I. The Classical Academy of Arms Paper Requirement

WHY A RESEARCH PAPER/THESIS REQUIREMENT

Individuals completing the requirements for credentialing as Classical Fencing Provosts and Classical Fencing Masters have both an opportunity and an obligation to credibly contribute to our shared understanding of fencing in the classical period. The Research Paper and Thesis are the individual contributions to knowledge by our members and a critical part of our mission to preserve and teach the techniques and tactics of classical fencing.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE RESEARCH PAPER AND THE THESIS

The Research Paper is a preliminary paper to provide experience in the preparation of an applied research project addressing a problem in the teaching of classical fencing. Its intent is to give the Classical Fencing Provost candidate experience in the process of writing a significant paper in preparation for the thesis. The Thesis is a traditional component of the qualification of Fencing Masters. The Classical Academy of Arms requires a thesis so that Classical Fencing masters will learn the tools needed to perform research to expand our knowledge of classical fencing and in doing so will make an initial, substantial contribution to that knowledge.
WHY NOT A VIDEO THESIS

Some national academies of Fencing Masters have modified their requirements to permit the submission of a video thesis. We believe that this does not serve the goal of presenting original research in a form suitable for use in further scholarly research. A written thesis requires that the candidate demonstrate (1) the ability to conduct formal research on an identified problem (2) knowledge of the literature, (3) the ability to write cogently about the problem, (4) good grammar, good sentence and paragraph structure, and logical argument (5) compliance with a format that is widely accepted for academic research, (6) the ability to produce a document that can be shared with other researchers on academic pre-print sites, and (7) the ability to contribute to the literature of sports science and history. The resulting document can survive changes and media formats and storage methods, serving as a resource for further research for years to come.
II. The Process

The proposal, topic approval, defense, revision, and final approval process for the Classical Fencing Provost Research Paper and the Classical Fencing Master Thesis is essentially the same. It is important to follow the steps in order and to work with your mentor at each step.

STARTING THE PROCESS

The initial step is to determine a topic which you want to study. This is an iterative process that should progress from:

1. A general area in which you have an interest,
2. Asking questions about what you are interested in discovering,
3. Asking more detailed questions about the questions,
4. Until you reach a project for which sources can be found and data can be generated and that is narrow enough that can be accomplished in a reasonable period of time and at a reasonable length.

Theses are often criticized as being a tremendous amount of detail about a tiny subject area. There is considerable truth to that. But the tremendous amount of detail is the important thing.

For example, you could decide to write your thesis about the Italian School. It sounds like a good topic, and a small one. But when we actually look at what it is, there are: (1) at least three Italian Schools, (2) with several formal training centers, (3) the spada and the sabre, (4) a number of noted masters, (5) a number of noted fencers including the great Aldo Nadi and Edoardo Mangiarotti, (6) a specific dueling culture that went through several phases with noted duelist, including Benito Mussolini, (7) the export of Italian technique to other European and American hemisphere countries, (8) the record of Olympic success, (9) the early and strategic development of fencing as contribution to national prestige, and (10) ... The topic is a career of study and hundreds of pages of writing, not just a simple, small topic. To be successful as a thesis, you would need to select part of one of these parts and focus on that.

The related issue is that you have to be able to find something about which there is sufficient material that you can access. For example, there is one translation of Siebenhaar’s manual for the Dutch Method. If your intent is to do a detailed study of part of Soebenhaar’s method, there is nothing to use as a point of comparison or as a contrasting view. If, however, your topic is to identify elements of Roux’s version of Kreusslerian Thrust Fencing and the contemporary Italian School in Siebenhaar’s work,
the single source is not a significant issue. It all depends on how you define the topic and set the scope of work.

**FINDING A MENTOR AND A COMMITTEE**

When you have identified a tentative topic, request a mentor from the Academy. The mentor will be the primary contact and advisor throughout the paper or thesis process. The mentor will work with you to identify at least one and preferably two additional committee whose function is to read, advise and approve the proposal and the completed research paper or thesis.

**PROPOSAL**

The proposal is a formal document presented to your committee to receive their permission to proceed with your paper. It should be approved by your mentor before presenting it to the committee. The format is abbreviated from what you will present as the final paper, but it is to your advantage to provide sufficient detail for the members of the committee to understand what you propose to do and how you propose to do it. The committee members are experienced researchers and can provide significant guidance to help you design the best possible research project.

The **Research Paper Proposal** consists of Chapter I, including Sections A and B, and Chapter II, Sections A and B, in draft form. Although in draft form it should be concise, cogent, and well written.

The **Thesis Proposal** consists of Chapters I, II, and III in draft form. Although in draft form it should be concise, cogent, and well written.

**TOPIC APPROVAL**

The committee will evaluate your proposal and either (1) approve without modifications, (2) request you modify the proposal in specific ways, or (3) reject the proposal. In the case of rejection, the committee will provide detailed comments to improve your proposal, suggest different approaches, or work with you and your mentor to find a better topic. An accepted proposal is clearance to perform and complete the project.

**SUBMISSION**

As you conduct the necessary research and writing, you should submit draft and completed chapters to your mentor for review, suggestions, and comment. When all chapters are complete (3 chapters for the research paper and 5 for the thesis), the mentor will work with you and the committee to schedule a defense.
DEFENSE

The defense is part of the process leading to approval or rejection of the research paper or thesis. In the defense the candidate is expected to be able to describe in summary form (as applicable): the problem and its significance; what others already knew about the problem and how his or her research expands that knowledge; the details of the method; the results; the major points in the analysis of those results; and any implications for further research. The candidate is then expected to be able to answer detailed questions about the research and how it was conducted. A research paper or thesis can be passed without revision, passed with revisions, or rejected. Rejection should be a rare event if the committee, the mentor, and the candidate did a thorough job at the proposal stage.

Defenses may be conducted in person when convenient or by skype.

REVISION

If revisions are called for, they may be minor revisions or major revisions. Minor revisions usually involve minor word changes, addition or deletion of sentences or paragraphs to clarify meaning, or similar adjustments to address committee concerns. Minor revisions normally can be coordinated between the candidate and the mentor. Major revisions reflect a significant level of discomfort on the part of the committee that the research effort answered the research question, that the method was correctly executed, or that the analysis is justified by the data. Major revisions require significant rewriting of one or more chapters and must be resubmitted to the committee, which may or may not require an additional defense.

FINAL APPROVAL

Once all corrections and revisions have been completed, and the mentor is satisfied, there is a final step. The candidate is responsible for providing a clean copy of the document as a .pdf suitable for posting on the Academy's website. Candidates are encouraged to post theses and research papers on commonly used academic pre-print websites (Academia.edu or ResearchGate).
III. The Format of the Classical Fencing Provost Research Paper

A complete template is available as Word file on request for use in preparing the paper. Papers should be prepared on 8.5 inch by 11 inch paper with standard 1 inch margins. The paper font should be Georgia 12 point. The paper should be double spaced with a page number centered beneath the text.

TITLE
Author

I. INTRODUCTION

Problem Defined

Explain for what problem in classical fencing this paper attempts to propose a solution. Clearly limit the scope of the problem by years, school, weapon, type of activity so that you can have a realistic chance of offering a solution in a 10 to 20 page paper. Smaller problems are better than global ones. For example:

This research paper examines the use of command driven instruction in teaching basic synchronization of blade and foot movement in classical dueling sword. Because dueling sword movement patterns differ from those of classical foil and sabre, command driven instruction may or may not offer a superior way of teaching synchronization in the reassemblyment, on the back foot first advance, and the front foot first retreat.

Current Status

Information which describes the current status of the problem you are examining. Support this material with citations to sources that show the nature, extent, and impact of the problem if they are available. Include reference to books and other literature and discuss what they contribute to understanding the problem.

II. DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM AND IDENTIFICATION OF POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

This is the major portion of the paper. Although this section does not require a formal literature review, you should show that you are familiar with the applicable literature by
using the concepts in the literature and citing each as appropriate. Citations should be in-text citations with the author’s last name and date in parentheses.

Elements

Examine the current status to determine its elements. This requires a careful study of the situation and identification of the root and significant secondary causes of the issue and of other factors which constrain your possible solutions.

Possible Solutions

Then identify possible solutions to the problem. These may be either solutions identified in sources that you consult, solutions based on interviews with other teachers of fencing or with students, or solutions that you have developed yourself. These solutions should be possible and potentially effective in addressing the issue being studied.

Solution Evaluation

In each case establish the potential usefulness of each solution with either analysis of detailed rich description of how the possible solution should work or with testing of the solution when practical. Support each solution with citations to any sources you use.

D. Analysis

Your analysis should rank the relative attractiveness and efficiency of your possible solutions and show the pros and cons for each.

III. PROPOSED SOLUTION

The proposal section identifies which solution is the preferable one and describes how this solution could be implemented.

WORKS CITED

Articles, books, web pages, videos, etc. used in the project and cited in the text (such as in the current status and the problem discussion). A more detailed discussion of this subject is to be found in the thesis format.
IV. The Format of the Classical Fencing Master Thesis

The thesis is composed of five standard chapters. Although some types of research may require a departure from this format, such departures should be rare, and must be approved by the mentor and committee as a conscious decision based on the need for an alternate format to address the question. Each of these chapters has subsections that should be considered for inclusion. Not every thesis is required to have every subsection in each chapter, but these subsections should be consciously considered for inclusion.

At first glance this structure might seem overwhelming. In reality, the standard format is understood by researchers in a wide variety of fields, and its organization allows others to rapidly determine the applicability of your work to their’s. It also provides a roadmap of what should be in the document, in what order, and in what level of detail, greatly simplifying the work of writing.

A complete template is available as Word file on request for use in preparing the thesis. Papers should be prepared on 8.5 inch by 11 inch paper with standard 1 inch margins. The paper font should be Georgia 12 point. The paper should be double spaced with a page number centered beneath the text.

TITLE

Author

I. INTRODUCTION

The introduction introduces the problem to the reader, explains its context, and provides a summary of how the problem will be addressed.

The Problem

The Problem is the description of the broader condition that establishes the need for the study. Focus this subsection on a problem toward which your research can make a contribution. “Throughout history many people were killed in duels” is undoubtedly true – it is also a really big range of history to address to describe the problem of dueling deaths. “During the classical period did the practice of dueling to first blood influence or create the fencing doctrine of hitting without being hit?” is a much tighter problem.

The Purpose of the Study

This subsection deals with your study – what you intend to achieve by undertaking this effort. For example, you may want to understand the forces at work that cause the
problem to exist, or you may want to develop a practical solution, or to provide an alternate interpretation of events, or to identify key factors in a single event, etc.

**Research Question**

This is the major question that must be answered: what do you want to know, what is the importance of the information, how can the information be used? For example:

*This research study examines the reported range and frequency of wounds in sword duels in order to better understand the validity of the concept of hitting without being hit as the basis for instruction in fencing.*

**Subordinate Questions**

These are questions required to answer the research question listed in the order in which they had to be answered in order to answer the main question. Note that not all research questions will have subordinate questions. Using our dueling study good subordinate questions are:

*What is the total number of duels during the period and what percentage resulted in no injury, one fencer being injured, both fencers being injured, or one fencer being killed?*

*By whom and when was the phrase that the objective of fencing is to give but not to receive originated?*

**Hints**

If you have a substantial list of subordinate questions (perhaps more than three) it may be a sign that you should refocus to make one of the subordinate questions.

It is better not to ask questions which you know you cannot answer. In our forts case above, we can arrive at a rough estimate of the number of duels and of the duels that resulted in injury. The level of specificity that the subordinate question asks probably requires years of search through newspaper archives.

**Background**

This is information which sets the stage for the research project, describes the context, establishes its value, and suggests ways in which the results might be used. Typically, this should be concise but have sufficient detail for a reader to be able to determine whether this research is relevant to his or her needs. It should always be clearly and tightly focused on its contribution to understanding the problem and the research question or hypothesis. Background for background’s sake is a waste of space.
For example - in our dueling study example above, a first paragraph might establish the role of the duel and its frequency, a second the desirability of hitting without being hit in dueling practice, and the third the implications of this for teaching classical fencing.

Scope

Scope describes the boundaries of the study and provide a rationale for those boundaries. In the dueling study you might restrict it to the two major dueling nations (France and Italy) and the time period to between 1880 and the start of World War I. The reasons could be, first, that at least partial data is available in other studies for the incidence of dueling and dueling injuries in these two countries and, second, that the fencing doctrine of hitting without being hit was well established before World War I.

Method

The method statement is not a complete description of the method used, but it should indicate the general research tradition (qualitative or quantitative), the specific method, and why that was chosen for this problem.

Assumptions

Every study involves assumptions, some of them being explicitly made as a way to limit or control the scope of the study and others because without them the size of the study would significantly increase. List any assumptions that are the basis for the research, preferably in their order of importance to the research. For example, it might be reasonable to assume:

This study assumes that the descriptions of fencing technique in period fencing texts are an accurate reflection of the technique being taught in classical fencing.

Limitations

Every study has limitations. They may include problems of access to the information you need, the limited available literature, the unsuitability of all the standard methods to a study of the type you are undertaking, and a host of other practical and method problems. By defining the limitations you have been unable to address, you let the reader know of potential vulnerabilities in your conclusions and increase the confidence in your results.

Significance of the Study

Fencing Master's theses rarely get read, much less revolutionize the world, so be reasonable in your estimation of the significance of your work. But you do not do a thesis just to fill a square. Show that your thesis will address a specific need for a
specific population, find a possible answer to a question that has not been addressed, or add to an existing theory of how what happens why.

**Relationship of the Researcher to the Subject.**

You are a fencing trainer writing about an issue in fencing – that is self-evident and generally does not require a Relationship of the Researcher to the Subject statement. However, if you have a specific expertise in the subject, relationship with your research subjects, or other unusual conditions, the reader needs to understand that relationship to understand your view. For example, if your great great-grandfather was wounded in a duel in the Bois De Boulogne in May 1880, that should be disclosed.

**Terms Used**

Provide definitions of any key terms that are either unique to this paper, that might be unfamiliar to someone reading the paper because of the use of the original language, or that have a variety of possible meanings, the choice of which needs to be specified for clarity. Generally they should be listed in alphabetical order. For example:

- **Classical fencing**: fencing in the manner taught by fencing masters and practiced by fencers in the period from 1880 CE to 1939 CE.

- **Naslag (Dutch)**: an after-thrust or after-strike, assumed to mean a riposte.

**II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are two types of applicable literature - the literature composed of fencing texts, books describing fencing and dueling, and articles contemporaneous to the classical period, and modern literature including modern translations and reconstructions of classical technique and commentaries on classical fencing. Contemporary (primary) sources and high quality modern translations are preferred when defining the practice of the period. Modern commentaries or even modern “classical” manuals are secondary sources.

The purpose of a literature review is to set the stage for your research by showing (1) how much has been written, (2) what the common themes are, and (3) what needs to be discovered (establishing your research question).

A well-done literature review contributes not only a list of what is known, but also an analysis that links what is known clearly to your problem.

The literature review may be organized chronologically (what was written earliest to the most recent), topically (what are the major themes and what do people say about them),...
or as an inverted pyramid working from the general to the specific, depending on which approach best identifies what is already known about the subject.

One issue is how to treat extant documents, for example, if you have gathered lesson plans or drill sequences from a number of sources. If a technical document contributes to knowledge but is not directly on point on your topic it should probably be part of the literature review. However, if it part of the data that you will study as intimately related to the problem, it is probably best discovered by (1) specifying that you will search for extant documents in your method section, and (2) describing its contribution in terms of content in your results.

Make certain to identify the sources you use with appropriate in-text citations, the author's name and date of publication - for example (Green, 2005). These are preferable to and easier to use than footnotes. You want your readers to be able to read your original sources if they need more information. Citing them adds to your credibility.

### III. METHOD

The method section must describe exactly what steps you took in your research in sufficient detail to allow the reader to do exactly the same thing you did. This is true whether your method is qualitative or quantitative. Standard Method sections include (additional sections may be appropriate in theses that include significant statistical work to identify variables and specific measurements) the following.

#### Research Design

This is a description of the overall approach to the problem and the specific research method selected. Because classical fencing lacks a large body of published credible research, in most cases the primary research designs will be qualitative observational or descriptive research appropriate for establishing the baseline for further studies. There are dozens of possible research approaches; the following may prove useful:

**Case study** - a detailed examination of a specific case or situation, documenting the who, what, why, when, where, and how effective the practice or approach was. A case study could examine the practice of a specific master who had a significant impact on fencing development, the politics of a decision on which approach to fencing an official body decided to adopt, or in a more modern example, how you approached a specific type of instructional problem.

**Survey research** - this may either be literature survey based or questionnaire based. For example, you could consult 10 textbooks from the classical period to determine the frequency of descriptions of three, four, or five part actions or distribute
a mail survey among known teachers of classical fencing to determine the schools, periods, and weapons they teach.

Comparison research - this is conducted to compare and contrast different approaches to classical fencing. For example, what are the core differences between the Italian and Spanish schools?

Quasi experimental research - if you are working on more effective ways to teach, it may be useful to divide your students into two groups, teach the standard way to one group, and a different way to the other group, and then describe the differences in outcome using evaluation tools designed to identify those differences. For example, you might test the effectiveness of short individual lessons in an open fencing setting against instruction in the same skill in a group class lesson. Progress in the Skill Development Program might be a useful measuring tool.

Regardless of method selected, it should be one capable of answering the research question. To demonstrate that, you should describe exactly how you did the method, step by step, and include copies of any questionnaires or measurement tools you used.

**Population**

This section provides a description of the population examined in the study and how that population was sampled (if you do survey research). Populations can be as small as one person or one Salle (with a description of its members).

**Data Gathering Procedures**

This section provides a description of how the data was actually gathered and of the instrument used to gather data. This includes such tools as a survey form, questionnaire, or an observation form and how those were completed and compiled.

**Tests or Process**

This provides a detailed description of the statistical or experimental method used or of the way in which the data was examined in qualitative studies.

**Methods of Insuring Validity, Reliability, or Truthfulness**

A description of how your work incorporated tests to assure you and the reader that the data you gather is an accurate reflection of what you need to answer your question. Validity is a measure of whether or not a research instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. Reliability is a measure of how well a research instrument provides an accurate and repeatable measurement or description of what it is supposed to measure or describe. Truthfulness is a measurement used in qualitative research to measure the degree to which the findings of the research are shaped by the research.
subjects and not by the researcher. The incorporation of measures like these is important to the credibility of your work.

**IV. RESULTS**

The results are just that, results, not interpretation or commentary (which belong in the Conclusion). Typically they address such items as: how many responses and what return rate you achieved on interviews or surveys, what you observed in observation or in case studies, what data you were able to gather with what level of confidence, what the demographics of your sample were, what the outcomes of your statistical tests or qualitative analysis were, etc.

The actual organization of this chapter should parallel your method and your research question. In general list them either in the order obtained or in the order in which they address the subordinate or primary questions. Be detailed – for example:

*Sixty percent (n = 24) of 40 individuals completing the questionnaire stated that they base their teaching of classical technique on videos by other modern classical fencers. An additional 30% (n = 12) stated that they relied on books published by modern teachers of classical fencing. Only 10% (n = 4) indicated that they used original texts published in the classical period.*

**V. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION**

This section provides the researcher’s take on the meaning of the research effort. This is best done by letting the facts speak for themselves, reasoned analysis, and conservative wording that avoids hyperbole. The analysis and conclusions can be structured in a variety of ways, based on how the study was conducted – the following is an example list of subsections:

**Subordinate Questions**

List the subordinate questions and provide the answers your research has provided. Indicate how they point the way to the answer to the research question.

**The Research Question**

Tie the answers to the subordinate questions together to answer the main question.

**Explanation of Results**

Describe what the results mean in the context of your research question and what is known about the subject already. Explain how your results converge with or diverge
from the research others have done and how your results contribute to the literature on the subject.

**Recommendations**

Develop any recommendations for action, and identify who should take those actions, based on the answer to the research question.

**Implications for Future Research**

No study answers every question about a subject. Every study leaves work undone. If your project identifies additional questions that need to be answered, briefly describe these. It is useful to highlight what you think (as someone who has studied the subject in great detail) are useful directions for further study. This is not a long laundry list – it can be one or two pressing issues that you see as flowing directly from your work.

**WORKS CITED**

There are many ways to list the sources (books, documents, CD/DVDs, web pages, etc.) that you have cited in the work; literally dozens of style guides spell this out. The Academy uses a simplified style for bibliographical listings designed specifically to support Internet searches. If you are familiar with another style guide’s bibliographical standards, please use what you are familiar with.

In the works cited section list sources in alphabetical order. Examples of listings include:

- For books or article: name of author; title of book or article; for articles the name and date of the publication or volume and edition number; for books the publisher, place of publication and date:


- For an article with no author:

  “Fencers and Fencing in America”; [magazine article]; *The Illustrated American*; pages 276-277; 10 May 1890.

- For webpages: incorporate the URL and date it was accessed:
Boballk, John; “How to Calculate Your Training Heart Rate Zones”; [Internet page]; at https://www.active.com/fitness/articles/how-to-calculate-your-training-heart-rate-zones; accessed 2 March 2019.

- For videos online:

IV. Helpful Thoughts

Do not undertake more work than you can do. The Academy is not looking for the great, definitive, 16 volume study of the history of fencing. Narrow the problem, the research question, and the scope so that the result is achievable in under 40 double spaced pages done with Georgia 12 point type.

At every step use your mentor. The mentor has done a Fencing Master thesis and/or an academic dissertation before. He or she knows the ins and outs of how to do this.

Work on the research paper or the thesis a little bit every day. If you keep working, it will be done sooner than you think possible.

Use the standard outline for the paper and add to the sections as information and ideas arrive. You don’t have to start at the beginning and go straight through.

Be scrupulously honest with your data. Don’t create data where there is, don’t develop interpretations that the data does not support.

If you use a source’s words quote them with a citation and the page number. If you draw ideas from a source cite the idea. Don’t steal other people’s work and represent it as your own.

Use quality sources – yes, it is possible to use Billy Bob’s Sword Fighting Page at http://killemwithasword.com, but, with all due respect to Billy Bob (whose page looks like it was composed by a demented rabbit armed with a crayon), a page that reproduces period sources and pictures, is well written, and includes citations as to sources is a better bet.

Produce a good looking academic paper. Strange fonts, colored type, cartoons, funny sayings, etc. are not useful. Please don’t start with a quote from someone who has nothing to do with the subject.

When the time to defend the paper or thesis comes, remember three things: (1) the committee wants you to pass, failures are messy, often agonizing for the committee members and require more work; (2) the fact your paper or thesis is being defended means that the committee thinks you have done good work worth talking about; and (3) you are the expert, you have done the work, and the committee wants to understand the material you are presenting.