

Safety recommendations for the practice of HEMA

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Purpose

This document proposes a number of recommendations concerning safety for the general practice of HEMA. These safety measures are to be put into practice in associations and during any event under the authority of the FFAMHE.

General principles concerning responsibilities

HEMA practitioners will use equipment, simulators and practice under their own responsibility.

The aim of the safety measures described herein is to reinforce safety for HEMA practitioners. They cannot however guarantee total safety and therefore, the FFAMHE declines any responsibility in case of an accident.

In every circumstance, it is essential to remain in control of one's self and of one's equipment. Every person should look out for himself, but also for other persons, by using the right equipment and by adopting a proper conduct for the practice of HEMA.

The techniques and the simulators used in HEMA are to be considered dangerous whatever the circumstances and should be treated accordingly.

HEMA rely on a process of research and experimentation of martial techniques, yet we only simulate these techniques, without meaning harm to anyone. Thus, using sharp weapons outside of supervised cutting exercises on non-living static targets is forbidden.

HEMA bouts must be carried out without the intention of hurting one's adversary. Excessive or deliberate violence should not be tolerated.

References

This document is one of three documents on safety recommendations presented by the safety panel. The two others are :

- Safety during cutting and thrusting sessions
- First aid kit for the practice of HEMA

Warming up

It is highly recommended to do a warm up before and after every training session. Warming up exercises help the body prepare for sustained physical effort. It is important to emphasize on the body parts that will be going through the most stress (for example, insist on warming up the wrists when preparing for single handed sword training).

HEMA being martial arts, sporting clothes and shoes are recommended. Jewellery should be taken off.

Caring for commonly used simulators and equipment

Weapons

Weapon simulators used in HEMA are of various types, and are usually distinguished according to the material they're made of.

« **Nylon** » **simulators** are more or less rigid simulators, made of a synthetic matter. Pommels and cross guards may also be out of the same matter, or out of metal. They can usually be removed and are exchangeable. Users should make sure that the surface of the flat and the edges of the simulator aren't damaged; and that they are smooth or only slightly rough in order to avoid injuries.

Wooden simulators are made of either plywood or solid wood. Users should make sure that the surface of the flat and the edges of the simulator are void of cracks and splinters; and that they are smooth or only slightly rough in order to avoid injuries.

Steel simulators are simulators with steel blades, pommels and cross guards. Some have rigid blades and others have more flexible blades (*federschwert* or *paratschwert*). Flexible bladed steel simulators are to be preferred to the rigid bladed ones in non-cooperative bouts. Simulator tips should be folded back or rounded. It is recommended that the tip also be covered by thick leather or a plastic blunt. Users should make sure that the blades are void of nicks and rust in order to avoid injuries. Flexible simulators should not bend excessively when at rest.

Leather simulators or leather simulators with a rigid frame are to be used with the same safety measures as nylon simulators. Dussack simulators made of leather are common. Users should make sure that the stitching is not damaged and that the frame is not threatening to pierce the leather. It is recommended that the stitching not be on the edge but on the flat of the blade.

Foam simulators, or foam simulators with a rigid frame are to be used with the same safety measures as nylon simulators. Users should make sure that the stitching is not damaged and that the frame is not threatening to pierce the foam. It is recommended that the stitching not be on the edge but on the flat of the blade. Due to the heterogeneity of these simulators and their sometimes poor reliability, we do not recommend using them.

Shinai are simulators borrowed from kendo, sometimes modified (by the addition of a cross-guard and/or extra weight). They are to be used with the same safety measures as nylon simulators. Users should make sure that the slats are void of cracks and splinters, and the same should apply to the cross-guard.

Historical weapons and replicas, as in sharp weapons and not simulators, are to be used only during cutting exercises on non-living targets. They should not be carried or transported if cutting exercises are not planned. They should only be transported in closed rigid cases. Users should make sure that the blades are void of nicks and rust. The blade should be covered by a thin film of oil (such as WD40 oil).

Individual protective gear

Fencing masks should be in compliance with FIE standards. It should have a wire mesh front and a padded throat-piece. It is highly recommended that the sides and back of the mask be protected by padding or leather. Users should make sure that the mesh of the mask isn't pierced or excessively deformed, and that the strap that serves to maintain the mask is in good condition. There are

masks made specifically for the practice of HEMA, which already include side and rear protections. The fencing mask is the only adequate head and face protection for the practice of HEMA. It should be worn in all circumstances during practice of armed HEMA.

Chest guards for women must be rigid and protect the entire chest. It is preferable to use protectors in compliance with FIE standards. Users should make sure the guard and its straps are in good condition.

Boxes for men must be rigid. They should be in compliance with martial arts standards. Users should make sure the box and its straps are in good condition.

Fencing jackets. Usually modern fencing jackets, in which case they must be in compliance with FIE standards. It is recommended to use leather coaching jackets with sleeves. There are jackets made specifically for HEMA, sometimes with extra rigid protections. Jackets may be complemented with a rigid torso protection. On the other hand, because of their heterogeneity and sometimes poor reliability, gambesons and other padded garments used in historical reenactment are not recommended for the safe practice of HEMA. Steel armours of various historical accuracy are also not recommended, except for armoured HEMA (*harnischfechten* or *armizzare*). Users should make sure their jacket is in good condition.

Gloves are essentially of two types: "light" gloves and "heavy" gloves. Light gloves are used for mobility, and padding is therefore limited. Fencing and stage-combat gloves enter this category. Heavy gloves are thickly padded, and somewhat rigid, offering better protection. Kendo « kote » and hockey gloves enter this category. There are gloves made specifically for HEMA. Users should make sure their gloves and the stitchings are in good condition, and especially that the gloves are not pierced.

Throat guards must protect the entire throat and the edges of the shoulders. They must be rigid and padded. Hockey throat guards are adequate, and there are also HEMA specific throat guards. Users should make sure their throat guards and its straps are in good condition.

Rigid protections are protective guards used in various sports, for various body parts (shins, knees, elbows, chest). It is preferable to use guards in compliance with martial arts standards. There are some HEMA oriented guards existing. Users should make sure their protections and their straps are in good condition.

Protective gear must be adapted to the type of exercise and the simulators used.

This document provides safety measure sets for the practice of HEMA using certain simulators. They are to be considered as minimal requirements, and practitioners should feel free to go for extra safety if they wish.

Competitive bouts are left aside. The FFAMHE does not wish to promote or regulate any type of competition in HEMA (as stated by the article 9 of the internal rules (règlement intérieur). Besides, HEMA competitions are still very much evolving, and there is no consensus at this stage. Therefore, our only recommendation to organizers of such competitions is to be extra vigilant concerning safety, as a competitive state of mind increases the risks of accidents.

For the practice of rapier (alone or with a dagger, targe, cloak, etc.) and of smallswords

Context \ Simulator	Exercising technique	Exercising technique with variations	Non-cooperative bouts
Rapiers for thrusting , (triangular sectioned blades)	Fencing masks, fencing jackets, gloves, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, fencing jackets, fencing breeches, gloves, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, coaching jackets or fencing jackets with vest, fencing breeches, gloves, boxes for men, chest guards for women
Cutting and thrusting rapiers (oval or diamond sectioned blades)	Fencing masks, fencing jackets, gloves, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, coaching jackets or fencing jackets with vest, fencing breeches, gloves, elbow guards, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, coaching jackets or fencing jackets with vest, fencing breeches, heavy gloves, throat guard, elbow and knee guards, chest guards for women, boxes for men
Smallswords (modern fencing « epee » type blades)	Fencing masks, fencing jackets, gloves, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, fencing jackets, fencing breeches, gloves, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, fencing jackets, underarms, fencing breeches, gloves, chest guards for women

For the practice of longsword (held with both hands)

Context \ Simulator	Exercising technique	Exercising technique with variations	Non-cooperative bouts
Nylon	Fencing masks, gloves, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, gloves, throat guards, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, fencing jacket, heavy gloves, throat guards, chest guards for women, boxes for men
Wood	Fencing masks, gloves, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, gloves, throat guards, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, fencing jacket, heavy gloves, throat guards, chest guards for women, boxes for men
Steel	Fencing masks, gloves, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, fencing jacket, heavy gloves, throat guards, chest guards for women	Fencing masks, fencing jacket, heavy gloves, throat guards, chest guards for women, boxes for men, rigid elbow and torso protections

For the practice of single handed bladed simulators (single handed sword, messers, dussack, etc...)

Context \ Simulator	Exercising technique	Exercising technique with variations	Non-cooperative bouts
Nylon	Fencing mask, gloves for the armed hands, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, throat guard, gloves for the armed hands, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, fencing jacket, throat guard, heavy gloves for the armed hands, chest guards for women, boxes for men
Wood	Fencing mask, gloves for both hands, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, throat guard, gloves for the armed hands, elbow guards, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, fencing jacket, throat guard, heavy gloves for both hands, elbow guard for the armed hand, chest guards for women, boxes for men
Steel	Fencing mask, gloves for both hands, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, fencing jacket, throat guard, gloves for both hands, elbow guards, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, fencing jacket, throat guard, heavy gloves and elbow guards for both hands, torso protection, chest guards for women, boxes for men

For the practice of a single handed bladed simulator with a buckler

Context \ Simulator	Exercising technique	Exercising technique with variations	Non-cooperative bouts
Nylon	Fencing mask, gloves for both hands, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, throat guard, gloves for both hands, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, fencing jacket, throat guard, heavy gloves for both hands, chest guards for women, boxes for men.
Wood	Fencing mask, gloves for both hands, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, throat and elbow guards, gloves for both hands, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, fencing jacket, throat and elbow guards, heavy gloves for both hands, chest guards for women, boxes for men.
Steel	Fencing mask, gloves for both hands, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, fencing jacket, throat and elbow guards, gloves for both hands, chest guards for women.	Fencing mask, fencing jacket, throat and elbow guards, torso protections, heavy gloves for both hands, chest guards for women, boxes for men.

A little explanations concerning the above mentioned tables. Exercising technique consists in practicing the same moves over and over again. The practitioners practice the studied technique together, in total cooperation. When including variations, one or the other practitioners are left with the choice of one or more alternative techniques. The exercise becomes therefore partially cooperative, as one of the practitioners increases difficulty to improve the other's technique. Introducing alternatives increases the risks as it is no longer possible to predict the opponent's reaction with certainty. Finally, non-cooperative bouts are "sparring" sessions during which the practitioners are free to do anything in order to deliver a blow to his opponent, without receiving one himself. This doesn't mean uncontrolled swordplay, the idea being to try and integrate studied HEMA techniques and principles in a simulated fight. During non-cooperative bouts, full strength and potentially dangerous blows should be avoided; sparring partners are responsible for both their own and their partner's safety.

Please be logical in your choice of gear. In case of doubt, it is up to the instructor to decide whether the gear is adequate for the exercise.

Safety depends on everyone's vigilance. Each and every practitioner should look out for potential hazards, such as undone laces, straps, faulty gear, tiredness, excessive aggression, etc.

It is also highly recommended that a first aid kit be readily accessible at the training session. A document by the FFAMHE's safety panel describes the composition of an adequate first aid kit for HEMA sessions.