

# The Back or Broad-sword

after Zach Wylde, 1711



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).

Note: the following is based on a transcript of Zachary Wylde's 1711 'English Master of Defence' hosted at [www.sirwilliamhope.org](http://www.sirwilliamhope.org). Some spelling has been modernised and minor edits made for readability. Any errors are entirely my own - William Carew, November 2012.

Firstly, the guards in number are five, commonly called, dignified, or distinguished by the names of the outside, inside, medium, George or hanging: otherwise called the dexter, or right diameter, or George, pendant, or the hanging guard.

Having declared to the reader the names of the guards, I'll begin with the outside or dexter, thus demonstrated, stand upon a true half body, and extend your sword hilt out at the arms end stiff, without bowing the elbow joint, your point leaning or sloping towards your left shoulder, or your opponent's right eye, lying as hollow as you can with your body; then you may see your opponent the inside your sword, so long as you keep this guard: you lying on this manner, if your opponent charge you with a blow, pitch, stroke, flirt, or chop on the out or right side, which is all one, you are then defended, or upon a sure guard: but if he strikes at your left ear, or inside commonly called, then you must prepare an inside or left guard, which is to be made on this manner, cross the outside guard, that is, a little twist or turn your wrist towards your left shoulder, your arm kept straight from you; then your point will be sloping towards your opponent's left eye, and you may see his body the outside your sword, while you keep the guard. Note, that as you move your sword either to the out or inside, carry your point almost erect, but somewhat a little sloping; these two guards will guard you securely, if rightly timed, so long as you keep out at length.

The medium unicorn or centre guard, is made thus; extend your arm straight out at length, and your sword placed between your opponent's eyes, lying true half body, your sword hilt as high as your chin, keeping it out at arms end stiff; then if he charge you with a blow or strike either to the in or outside, cross his sword, which makes a perfect guard: this guard keeps your opponent from encroaching upon you, if he does, he endangers himself.

The George is seldom used, but when a downright blow or pitch is made at the head, then prepare the George thus; extend your arm out stiff, and with your sword cross your own or your opponent's forehead, then your point will be level with the hilt; but be sure that your pitch be to that height, that you can see your opponent's head eight inch under your guard; I do not esteem this as a good guard to lie on, by reason I am exposed in two places.

The last is the pendant or hanging guard, which is the surest and best guard that can be made, a man cannot come up to half-sword, without this guard, it's made on this manner; extend your arm stiffly out, and turn your knuckles outward, then hold your hilt half a foot or more, higher than your head, then the point of your weapon must slope or hang dipping towards the outside of your opponent; but before you, look just under the hilt, and observe to see your opponent's head six or seven inches under it continually, or else you cannot be safe: when you lie on this manner, you then will be exposed or lie open on the outside, which may be guarded by pitching your point to the outside of your body, or coming to an outside guard: I approve of this to be the best of guards, especially if you meet with a rustic, downright striker, for it almost saves the whole body; whereas any other guard saves but half at one time. So much for defence or guards at sword.

You may raise or throw your guards on this manner; stand upon a full or entire body, and ground your sword point at or upon the toes of your right foot, then advance your arm, and bring the point of your sword by your left arm, round the back side of your head, so by a little twist of the wrist, you come to an inside guard; but observe, that at the same juncture that you raise your sword, step with right foot half a yard or more distant from the left, being in the direct line from the middle of your left foot, the toes of your right foot turned a little outwards, then you may see your opponent's body on the outside your sword: from there you may come to an outside guard thus, by returning your sword the same way it came, likewise your foot, and come to the place of an outside: from your outside you may come to a medium, by dropping your point, and bringing it by your left ear, then place it between your opponent's eyes: from there you may come to a George, by returning your sword round the back of your head, then come to the place of a George: from the George cast or throw your point upon a level from you, then by a great compass round, you may come to the hanging guard, etc. To practise raising or throwing the guards on this manner, you'll find them to be your true grounds and rudiments of feinting. Without boasting, I was the first man that ever taught or showed the method of raising or throwing the guards.

Offence or offending is performed thus, when your opponent makes an inside blow or pitch at you, guard him with an inside, and pitch quick to his outside, which upon the fall of his blow will be exposed. When he strikes to your outside, chop quick to his open on the inside, according to the rule of true play; and in this case, let all your answers be made as quick as the hand can perform them. If you exercise with any man, before you make your false play, prove him with true play, to know what guards he'll make, and then your false play or feinting will happen in better order.

1<sup>st</sup>. Let your first assault be a quarter blow and a half, or a quick chop, performed by the wrist, upon a medium, directly to your opponent's face, there you'll perceive whether he'll make an inside guard or not: but note, that as soon as you have delivered either pitch, blow, or chop, be sure to recover your sword into its place again, lest your opponent hit you before recovery.

True play is to pitch or strike at the place you see lies most open, whether it be in or outside: so that when you've proved your opponent with true play, then you may offer a feigned pitch or blow at the place you discover lies open; and as he endeavours to guard his open, then pitch your blow or chop into the contrary. A feint is made single, double, treble, quadruple, quintuple, or as often as your fancy directs; for as you perceive your opponent changes his guard, change with him, and being more quick than he, you may pitch into an opening. If you come to engage with any man, lie upon a full outside, and wade your weapon in the place you lie in, by the motion of the wrist, but keep your arm in its place, then chop it home to his inside: so perform the same from an in to an outside. From your wading upon out or inside, you may make a feint single, double, or treble; but be sure you do not alter your arm, but keep it in its certain place.

A blow I call the swoop, is made when you lie upon an outside thus, let your point drop hanging wise, and bring it round the point of your opponent's sword, and pitch it home to his face: or otherwise, you may turn this swoop into a feint, by feinting to come on the inside, then change it quick, and finish your stroke on the outside. It is a grand cheat to make a full thrust to your opponent's face, inside his sword, and when his sword answers or guards yours, turn your stroke round over his point to the right ear or outside: so to the contrary, thrust to his face outside his sword, and conclude your blow on the inside; it is a difficult thing to guard either of these assaults, if the hand be quick that performs them.

A single feint is made by feigning or offering a blow or stroke on the inside, and concluding it on the outside; or pretend to make a blow on the out, and finish up on the inside. Another feint, is made by feigning a blow to the outside of the head, and immediately fall it to the inside of the right leg; or pretend to strike at his left ear, then conclude upon the outside of his right leg; but be sure you consume no time in your recovery. Likewise, you may offer a blow at the inside of the leg, and turn it over to the outside of the head. Another deluding cheat at sword, is made thus; lie upon a medium, then turn to the hanging; but at the same juncture approach or encroach one step, then finish with a single feint. Another grand deceit, is to make a feint with a step, which you make in different manner; that is, lie upon an outside guard and inside step, then offer a blow with your step to the in, but end it on the outside: so pretend to strike with your step to the out, then conclude it on the inside.

The chief rule you are to observe at sword, is first your true play as aforesaid; the next in course of play, have a special regard to a slip, thus explained, lie as hollow as you can, with your body upon a full outside, then if your opponent pitches or throws to your inside, by a quick spring, or sudden advance of your arm, quite out of his reach, being exactly timed as he delivers his pitch, he missing your guard, the strength of his blow will carry his sword beyond distance of guard, so that you may easily hit him before recovering; but let your answer be pitched in directly upon a medium, with all the life and quickness imaginable. You may slip from lying upon any guard whatever, but be sure that you observe your distance; if you do not you may be hit in making of a slip; then, in my opinion, you'll make but a bad piece of work on it: Your distance is, if the point of your sword reach ten or twelve inch over your opponent's hilt, you may slip with safety; or in making of a slip, you may break measure, by falling back with your body.

You may make a double slip thus, when you observe that your opponent understands a slip and slips, you then time it right, and slip him; I count this the excellency of play, which may be acquired by frequent practice: without vainglory, I was the first person that ever taught or performed the double slip (though if one man had the excellency of all men, yet notwithstanding, he would be neither valued or esteemed in some places, especially amongst the ignorant and ignoble). Observe, that when you make either blow, pitch, stroke, or chop, true or false, let them be performed as quick as the hand can throw them in; then recover upon the hanging guard, which is your greatest safety: suppose that you be slipped just as you perceive that you lose your point, turn your wrist to the hanging, which is in all cases the most absolute and surest guard or defence.

Note, that your play at broad-sword is different from small-sword, for broad-sword is played circularly, that is upon traverse, in which, if you be cunning, you may pick several advantages. Observe, that if your opponent drops to your leg, at the same time slip your leg back out of his reach, then return your stroke as speedily as possible: if you fall to the leg, let it be by a feint, that is, offer a pitch to the outside of his head, or right ear, then fall to the inside of his leg; this will concern him so much with his guard, that you cannot hazard.

A close at broad-sword is performed thus, engage your opponent's sword on the inside with all your strength, then force it backward as low as his knee, and at the same time step in with your left foot, and seize the foible (feeble) of his blade with your left hand, then execute your intention: you may perform the like by engaging on the outside of his sword, and perform as aforesaid: you may disarm either of these ways, after the same manner as you do at small-sword.

Otherwise, lie upon a low guard, or rather no guard; that is, hold your sword as low as your middle, so that all the upper part of your body be bare, or clearly exposed; and when your opponent strikes at your head, pitch to the hanging guard, and at the same juncture step in with your left foot, and with your left hand, the back thereof being turned towards your face, make seizure of his sword, then use your most merciful discretion. Take notice, that if your opponent strikes at the same time as you do, I call it a *contretemps* (counter time), which be careful to avoid.

Ever since I have taught this noble art of fencing, it has been my observation that many gentlemen, especially some topping masters in their own conceits, that only teach small-sword, will not in the least allow one man to understand, or be an artist in three sorts of weapons, to wit; small-sword, broad-sword and quarter-staff; (adding wrestling) these are the subject of my discourse: truly, I much wonder at their great ignorance, for it may be as well said, that an eminent and excellent physician, whose universal knowledge and fame is extended through the whole kingdom, knows but a single medicine, or can prescribe but one way to cure a distemper (which doubtless has twenty). Or that a very famous and able musician can but play or teach of one instrument; truly, in my opinion, there is as much reason for one as the other. Therefore I shall not in the least trouble myself to undeceive their incredulity, etc.

Whereas I have made it plainly appear, that small-sword and broad-sword, hath such a dependence one upon another, in sundry respects ought to be linked together, for the cross parry at small-sword, is the same and equivalent to the in and outside guard at broad-sword: The Falloon parrying is the same as the pendant or hanging guard, there's no difference in the least, as to the ways of parrying and guarding. Further, give me leave to state a case, suppose I have a sword that will not only cut but likewise thrust, do one as well as the other (as in my time I've had several) I dare undertake to answer the bravest small-sword man in the universe, by reason I have a double advantage: in the first place, I'm upon equal terms with him, as to thrusting; then for cutting, I have ten times more odds, for if he thrusts in cart at me, I'll but strike or cut at the same time as he presents his thrust, and I will lay my life I can disable him upon the wrist, he can no way evade it. Otherwise, if he thrusts again at me, then I'll parry him, and in spite of fate cut his arm in his recovery. Further, I affirm that there is no man living who can lie in any posture whatever at small-sword, but without fail I can cut the wrist of his arm, and at no hazard to myself; it is impossible for any man to parry a stroke or cut, unless he truly understands broad-sword: what I've said, I think is sufficient to convince a rational man in this matter, etc.