
Weight: 3lb, 1.4kg
Point of Balance: 3", 8cm from the crossguard

Sidesword



(Image courtesy of www.armor.com)

This is the term that modern practitioners give to the kind of “cut and thrust” sword that became popular in the early 16th century, and developed into the longer, thinner rapier by the end of the 16th century. It is most commonly used by practitioners of the Bolognese style, and of Meyer’s *rappir*. It is arguably the first single-handed sword that was commonly used without a shield or buckler, though of course we have sources that show it being used with bucklers, daggers and other things.

This sword type marks the beginning of the tendency towards more complex hilts. For a full description of how sword hilts developed over time, from a simple cross all the way up to the cup hilt, please see *The Duellist's Companion*, pages 9-18.

Specs Summary:

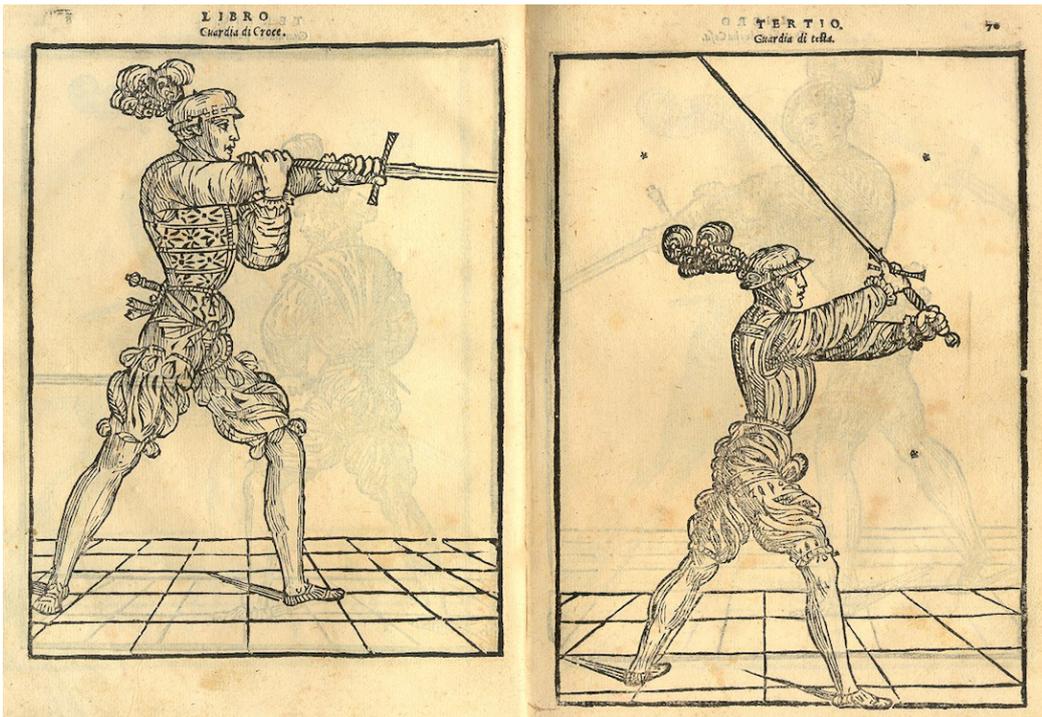
Hilt type: a more complex hilt; at least finger-rings, and a sidering.
Total Length: 39"- 44", 99 - 112cm
Blade Length: 34"-37", 86 - 94cm
Weight: 2.8-3.5lb, 1.25 - 1.6kg
Point of Balance: 2.5" - 4", 6 -10cm from the cross.

Two-Handed Sword



(Image courtesy of www.armor.com)

This kind of sword, far too long to be worn at the waist, was used especially in Italy, Germany, and Portugal. The 16th and 17th century fencing sources call it a *spadone*, *zweihander*, and *montante* respectively. There are style differences, of course, but generally speaking these swords are about 5 feet (150cm) long, with very wide crossguards, and often a secondary crossguard built into the blade. You can get the general idea from these plates from Marozzo's 1536 *Opera Nova*.



Hilt type: a simple crossguard, sometimes with siderings.

Total Length: 58" - 65", 147- 165cm

Blade Length: 42"- 50", 107 - 127 cm

Weight: 4 - 5.5lb, 1.8 - 2.5kg

Point of Balance: 4" - 8", 10 - 20cm from the cross.

Rapier



(Image courtesy of www.armor.com)

Of all the historical sword styles, “rapier” is perhaps the one that shows the greatest degree of variation. Capoferro and other “rapier” masters refer to the weapon they are writing about as simply “spada”, a sword. The Oxford English Dictionary has it as: “a light, slender sword used for thrusting”.

The term “rapier” is very imprecise, covering a range of hilt styles, blade lengths, etc. It has been variously used to describe everything from a bronze- age thrusting sword (in archaeological texts) to a sports sabre with a funny grip (in a modern SCA equipment catalogue). The word is probably not Italian at all; according to the OED it comes from a German, Dutch or possibly French root. Meyer for example refers to the “rappier”. The term as it was used in English sources in the period in question (the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century) describes a complex-hilted sword with a long slim blade, used mainly for thrusting.

A glance at the historical record shows swords we would call rapiers in an abundance of different weights, lengths, hilt configurations, points of balance, and so on. As I see it, the hilt type that you choose matters much less than that the blade length, mass and point of balance be within the following parameters. In my opinion, Capoferro’s system works best with a sword that weighs between 1kg and 1.6kg (2.0—3.5 lb), with the point of balance between 6 and 15 cm (2.5—6 inches) in front of the crossguard, a complex hilt that allows you to put your forefinger over the crossguard safely, and a blade length from crossguard to point of at least 97 cm (38”) (for short people), up to a maximum of about 114 cm (45”).

Capoferro himself tells us, in Chapter III: The Division of Fencing That is Posed in the Knowledge of the Sword, section 36:

“Therefore the sword has to be twice as long as the arm, and as much as my extraordinary pace, which length corresponds equally to that which is from my armpit down to the sole of my foot.” (Translation by William Wilson and Jherek Swanger).

I have never met anyone for whom those three measurements were the same, and in my *The Duellist's Companion* I worked them out like so:

“My arm is 52 cm, shoulder to wrist; my lunge about 120 cm from heel to heel, and it is about 140 cm from my foot to my armpit when standing. When standing on guard, it is about 115cm from foot to armpit. When in the lunge, it is about 104 cm from foot to armpit. Also, it is not clear whether he refers to the length of the blade, or of the whole sword.

If we resort to the unreliable practice of measuring the illustrations, in the picture of the lunge, the sword blade is 73 mm, the arm from wrist to armpit 37 mm, and the line G (front heel to front armpit) 55 mm. The distance between the feet is 67 mm. So, the measurement most consistent with the text would appear to be the length of the arm, from wrist to armpit, as it approximately correlates to half the length of the blade.

Given this as a guide, my blade ought to be 104 cm or about 41" long from the guard to the point."

Specs Summary:

Hilt type: a full complex hilt; either swept, Pappenheim, or cup.

Total Length: 45" - 53", 114 - 135cm

Blade Length: 38 - 45", 96 - 114cm

Weight: 2.8-3.5lb, 1.25 - 1.6kg

Point of Balance: 2.5" - 6", 6 - 15cm from the cross.

Smallsword



(Image courtesy of www.armor.com)

Ah, the glorious smallsword; my first love as a swordsman, and never was there a nastier, tricksier, more vicious death-dealer than this.

The smallsword refers to the successor of the rapier, popular from about 1650 to the end of the eighteenth century (and surviving to this day in some civilian ceremonial forms, such as the Finnish PhD regalia). The smallsword was shorter than the rapier, with a blade length of about 30" to 34" (approx. 76 cm to 86cm), and was lighter, weighing in between 500 and 1000 g (approx. 1—2 lb). It would often have a triangular section blade, and usually a relatively simple shell guard, with or without arms. One interesting variation on the smallsword, the colichemarde, had a broad forte, suddenly narrowing at about the middle of the blade.

Domenico Angelo, in his 1787 *The School of Fencing* makes the following recommendations:

- 1) have a triangular section blade, for single combat, and a flat, heavier one for battle
- 2) The sword should be proportional to your height and strength
- 3) but should not exceed 38" "from pommel to point".
- 4) "it is an error to think that the long sword hath the advantage."

Specs Summary:

Hilt type: a simple shell guard, vestigial quillons, and usually a knucklebow.

Total Length: 35 - 39", 89 - 99cm

Blade Length: 30" - 34", 76 - 86cm

Weight: 1 - 2lb, 500 - 1000g

Point of Balance: 2 - 4", 5 - 10cm down the blade.

Backsword, Broadsword, or Sabre



(Image courtesy of www.armor.com)

As Capt. John Godfrey wrote in his 1747 *Treatise Upon the Useful Science of Defence: Connecting the Small and Back-sword, and Shewing the Affinity Between Them*, “The Small-Sword is the Call of Honour, the Back-Sword the Call of Duty.” Variations on the theme of a solid military cutting sword have been around since before the pyramids, but this distinct style is characterised by a broad blade (hence “broadsword”) often with a blunt back edge (hence “backsword”), and a quite enclosed hilt offering excellent protection to the hand.

It is not strictly true to say that if the blade is curved it must be a sabre (there are straight-bladed sabres, and curved bladed swords that are not sabres, such as falchions and katanas), but it works as a rule of thumb. These are not hard and fast distinctions. The specs here work for all three sword types. Note though that systems that use a heavily curved blade tend to make use of the curve not only for devastating cuts, but also for sneaky blade angulations. So if your system calls for a curved blade, make sure you get one.

Specs Summary:

Hilt type: fully enclosed.

Total Length: 36 - 42”, 90 - 107cm

Blade Length: 31 - 36”, 90 - 92cm

Weight: 2 - 3lb, 1 - 1.5kg

Point of Balance: 2 - 4”, 5 - 10cm down the blade.

Sabre (duelling)



(Image courtesy of www.therionarms.com)

Light sabres, for light cavalry (not Jedi), were usually of a similar style to the heavy version, just shorter and lighter. The slim, very lightweight fencing sabre did not become common until towards the end of the nineteenth century. At the time of writing (Spring 2015) this kind of sword, is usually called a duelling sabre, and is available in several styles, as described by the 19th century authors that defined them (Radaelli, Hutton, etc.). As these tend to be all about the same size, I'll list just one spec.

Specs Summary:

Hilt type: shell with integral knuckle bow.

Total Length: 37"

Blade Length: 31"

Weight: 1.5lb, 700g.

Point of Balance: 4-5", 10 - 13cm down the blade.

Historical Examples

We are very fortunate in that thousands and thousands of swords have survived into the modern age, largely thanks to museums and collectors. So we have abundant examples of the real thing to copy and draw from. All good WMA sword suppliers take these existing examples into account, and many do accurate reproductions. A few words of warning though: just because it still exists doesn't necessarily mean it's good. Or representative. You can find some really awful historical swords, and you should be careful about buying a copy of an original if it falls outside the specs range I have noted above. Then as now, people had varied taste, and varied ideas about what made a good sword. Think of the massive range in quality and style in the tools we use today; smartphones, cars, and so on. It was like that back then.

Our written sources are sometimes useful in this regard; what could be better than a recommendation from the master himself? Unfortunately it is relatively unusual to get detailed information from actual fencing treatises regarding the size or weight of the sword. I think that this is largely due to the fact that most of the intended readership didn't need any help in that regard, and that no worthwhile system is very sensitive to small changes in the weapon.

One notable exception is Ridolfo Capoferro, who at least tells us the length of the weapon, as noted above. Another is Domenico Angelo, also noted above. We also have some specifications from Filippo Vadi regarding the proportions of the sword, in his Chapter 2, "Measures of the Two-Handed Sword". This is a rather more complicated matter than at first it appears; I went into it in some detail in my *Veni Vadi Vici* (pages 39-41) and have reproduced that section at the end of this booklet; some test readers found it a bit dense!

Choosing a Supplier

As a general rule, go with suppliers who advertise their swords for the use you intend, and it is a good idea to go with suppliers that have a track record of reliability. It is strangely common for makers to produce excellent swords for a while, get overloaded with orders, and then collapse (which can lead to you losing your deposit, or waiting a year or more longer than agreed for your order). Running a business is a totally different skill set to making swords, and ideally your supplier has both. Or, he lives in your town and you can go bribe him with beer, or threaten him with dire retribution (watch out though, he has both hammers and swords! The beer approach is better).

Ordering Online

In a perfect world, you find the sword you want on a stall or in a shop, swing it around, fall in love and ~~get married~~ buy it. But most probably, you will be ordering one online.

The things to look for in a sword supplier or smith are:

- The swords should be advertised for use. Look for HEMA or something like that in their website blurb.
- The swords appear to be of the right style and size. A good maker will always provide detailed stats; at least length and weight.
- Ideally, one or more of your friends has bought one of their swords and been happy with it.

The online suppliers I use most for swords are:

Pavel Moc: www.swords.cz

Darkwood Armory: www.darkwoodarmory.com

Arms and Armor: www.armor.com

Albion: <http://www.albion-swords.com>

Ordering a Custom Made Sword

For many of us, ordering a sword is our first experience of dealing with an artisan, and ordering something custom made. Like your doctor, your tailor, and your spouse, you should never lie to or deliberately mislead your smith. Be honest, and you will get exactly what you want; and be fair. People who have never made stuff by hand for a living tend to have no clue whatsoever what it entails. If that's you, and you are ordering something custom made, here's my advice:

- Find a maker whose work you love.
- Tell them exactly what you want the thing you are ordering to *do* (such as impress your friends; cut through a car door; be perfectly historically accurate down to the molecular arrangement of the iron and carbon; or what).
- Tell them your budget.
- Trust their artistry. Do not, not, not overload them with obsessively detailed specifications. They are not a CNC machine.
- Agree to the timeframe, then wait patiently.

If they say they want the job, and you can meet their price, great. If not, go back to step one. Do NOT haggle. You can ask if there are any unnecessary embellishments that they can leave out (that solid silver pommel, for instance) to bring the sword within your budget, but do not ask them to drop their prices by one penny. I made my living as a cabinet maker and antique furniture restorer for five years after graduating University. I know what it is like to have someone, who probably earns ten times what you do, bitch about how much you are charging them to make something. I flat guarantee that no sword-maker on the planet who is working on his own or in a small shop is in it for the money. Because there isn't any.

My top recommendation for custom swords is:

JT Pälikkö: http://www.kp-art.fi/jt/index_eng.html

If these little books do well, then my budget for custom work will go up, and I might be able to generate some additional recommendations. You can also request custom work from Pavel Moc, Arms and Armor, and Darkwood Armory; I've done so and they were very good.

Thanks and Credits:

Cover Design: Eleanora Rebecchi

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Appendix

From *Veni Vadi Vici*:

This chapter is fascinating because it lays out the proportions of the sword that Vadi would have us use. Note, he does not give any dimensions, only lengths relative to your stature. As in geometry, the exact dimensions are not interesting, as they give just one specific instance of the principle. The proportions are everything, as they can be scaled in any direction without the form being lost.

Using Vadi's stated proportions, my sword should be 133cm (my floor-armpit measurement) and the handle about 21cm (my "span" is 21cm, and I have relatively small hands, so this should be a bit bigger). Allowing about 5cm for the pommel, that gives us an approximate length of the crossguard of 26cm.

With reference to Peter Johnsson's article in the Park Lane Arms Fair Catalogue (March 2012), let's have a brief look at the geometry of this weapon. Using the 26cm hilt length as the diameter of a circle, 5 such adjacent circles will give us an overall length of 130cm: quite close to the 133 of my floor-armpit measurement. So, let us divide 133 by 5 to get a diameter of 26.6cm for our circle.

Adding in the connecting circles to create the vesica pattern that Johnsson has established gives us nine interlocking circles. Nine is an excellent number for this kind of thing, being a trinity of trinities.

The crossguard is placed on the circumference of the first circle, and is of the same width as the diameter measurement. Its thickness should be within the third circle, not the first, to avoid taking length off the handle. It is probably square in cross section, and the tips should be pointed. I see this as a shallow pyramid at each end, rather than a chisel point or a serious spike, but that is from a general impression of the illustrations, not hard data.

Now to find the geometry of the hilt and blade. The pommel is "round" ("tondo") but this does not imply a ball shape I think; more a cylinder, to fit in the fist. The images suggest a round section scent-stopper or oval in length design.

Data from the images is unreliable, as I do not yet have access to the original, but taking a fair sample of the pictures renders the following data:

(Note: handle = total length of grip and pommel. Measurements in mm.)

| | 15R, Segno | 17R: corona | 18R top left |
|---------------------------|------------|-------------|--------------|
| Man | 130 | 71 | 76 |
| Sword | 98 | 49 | 58 |
| Blade | 78 | 33 | 40 |
| Handle | 20 | 16 | 18 |
| Crossguard | 16 | 13 | 12 |
| Ratio Man:Sword | 1.1327:1 | 1.449:1 | 1.31:1 |
| Ratio Sword:Handle | 4.9:1 | 3.062:1 | 3.222:1 |
| Ratio Cross:Handle | 1.25:1 | 1.231:1 | 1.5:1 |

It is interesting to note that the longest sword (relative to the man holding it) is 1.31:1. I am 175cm tall: keeping this ratio, my sword should be 133.6cm long, and my floor-arpit measurement is 133cm. Pretty close: but this is the longest sword in the sample. We can see from Folio 40R that the sword may be carried in a scabbard: but that particular sword appears quite short, especially in the handle. The functional length limit of a sword that is worn is the maximum length of blade that can be drawn from the scabbard while it is attached to the belt.. On me that is about 110cm. Vadi's sword fits just within this maximum. Note that on folio 28R where he gives the form of the sword to be used in armour, the crossguard is as long as the handle alone, not handle and pommel together. The images tend to suggest this latter arrangement.

For a discussion, with video, of the consequences of changing the length of the sword, please see here: <http://guywindsor.net/blog/?p=129>

Further reading

If you've enjoyed this booklet you definitely should visit [my blog](#), and sign up for my mailing list (it's populated only by the excellent, there's never any spam, and members get the news first about new releases and giveaways) and please consider buying one or more of the following:

The Swordsman's Quick Guide Series, volume 1: The 7 Principles of Mastery (which is currently free on all platforms) covers my seven principles of mastering any field. They are: Mindfulness, Flow, Adopt Useful Beliefs, No Injuries, the Pareto Principle, Run a Diagnostic, and Distinguishing between Knowledge and Skill.

The Swordsman's Quick Guide, volume 3: Preparing for Freeplay This instalment covers how to get from set basic drills to freeplay, by increasing complexity in a consistent and constructive way.

The Swordsman's Quick Guide, volume 4: Ethics This instalment gives the reader the basic tools to establish for themselves the ethical dimension of martial arts training.

The Swordsman's Quick Guide Compilation volume 1: instalments 1-4

The Swordsman's Quick Guide, volume 5: How to Teach a Basic Class This instalment is intended for people just starting out as teachers, to give them the teaching knowledge and confidence to run a safe basic class.

The Swordsman's Quick Guide, volume 6: Fencing Theory This instalment covers the idea and structure of fencing theory; what it is, how it works, and how you can use it to analyse any fencing style from any period.

The Swordsman's Companion, a training manual for medieval longsword, 2004. This was my first book, and it has become something of a classic in this field. As a training manual, it is largely replaced by *The Medieval Longsword*, but as a book about how and why to train, it is still relevant.

The Duellist's Companion, a training manual for 17th century Italian rapier, 2006. This is still the standard work on the interpretation and practice of Capoferro's rapier system.

The Little Book of Push-ups, 2009. The title says it all. It also includes advice on how to get from zero to one push-up, and general physical training.

The Armizare Vade Mecum, mnemonic verses for remembering Fiore's Art. 2011. This is a collection of verses, each one of which encapsulates one element of Fiore's art.

Mastering the Art of Arms vol 1: The Medieval Dagger, a training manual for Fiore's dagger material. 2012. This is a complete overview of the dagger material in Fiore's art of arms, and includes instruction on how to fall, how to develop real skills, as well as covering all of the fundamental attacks with and defences against the dagger.

Veni VADI Vici, a transcription and translation of Filippo Vadi's *De Arte Gladiatoria Dimicandi*, with commentary and analysis. 2012. This is my first full-length translation, and was funded by a successful Indigogo campaign. A must-read for anyone interested in working from Vadi's treatise, and anyone interested in the historical aspect of the Art. I am currently working on a second, heavily corrected, edition.

Mastering the Art of Arms vol 2: The Medieval Longsword, a training manual for Fiore's longsword material. 2013. If you want to learn how to train and fight with a longsword in an authentic medieval style, this book is for you. This book features an introduction by the excellent historical novelist, and medieval combatant, Christian Cameron.

Swordfighting, for Writers, Game Designers, and Martial Artists. 2015. Especially the chapters on Talent, and overcoming Barriers to Success. This book is made up of about 50% posts from my blog, and 50% new material. It also features an introduction from the one and only Neal Stephenson, author of *Snow Crash*, *The Diamond Age*, *The Baroque Cycle*, to name but a few.

Mastering the Art of Arms, vol 3: Advanced Longsword, Form and Function. 2016. This covers using forms for skill development, and a lot of Fiore-specific training, building on the groundwork laid in *The Medieval Longsword*.

If you already have them all, thank you for your generous support of my work!

Finally, let me ask you now to review this book, for better or worse, wherever is convenient for you. If I've done something right I need to know to do it again; moreover, I need to know what could be improved. As Vadi wrote:

`"And if this my little work finds its way into the hands of anyone versed in the art and appears to him to have anything superfluous or wrong, please adjust, reduce or add to it as he pleases. Because in the end I place myself under his correction and censure."`

Thank you!