

Optimize Your Training: Learn How You Learn

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We all want to be the best, or at least the best we can be. This takes work. Although we all have support of trainers, knights and other combatants, your path is largely self-guided. After all no one should be more involved in your success than you. Own your path. Drive it.

In this class we will be exploring a range of ways to enhance your learning at training for the intermediate fighter through sparring, drills and general focus, both physically and mentally. Finally, we will discuss how to understand our individual learning styles in order to better retain knowledge gained in training using the VAK learning principals.

Today, we will largely focus on physical training that can done during isolation.

Introduction: I personally have been involved with the SCA for 19 years and have been an authorized fighter since I was 16 years old. I am a knight of the Kingdom of Lochac (Australia and New Zealand) and have travelled to the West Kingdom as often as possible for training.

Please note, I have not won a Crown in my own right and do not attest to have the answers to how to achieve this aim. Rather, I am a person who is not a “naturally gifted” fighter. When I began training, I couldn’t throw a shot with power or even get up off the ground in my armour once bested. I began with no martial experience or physical conditioning. I also hail from a remote area with my partner, Duke Felix being my only consistent training buddy for much of my career. Through hard work and with the help of amazing teachers, I was able to achieve a level of prowess worthy of the accolade of Knighthood in what is considered the average duration for my Kingdom. My point is, if I could find success, I believe most people can.

None of the exercises here are of my own making, but rather are tools and philosophies that helped my progression, which I have acquired from training with a variety of renowned teachers, carefully curated into this *hopefully* easy to follow document. I firmly believe that as we are all individuals, there is no “one true way” and some of these tips may resonate for you, but some may not. So please, take what you like and don’t worry about what you don’t.

I hope you find this useful in your practice.

Section One: Physical Training

- Always warm up and cool down. (Injury prevention and mental warm up.)
- Practice whenever possible. (Do pell work at home, Drills and slow work when possible and attend fighter practices regularly.) The more you train, the faster you will progress. (10,000 hours to mastery.)
- Break up your focuses for different exercises. This allows you to effectively break down the focus for different skills instead of attempting to be perfect at sparring time.
E.g. - Learning shots, combos and shot mechanics = pell work
- Practising footwork, position and application = slow work and drilling
- Applying timing and defence = full speed sparring
- If you are inclined, hit the gym. (Suggested types of workout: Core strength, general strength, plyometric, high intensity interval training)
- If things are getting easy, change it up and challenge yourself. (See goal setting.)
- Sometimes training hurts. You will have to sacrifice effectiveness to improve.
- Travel often. Travel to where the bigger fish are. Seek out and fight combatants above your level as often as possible. Ask for feedback. They will only help you improve.

Drills Catalogue

Independent:

The Century Drill (Pell)¹ - On a pell, throw 100 focused, uninterrupted blows for 100 days. Each day you must throw 100 shots on the pell, but if you get distracted, loose count or have to stop for any reason, you must restart that day's 100. A day lasts from dawn until dawn. If you forget to do your 100 blows on a day, you must restart back at day one. This can be incorporated with other focused aims. (Note: This drill is not merely about swinging your stick to make up the number. Each shot should be thrown with focus and intent. Otherwise the drill can be detrimental if you are not throwing your blows correctly.)

Visualization Drills (Pell)² – The pell can be as responsive a tool as you like with some imagination. Start by thinking of a scenario that kills you at training. Imagine what happens and what it looks like. Be sure to carry your shield. Then try to find ways to block and counter that on the pell. When throwing your blows, consider your shield position. Find 2 or 3 different counters and take note of what options you then have from each and what defence you are left with. If you can, then start to think of what options your opponent may

¹ As taught by Duke Radnor of Guildemar

² As taught by Duke Felix Arnett von Danzig

have from your counter and continue the exercise. (Note: this pairs well with the mirror man drill)

Defensive Pell Work³- Visualize your opponent's attack and deliberately block these, then see what shots you can throw by utilizing a complimentary movement to the block. This helps to create smooth, graceful counters.

Pell Work in Motion – While practising particular set ups or in conjunction with another exercise, incorporate steps and movement into your pell routine. For example, begin out of range and throw while moving into range. Practise throwing while moving past the pell or while retreating. Pay special attention to where your defence falls when you move. By preparing yourself to fire while in motion, you prepare yourself for the moving fight.

Footwork Drilling – Practising going through your steps and moving smoothly in guard while maintaining balance and good form.

Mirror Man⁴- With sword and shield, find a mirror or reflective surface in which you can easily see your reflection. Get into your stance and critique it. Observe any openings and consider “If I were fighting that guy, where would I hit him?” Block that shot and hold this position. Then look again assess the new openings and repeat. Similarly, throw your offensive movements and consider where you will become vulnerable, then attempt to tighten or block those openings.

Mirror Technique Check – With tape, scribe a line down a mirror in a room with space to practice your sword work. Go through some standard drilling using the line on the mirror as your pell. Check to see that your stance is strong, even and that your body is moving appropriately to generate power. Also check that you cut through your target.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRDC0eYkrNA&feature=youtu.be>

Drill in Multiple Guards- So rarely do we find ourselves in a fight where we get to hit our opponent under ideal circumstances. Even by naturally walking forward we are using passing steps that change the orientation of our feet in guard. Practise at the pell in both shield-foot-forward and sword-foot-forward position to gain confidence from both platforms.

Partnered:

Appropriate Slow Work- Doing slow work with a partner should always be very slow and deliberate. It should be slow enough that you can consider goals. Slow work is never about winning or losing, it is about practising perfect technique in a controlled setting. So be sure

³ As taught by Duke Felix Arnett von Danzig

⁴ As taught by Duke Haouc Bender

to have an aim to achieve while practising at slow pace. This is the time to isolate and practise new techniques.

Frozen Man Drill- Frozen man is turn-based slow work. With a partner, with sword and shield you will take turns slowly responding to and returning an attack using One Step, One Block and One Shot. To Start, Person A takes one step and throws a slow shot at an opening on Person B, leaving it in place. Person B then takes one step, blocks Person A's shot and throws their one shot leaving it in place. Person A then responds in turn and so on. When responding in turn the ultimate goal to work towards can be to make your step, and block happen in one unified motion, clearing the way for a shot thrown with perfect technique, creating graceful dominance.

Ghost Drill⁵ - One person has a weapon, the defender has none. Going at half (or less) speed, the attacker makes cuts and thrusts at the defender, who avoids being struck only with movement. Use footwork and body position to avoid attacker's blade. Make sure the defender moves as slowly as the attacker; do not falsify the drill with overly fast footwork that could not happen at speed. Don't forget that strikes can be avoided by moving offline and IN, as well as away.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74IPHxasRWI&list=PLZQnwBVSE628Kcpesrad1IPbPg8-l47jt&index=9&t=0s&fbclid=IwAR2xTRaiu2dc40aeLgN7PT83PvtK_HAPQ7SQ8cmuuqbTCOdXO4FmADL7euw

Ghost/Counter⁶ - Same as above, but now the defender has a weapon. The defender is trying to move in such a way as to avoid being struck, but is still able to touch the attacker with their weapon. This develops the ability to void attacks that still allows for counter attacks, instead of just backing away. For an extra challenge, give the defender a shorter weapon than the one used by the attacker.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciDCcpI6fw&list=PLZQnwBVSE628Kcpesrad1IPbPg8-l47jt&index=9&fbclid=IwAR2xTRaiu2dc40aeLgN7PT83PvtK_HAPQ7SQ8cmuuqbTCOdXO4FmADL7euw

Critique Circles- While at fighter practise; organize a king of the hill. Instead of swapping both combatants, one person stays in the middle and all other fighters fight them 3 times. While the combatants await their turn, they watch. After each round they should offer feedback to the combatant holding the field that round. Take note of your feedback and try to act on it in the subsequent rounds or training sessions.

Section Two: Mental Training

- Be inspired! Learn from anyone. Search for commonality before differences.
- Goal Setting
 - Major and Minor Goals

⁵ As taught by Duke Marc de Arundel - <https://www.scabastardsword.com/pellworkdrills.htm>

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- Major goals are your long term goals (e.g. winning a tournament, winning a crown, attending every training for a year.) The sky is the limit!
- Minor goals are ever changing set of aims and victory conditions you set yourself at training sessions. (This can be anything from achieving a new technique, focusing on defence, being the first in and last out of armour) you may have 1 minor goal or many in a single training session. These should be measurable so that you can gauge your success.
- Choosing Goals
- Sticking to Goals and Changing Goals
- Being honest with your intent
- Training VS Practice ("I-method" (Introduction, Isolation, Integration)
 - ***"The first stage is Introduction.*** *Introduction is just that, the first time the movement is introduced to the students within that class. The motion, technique, or skill is taught, and then repeated, absent any resistance. This is done until the students can repeat the motion mechanically correct, when no resistance is present. This is not drilling. This is simply introducing of a new move. And this stage tends to last no more than 5-15 minutes, maximum."*⁷

This is the time you spend learning a new technique or concept with a trainer or training aid. Take the time that you need to fully understand the lesson.

- ***"The second stage is Isolation.*** *Isolation is the drilling stage. Once the move can be repeated mechanically correct absent resistance, Introduction, then it is time to add Aliveness, and that means adding Timing, Energy and Motion – in other words, it is time to add progressive resistance."*⁸

This is where you take the technique to the pell, drills and start to work it into your slow work.

- ***"The third and final stage is Integration.*** *This is where we put the part back into the whole. This is the sparring stage."*⁹

This is when you begin to bring the technique into your focused training through minor goals/mini games/victory conditions while sparring.

- Focus (Assess your opponent and maintain awareness)
 - What focus feels like
 - Gaining Focus (facing the weapon, looking at a point, having a mental prep a routine)
 - Regaining Lost Focus
 - Limiting your fights during practise.

⁷ Straight Blast Gym (2020) <https://www.straightblastgym.com/philosophy/>

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

- “You don’t get extra points for killing ‘em faster.” “The victor is the person who stays perfect for longest.” (Defence is always important. The winner of a bout isn’t always the most skilled combatant, but rather the person who hasn’t made a mistake in that moment.)
- Training is about learning and improving your art, drop the ego at training. Be willing to die in order to learn.
- Take Note of how you die in a fight. Record it and change up your game. **Being bested is a gift of knowledge.**
- Keep a Training Journal
- Film your Fighting and Review
- Communication Journal and Affective Communication with Trainers

Section Three: Learn how you Learn (VAK Principals)

- **“Visual learners tend to...**
 - *Learn through seeing.*
 - *Think in pictures and need to create vivid mental images to retain information.*
 - *Enjoy looking at maps, charts, pictures, videos and movies.*
 - *Have visual skills which are demonstrated in puzzle building, reading, writing, understanding charts and graphs, a good sense of direction, sketching, painting, creating visual metaphors and analogies (perhaps through the visual arts), manipulating images, constructing, fixing, designing practice objects and interpreting visual images.”¹⁰*

Ideas for Visual Combatants: Watch and visually analyse fighting. Film your fighting and watch it back. Ask for demonstrations of techniques. Take notes in your fighting journal and draw diagrams, highlight important points. Read manuals or information in relation to combat that has pictures or diagrams.

- **“Auditory learners tend to...**
 - *Learn through listening*
 - *Have highly developed auditory skills and are generally good at speaking and presenting*
 - *Think in words rather than pictures*
 - *Learn best through verbal lectures, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say*
 - *Have auditory skills demonstrated in listening, speaking, writing, storytelling, explaining, teaching, using humour, understanding the syntax*

¹⁰ James Cook University, Visual Auditory and Kinaesthetic (VAK) Learning Style Module (2016), http://jcu.edu.au/wiledpack/modules/fsl/JCU_090460.html

*and meaning of words, remembering information, arguing their point of view and analysing language usage.*¹¹

Ideas for Auditory Combatants: Repeat directions, feedback and instructions verbally to clarify. Describe what you're trying to achieve in a set. Talk about how it went and discuss feedback. Use training journal and review what you've written by reading it aloud. Watch instructional videos that explain techniques and concepts verbally. Film your fighting, play it back and discuss the fights with a buddy or even explain to yourself what is happening in your fights.

- ***Kinaesthetic learners tend to...***
 - *Learn through moving, doing and touching*
 - *Express themselves through movement*
 - *Have good sense of balance and hand-eye coordination*
 - *Remember and process information through interacting with space around them*
 - *Find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become s\distracted by their need for activity and exploration*
 - *Have skills demonstrated in physical coordination, athletic ability, hands on experimentation, using body language, crafts, acting, miming, using their hands to create or build, dancing and expressing emotions through the body.*¹²

Ideas for Kinaesthetic Combatants: Do an unarmoured practice with a trainer or training buddy (Pell work, drills). Do a lot of unarmoured technical training. Go through your feedback physically (recreate the fight or situation). Try new techniques and go through the movements physically. Ask trainers to allow you to try out movements a few times. Ask for more time if needed. Use your training journal to write feedback down. Draw diagrams in your journal. Watch fighting videos and pause when you see something you want to try and go through those motions. Film your fighting, play it back and pause to physically practice fixing deficient techniques.

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<https://engage-education.com/aus/blog/vak-learning-styles-what-are-they-and-what-do-they-mean/>

¹¹ ibid

¹² ibid