

# The Hierarchy of Defense

By

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Giving Credit where credit is due: The inspiration for this class came from WMAW in 2007. Since then it's been taught with a rapier specific focus, today is the first revision of the class to meet the needs across a variety of types, not just systems of fighting within rapier combat. If we are successful I'm hoping to build two more classes on a similar theme to address other areas. Please provide feedback and ask questions.

Drills and Audience Evaluation: Like weapon types should be paid up, if only to minimize stress to the equipment. Description and demonstration of "What do we mean by drilling at 1/3 and 2/3 speed."

What and Why: The Hierarchy of Defense is a method of classifying and analyzing defenses used in combat to gauge the effectiveness of said defense. In any combat style, with any weapon or combination of weapons, the effectiveness of the split-second decision on how to defend against an attack can be aided and improved by analyzing and practicing methods to use defenses that are higher on the Hierarchy scale (better or more effective). For any given attack, the choices you have in reacting can usually be classified into certain types of defense: and some may simply protect you, some may protect you and allow you to return an attack, and some may allow you to dispatch your opponent while protecting you.

A fighter can use this system to analyze, evaluate, and adapt their defense against attacks they know they commonly see, after the fight. Look at a movement or action in defending against an attack and ask: where does it fit in the Hierarchy? Does it layer defenses for additional protection and effectiveness? Could it be modified to do so? Is there a better defense available? If using a *dui-tempo* 'defend then attack is not sufficient, and the attack is still getting through to strike you, then you may need to reevaluate the defense you are using.

Defense: *resistance or protection against attack.*

What makes a good defense? At minimum, it stops you from being hurt or injured. At best, it does so while also combining an offense so your opponent can't or won't try to attack you again.

There is a difference between the smartest defense and the best defense. Running away may be smarter, but defending and dispatching the attacker is often best.

Analysis of a defense:

- I. Protection – has at least one of three elements: blocking, deflecting, and/or voiding.

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2. Attack – does at least one of the following to the attacker: Discourages, Disarms, Damages, or Dispatches

There are seven levels in the Hierarchy, going from the least effective to the most.

1. **-1 Full Offensive.** A barrage of attacks that does not allow your opponent an opportunity to attack. This only works if your opponent does not have any offense elements to their defense. This defense does not have any protective elements to it. *Inefficient attacks without strategy. (Bestial Fighter)*
2. **Sub-level 0 Run away.** Retreat, duck, etc. While you have dodged the attack and thus protected yourself, the opponent is still ready for another attack, since your defense did nothing to stop them from doing so. While this works for protecting you, it often has little to no attack element. *(attack, run)*
3. **Simply block the attack.** Best done using a shield, or if done with just weapons or open hand, done with a true cross to defend a strong attack in the strongest manner. An example might be a simple block with a shield, buckler, or sword. Again, while this protects you, it usually does nothing to discourage, disarm, damage, or dispatch your opponent. *(fendente or thrust, buckler block)*
4. **Defend, then attack.** A two-tempo (dui tempo) action, using two separate moves: defend, then attack. Has both protection and attack. But doing two separate actions can allow the attacker to defend themselves. *(fendente or thrust, buckler block, punch)*
5. **Defend with pass or deflection, and attack.** This is better; in that you deflect or redirect the attack in a way that gives you advantage to return your attack. A good example of this would be the falso manco deflection of a fendente done in Italian Cut and Thrust combat. Protects and attacks, with less time for attacker to defend themselves.
6. **Defend with void, and attack.** Along with the block or parry, you void the body or part of the body being attacked. The defense stops the attack, and you have the added safety of having removed the object being attacked in case your defense is beaten or avoided. Examples of this would be an encartata from a strong lunge, or voiding the leg from a cut in sidesword. Void has high protection value, particularly when combined with a deflection or block, and allows for quick attack.
7. **A single strong attack that defeats the opponent while protecting yourself from the attack.** A single movement that defends you and attacks the opponent simultaneously. Examples would be a contra-tempo strike against an attack in rapier in which you have gained the forte, taken the line of attack, and used a shorter time attack, or the guardia di faccia from Dall'Aggocchie's Sidesword. *(ground defense, kick to abdomen)*

It is possible to use elements from multiple levels in an action, and in doing so, give additional defense and safety. For example, performing a void while doing the single contra-tempo attack would use both levels 5 and 6.

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So what determines which level of defense is not only best, but possible, from any given attack? A number of things:

- Distance
- Body position and position or angle of attack
- Timing and/or speed
- Weapon being attacked by and defended with

Thrusting attacks (rapier, spear) are better defended against with a deflection or void rather than a block. Cutting attacks (c&t, rattan) are better defended against with a block. Generally these are easier defenses to make but not always the best defense to make.

The single-time attack requires split-second reactions and impeccable timing. If the distance is too great, it may not be the best defense for a fighter if they are not fast enough to get their attack in while staying protected.