Girolamo Cavalcabo
Rapier and Dagger

A Practical Guide

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About the Guide

This guide aims to give a practical understanding of the fundamental principles and key techniques in Girolamo Cavalcabo's Treatise or Instruction on Fencing (1597) in Jacques de Villamont's translation into Middle French.

All the techniques, examples and drills given in the fencing treatise are illustrations of the principles and assumptions underlying the author's fencing system. Exposing these principles and assumptions provides a solid foundation on which you can make sense of the techniques, examples and drills in the text.

The focus of the guide is firmly on using the rapier and dagger. There are small sections on the use of the sword and cape and fencing against left-handed opponents towards the end of the guide. The "excellent discourse" by Patenostrier of Rome, part of Villamont's book, and Cavalcabo's notes on the sword alone have not been included here.

Why Should I Care?

Building your knowledge of Cavalcabo's sword and dagger system from the bottom up rather than from the top down will make you a better swordsman or swordswoman. With practice, you will more quickly develop an intuitive understanding of how Cavalcabo wants you to handle particular fencing situations. You will have a framework to assist you in closely studying the text itself as well as for comparing Cavalcabo's fencing with similar treatises.

Layout and Format

The guide begins in the Overview section outlining the fundamental principles and basic strategy of the fight, guards, strikes and defenses. It then goes on in the Principles and Techniques section to highlight key actions and statements of tactical advice that occur repeatedly in the treatise. Finally, a range of exercises which illustrate these techniques and principles are listed in the Drills and Exercises section of the guide. Each section of the guide calls out the relevant topic headings in Cavalcabo's treatise for further study.

The sections to do with using the sword and cape and facing a left-handed opponent are dealt with at the end of the guide - in the same way as they are in the treatise itself.

Assumptions

The guide assumes a right-handed fencer who already has some training or experience with rapier and dagger. It also assumes that you facing a single opponent, similarly armed, training for a non-cooperative (antagonistic or free sparring or competitive) encounter.
About the Treatise

Girolamo (Hieronyme) Cavalcabo

Girolamo Cavalcabo is thought to be a descendant of the famous family who ruled Cremona, Italy, for some time during the fourteenth century although this is far from certain. He himself was trained in the Bolognese fencing tradition and, according to Egerton Castle in *Schools and Masters of Fencing*, trained under Angelo Viggiani.

At some point, he travelled to Rome where he was introduced to the “Agrippan” system of guard positions (eg: first, second, third, fourth) and where he established his own fencing school. His son, Cesare, was teaching there around 1609. Girolamo is thought to have moved the school to London around this time before finally settling in Paris. He was appointed by Henry IV of France as fencing master to the king’s son, the future Louis XIII.

Cesare was Master of Arms to the French court from 1611 until 1642 and is recorded as the last of the Italian fencing masters to teach there. The date is significant. It is the year that marked the end of the influence of the Medici family at the French court after the disastrous regency of Marie de Medici, Henry’s second wife and mother of Louis XIII.

Girolamo’s father, Zachara or Zacharia, produced a second printing of Viggiani’s *Lo Schermo* in 1588.

The Treatise

Cavalcabo’s text has numerous topic headings that are not illustrated and essentially unordered. While he starts with the simpler aspects such as terminology and the model of the fight and then progresses to more complex topics, he jumps in a seemingly random manner from technique to tactical advice and repeats himself frequently. It is possible that each topic heading represents a lesson plan. Arguing against this is the fact that some topics are very short and simple and some are quite lengthy and complex.

The treatise was originally written in Italian and appears to have never been published in this form. Jacques de Villamont, presumably his student, made a translation into French which was published first at Paris in 1595 and then at Rouen in 1597 with the inclusion of “*Le Guidon des Capitaines*” (“The Captains’ Banner”), an instruction manual for infantry commanders. Other notable editions in French were published in 1610, 1617 and 1628.

It was translated into German and illustrated by Conrad von Einsidell with editions published at Leipzig in 1611 and 1612.

There is an excellent translation of the 1597 edition by Rob Runacres of the *Renaissance Sword Club* which covers Villamont’s translation of Cavalcabo and Patenostrier’s “excellent discourse” on the sword alone.
The Weapons

The sword is not defined in the text but will likely be a type of weapon common to 1590s, particularly in Italy. This suggests the sword is a predominantly thrusting weapon with a rather triangular profile, fairly wide at the forte tapering evenly along its length to the point, with a the beginnings of a complex hilt arrangement consisting of a knuckle bow, one or two rings and ports and a defined ricasso to allow for fingering the blade.

The parrying dagger is likely to be longer than the standard self-defence dagger or rondel with wide quillions, either straight or curved forward but without the solid sail of later *main gauche* parrying daggers.
Overview

These are the fundamental tenets on which Cavalcabo constructs the entire edifice of his fencing system. They are, as much as anything, statements of belief rather than provable facts.

**Axiom 1:** Defence is stronger than attack. In attacking, the fencer becomes disordered, less stable and less able to defend. In defence, the fencer is solidly placed and able to fend off all attacks. The corollary of this is that it is better to wait and be attacked in order to defend and more strongly riposte than it is to attack.

**Axiom 2:** Fencers are either aggressive or timid. Although Cavalcabo does not use these words, the concept is implicit in the text. These terms may be applied to a fencer throughout the fight or applied differently to the one fencer at varying stages of the fight. The terms appear also to be absolutes rather than the ends of a continuum. Aggressive fencers will act now rather than wait for the perfect circumstances. Timid fencers will wait for the right moment, which may never eventuate, rather than act rashly. You must have the means to deal with each type of opponent.

Terminology

Some technical terms are introduced by Cavalcabo at the start of his text but these are generally explained again each time they are used or the description of the term, rather than the term itself, is used.

**Premiere:** The sword hilt is held higher than the shoulder on the right side. Cavalcabo does not explicitly state that the quillons are vertical nor that the palm of the hand faces the right or outside line, although this is likely, following the Agrippan style.

**Seconde:** The sword hilt is held at shoulder level with the palm of the hand facing downwards.

**Tierce:** The sword hilt is held low on the right or outside line of the body with the point aimed at the opponent. Also, a thrust from this position, the sword hand held with fingers downwards.

**Quarte:** The sword hilt is held low on the left or inside line of the body with the point aimed the opponent. Also, a thrust from this position, the sword hand held with fingers upwards.

**Estramaçon:** This is used both as a generic term for any cutting strike and a cutting strike achieved by moving the sword in a circular manner around the wrist rather than the elbow or shoulder. In the Bolognese sidesword and rapier tradition, this latter action is known as a *stramazzone* or *molinetto*, depending on the direction of the strike.
Basic Strategy

Cavalcabo makes plain that the basic strategy is to wait in the guard of quarte, with the dagger held close to the hilt of the sword, for the opponent's attack, parry it then counter attack while the opponent is disordered. Of course, this relies on having an opponent who is aggressive and likely to attack. The same strategy can be used against a timid opponent but you must first convince the opponent to attack.

The epitome of fencing is encoded in the following sequence. There are a range of techniques outlined below to account for situations which lack this level of perfection.

1. From the guard of tierce, you thrust at your timid opponent then retire into the guard of quarte to await your opponent's response. If your opponent is aggressive, simply standing in quarte with your dagger near your sword hilt provides sufficient invitation to cause the opponent to strike.

2. The opponent thrusts at your exposed right shoulder.

3. You parry the thrust with your sword in seconde, control the opponent's blade with your dagger while stepping with your rear left foot towards the opponent's right, and thrust in seconde to the opponent's head or torso.

4. You retire out of distance into either the guard of tierce or quarte.

Note that the sword is the workhorse. It parries and it strikes. The dagger is the sword's assistant and its primary role is to bind and control the opponent's blade so that the opponent cannot parry your counter-attack. This is a common theme throughout the text.

See these topics in the treatise:

- Interpretation of some words which are used in this book
- To know how our bodies can operate
- Rule to understand which is the true edge or the false edge of the sword
- Instruction for what is the fort and the faible of the sword
- As our bodies must operate for the better
Timing and Distance

Either you are close enough for you and your opponent to hit each other or you are not. The first is called “in measure”. The second is called “out of measure”.

Cavalcabo calls out three tempi: time of the sword, time of the dagger and time of the feet. These do not form a hierarchy as they do in, say, Silver’s works. Tempo to Cavalcabo represents the triggers for action. When you see the sword, the dagger or the feet move, you must act to either defend or attack.

See these topics in the treatise:
- Warning that one must guard by watching the sword, dagger and foot
- Four ways to pass
- To know what thing is tempi
- What thing is in measure and out of measure

Guards and Counter-guards

There are four guards following the Agrippan or Roman school: premiere, seconde, tierce, quarte. The dagger (and cape) is always held near the sword hilt and on the same side of the body as the sword.

The idea of counter-guards is raised early in the text but never examined in detail or as a subject in its own right. A counterguard is a posture from which the opponent must take a tempo in order to re-orient before attacking. In other words, it is the guard position in which you are most protected from the likely actions of your opponent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opponent’s Guard</th>
<th>Counterguard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Premiere, Seconde, Tierce</td>
<td>Quarte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarte</td>
<td>Seconde, Tierce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagger forward, or</td>
<td>Seconde, Tierce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left foot forward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against a left-hander</td>
<td>Copy the opponent's guard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Copying the opponent's guard means exactly that: if your left-handed opponent is standing in the guard of tierce, you adopt the guard of tierce, etc.

See these topics in the treatise:
- Four main guards of the single sword and the sword and dagger
- Counter-guards to the above
- To understand when you will be in guard with advantage
- To know which guard is the more perfect for attack and for defence
- Instruction for which is the most perfect guard to attend against all bottes that can be made
Warning to hold the dagger carefully in the hand

Thrusters, Cuts and Parries

The thrust is the preferred strike. The rationale for this is not given but, because of the time period in which Cavalcabo writes, one can assume that he follows the typical theory that the thrust is quicker and more hidden than the cutting strike.

The cut is called the *estramaçon* in the text. Strictly speaking an *estramaçon* is the same as a Bolognese *stramazzone*, a circular cut from the wrist from, in this case, either the left or the right. All cuts of are this type. Large motion cutting strikes from the shoulder are not referred to or implied in the text.

In addition, all cuts are preceded or prefaced by a thrust to the head to draw out a response from the opponent and to give you time to transform this motion into an *estramaçon* to a different target such as a leg or arm.

Parries are of two types. The most common is the parry using the strong of your blade to push the opponent’s thrust safely offline or block an opponent’s cutting strike. Cuts to your left side are parried in this manner in *quarte*; cuts to your right side are parried in *seconde*. The second type is what is called the cross-parry where the sword and dagger used in conjunction to capture a downwards strike in the intersection between the blades crossed in the form of an X.

Recall that the sword is the primary tool for both attack and defence. It is the sword that parries in the majority of circumstances. But the dagger has its own special and vital role to play in an exchange. The dagger is the key to transforming a parry into a riposte or follow-up attack and the secret is to use the dagger to maintain the pressure on your opponent’s blade. In this way, the opponent has no chance to *caver* or strike around and you maintain an opening at which you may strike.

See these topics in the treatise:
- To know what is the most perfect parry
- The manner to assault with the *estocade* with advantage
- Play of the *estramaçon*, and to know how they are made: their names, and how they are called
- To attack it is necessary to go with the thrust, and the cut
- Against one who wants to attack with the point and then turn a cut
Principles and Techniques

Invitation and Provocation

The key is to get the opponent to attack and then respond to it. This may include invitation, provocation, feints, pretending to fall for the opponent's feints, etc. There are several tactics that may used to do this but they all rest on the assumption that you can recognise and take advantage of the opponent's habitual behaviour.

**Invitation**
Presenting a target by your posture, eg: standing in *quarte* opens your outside line (right-hand side) for an attack. This may be effective against an opponent who is impetuous or likes to make probing attacks, whether as feints or in earnest, or want to always press forward.

**Provocation**
Forcing the opponent to react to you in a known manner, eg: presenting your sword to an opponent who likes to use their dagger, making exploratory attacks to see what the opponent will do in response, or it may be as simple as making a strike to force the opponent to do *something* as opposed to just standing in guard. Cavalcabo uses the Italian term *chiamate* rather than the later French term *appel* for this.

The principle behind both the invitation and provocation is to figure out how your opponent habitually acts and then provide an opportunity for the opponent to do this - but in such a way that your have a response to it already prepared.

Key Actions

The following list captures 90% of the techniques described in the text. They are merely described here and are broken down step-by-step in the Drills and Exercises section of the guide. Note that not all variations of the basic technique are captured here and this list does not substitute for a close reading of the text.

1. **Parry in seconde, control, counter-attack**
   Invite in *quarte* or provoke and retire into *quarte*. Parry with your sword to your outside line while stepping with the rear (left) foot, i.e. stepping offline, away from the parry. Control the opponent's weapon with your off-hand weapon. Thrust in *seconde* (or *estramaçon*/cut to the head or the leg). Optionally *caver* from *tierce* to parry.

2. **Parry in quarte, control, counter-attack**
   Invite in *tierce/seconde* or provoke and retire into *tierce/seconde*. Parry with sword to your inside line while stepping with the rear (left) foot, i.e. stepping in the direction of the attack. Control the opponent's weapon with your off-hand
weapon. Thrust (or cut/estramaçon) to the head or body. Optionally caver from quarte to parry.

(3) Parry with dagger, counter-attack

Invite by posture including from a high (crossed?) guard. Parry with the dagger to your inside line (to the left), thrust to the face or body from the firm foot. Optionally, this may include stepping left with the rear (left) foot and/or using blade opposition and/or cutting an estramaçon to the sword arm.

(4) Thrust, caver around dagger to cut

Provoke by a thrust between the weapons or to the face. If he parries with the dagger, caver around the dagger and thrust at his left side (towards your right) or turn a main droite/estramaçon.

(5) Thrust, caver around sword to cut

Provoke by a thrust between the weapons or to the face. If he parries with the sword, caver around the sword and thrust to his right side (towards your left) or turn a revers/estramaçon. Optionally, may be replaced with a dagger thrust.

(6) Void and counter-attack

Invite or provoke as circumstances dictate. Retire or slip back (void) to allow the opponent's strike to go past then thrust or cut as the opponent lies spent.

(X) Retreat or chase

Retire or follow until an opening appears that you can take advantage of. This seems to refute the idea of action disorders oneself and encourages the opponent to attack. There is no single action of the blade discussed under this rubric. The take home message of this is the idea of pursuit and withdrawal.

Tactical Situations

Cavalcabo’s text is quite clear on the circumstances in which the key actions should be performed. For the most part, any given tactical situation has a single preferred response although there some options and variant responses given to handle circumstances slightly different to the base model envisioned. The situations called out in the text, the preferred response and any options are included in the table using the code used above. The situations in the table are keyed to topic headings in the text.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Preferred Action</th>
<th>Option or Variant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Against those who use feints</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who strike with the firm foot</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who strike first then retreat</td>
<td>Provoke then X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who never want to strike</td>
<td>Use the basic strategy (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who parry with the sword or dagger</td>
<td>Thrust to the opponent's face then: 4 (if parried with the sword), or 5 (if parried with the dagger)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who remove the foot</td>
<td>Provoke then X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who give the sword to beat</td>
<td>Feint capturing the sword with your dagger then 3, or Feint capturing the sword with your sword then 4.</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who hold the dagger strongly advanced and the sword retired</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who pass</td>
<td>Present your sword for the opponent to beat then 2 or 3</td>
<td>1, 4, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As one must conduct oneself against a man whom one has never fenced</td>
<td>4 or 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who hold their weapons open</td>
<td>4 or 5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who uncover the left or right side</td>
<td>Use the basic strategy (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against one who always turns</td>
<td>Provoke then X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who place themselves low holding the dagger near the sword</td>
<td>3, 2</td>
<td>1, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against those who want to cover your sword with theirs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule to observe against one that wants to strike first with an estocade or with a cut</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tactical Advice

Situational awareness is a fundamental tenet of Cavalcabo’s fencing system. Understanding when to invite your opponent to attack you and when to provoke the opponent into some form action is vital. Fortunately, Cavalcabo gives us some guidance on this.

His general advice is to attack the nearest opening. The aim of this is not so much to hit home (although if you can, you should) but to provoke the opponent into making some action that you can take advantage of. These probing attacks serve an additional purpose of allowing you to gain valuable information about how your opponent reacts. For example, does your opponent:

- Always riposte with the same strike?
- Always work around your outside line?
- Always retreat or pass forward?

You can use this information to plan future actions against this opponent.

Against a more aggressive or impetuous opponent, you should present openings for your opponent to strike. These invitations should be backed up with a plan for how you will respond to the attack.

In addition, pay close attention to your opponent's stance. If the opponent's feet are widely separated, it is likely that the opponent has settled into a strong defensive stance and will need to be actively provoked into action. If the opponent's feet are narrowly spaced, it is likely that the opponent is looking for an opportunity to attack and need only be presented with an invitation.
Drills and Exercises

Drills are nothing more (or less) than muscle memory exercises designed to ingrain a set of movements into a single action that can be performed instinctively. The action of the drill happens the same way each and time.

Variations on the drills such as counter-attacking with a cut to the leg rather than a thrust to the torso may be introduced once the basic actions are mastered. The variants allowed by Cavalcabo are evident in the text itself.

All directions assume a right-handed fencer. Reverse them for a left-handed fencer. All drills are written for solo practice although it is trivial to adapt them for a real partner.

Action 1 from Quarte

This drill may be done as a solo exercise or with a partner.

1. Stand in quarte. The right foot is forward and the sword and dagger are held to left side.

2. Visualize your imaginary opponent making a thrust or cut to your right side.

3. Move the sword and dagger to parry in seconde with both weapons while stepping to the left with your left foot. The step to the left need not be great nor too far forward. Twist your shoulders to ensure that both the sword and dagger come into play.

4. Visualize maintaining pressure on the opponent's blade with the dagger and drop the point of your sword online in a thrust in seconde to the opponent's head or torso.

5. Recover back into the guard of seconde. Do not omit this step.

It may be performed by more advanced students as an action from seconde identical to the above except that the movement to parry includes an initial caver under the imaginary opponent's blade.

Action 2 from Tierce

This drill may be done as a solo exercise or with a partner.

1. Stand in tierce. The right foot is forward and the sword and dagger are held to the right side.

2. Visualise your imaginary opponent making a cut or thrust to your left side.

3. Move the sword and dagger to parry in quarte stepping left, into the strike, with the left foot. The step to the left need not be great nor too far forward.
4. Visualise maintaining pressure on the imaginary opponent's sword with your
dagger and drop the point of your sword online in a thrust in *quarte* to your
opponent's head or torso.

5. Recover back into the guard of *quarte*. Do not omit this step.

This may be performed by more advanced students as an action from *quarte*
identical to the above except that the movement to parry includes an initial *caver*
under the imaginary opponent's blade.

**Action 3 from Seconde**

This drill may be done as a solo exercise or with a partner. Note that this is a rare
occasion where the dagger is the primary parrying tool.

1. Stand in *seconde*. The right foot is forward and the sword his held high at the
level of the shoulder or slightly above. The dagger is held near the sword hilt
as usual but underneath it.

2. Visualise your imaginary opponent making a thrust to your torso.

3. Parry the in-coming thrust downwards and to your left with the dagger. The
aim is to move the opponent's word point off-line or outside your presence.

4. This achieved, extend your arm to present your sword point for the opponent
to run onto. Force may be added to this step to make a thrust to the
opponent's head or torso.

5. Recover back into *quarte* or *tierce* guard. Do not omit this step.

There are a number of alternate actions for step 4. The most practically useful of
these is to make a cut or *estramaçon* to the opponent’s extended sword arm. This
alternative action better suits an older style of cut-and-thrust side sword blades rather
than contemporary thrust-oriented rapiers.

**Action 4 from either Tierce or Quarte**

This action can be seen with Action 5 as one of a pair of actions dealing with a
specific circumstance. The pair represent the two best answers to the question of
what to do when your opponent parries your thrust. This may also be used as a
provocation.

1. Stand in *tierce* or *quarte* as you please. The right foot is forward and the
sword and dagger are held together.

2. Thrust in *tierce* to your imaginary opponent’s face.

3. The opponent parries your blade with the sword to your left (inside line).
4. Turn your wrist palm down, giving way to the opponent’s parry, and use the momentum of the parry to charge and power your *estramaçon* to cut from the right to the opponent’s head, shoulder or torso.

5. Recover into *quarte* guard. Do not omit this step.

The key points to note here are parrying to your inside line (to the left) and not using strength to prevent or fight the parry. This last point gives your cut/*estramaçon* the power it needs to strike effectively.

**Action 5 from either Tierce or Quarte**

This action can be seen with Action 4 as one of a pair of actions dealing with a specific circumstance. The pair represent the two best answers to the question of what to do when your opponent parries your thrust. It, too, may be used as a provocation.

1. Stand in *tierce* or *quarte* as you please. The right foot is forward and the sword and dagger are held together.

2. Thrust in *tierce* to your imaginary opponent’s face.

3. The opponent parries your blade with the dagger to your right (outside line).

4. Turn your wrist palm up, giving way to the opponent’s parry, and use the momentum of the parry to charge and power your *estramaçon* to cut from the right to the opponent’s head, shoulder or torso.

5. Recover into *tierce* guard. Do not omit this step.

The key points to note here are parrying to your inside line (to the right) and not using strength to prevent or fight the parry. This last point gives your cut/*estramaçon* the power it needs to strike effectively.

**Action 6 from Quarte**

This drill may be done as a solo exercise or with a partner.

1. Stand in *quarte*. The right foot is forward and the sword and dagger are held to left side.

2. Visualize your imaginary opponent making a cut to your right side.

3. Throw your weight backwards onto your rear foot and withdraw your front foot to touch your rear foot, raising the point of your sword. This should put you out of measure and your opponent’s strike should sail harmless by.

4. After your opponent’s strike has passed by, step out again and launch a thrust to your opponent’s head, shoulder or torso.

5. Recover back into *quarte* guard. Do not omit this step.
There are many variants of this exercises including standing in *seconde* and taking a strike to the left side as well as practicing this action against a thrust rather than a cutting strike by your opponent. In this latter case, you will need to employ the sword or the dagger in step 4 to remove the point of the opponent’s weapons to allow you to thrust safely at him or her.

**Action X**

There is no clear direction which can be transformed into an exercise for this action regardless of the frequency with which it is encountered in Cavalcabo’s text. The suggested approach for drilling these circumstances covers two variants.

**Drill Variant 1: Retreat**

1. With a partner to play the pursuing role, both stand in guard: you in *quarte* and your partner in *tierce*.

2. The pursuing partner continually attacks moving forward. The speed of the pursuing partner’s forward motion should be adjusted to suit experience levels and training objectives.

3. You withdraw or retreat, defending in *quarte* or *seconde* as appropriate, until an opening for counter-attack presents itself.

4. Hold ground, parry the pursuing partner’s attack and thrust to the opponent’s head or torso.

**Drill Variant 2: Pursuit**

1. With a partner to play the retreating role, both stand in guard: you in *tierce* and your partner in *quarte*.

2. Attack the opponent and push forward. The idea for the attacking partner is to keep pushing forward, forcing the opponent backwards.

3. The retreating partner continually withdraws moving backward. The speed of the retreating partner’s backward motion should be adjusted to suit experience levels and training objectives.

4. You advance or pursue, thrusting in *quarte* or *seconde* or cutting as appropriate, seeking any opening that presents itself.

5. Stop pursuing after three or four strikes and come back into guard to prevent yourself from becoming disordered.
Using the Sword and Cape

The cape is used in the same way as the dagger. It is there to assist the sword by controlling the opponent’s weapon once parried. In this way, the cape and the dagger are entirely interchangeable.

All the actions outlined above are appropriate for the cape. Cavalcabo says that the cape may be brought into play to parry all thrusts but only after a cut has been parried with the sword. The common reading of the text, however, has it that this is exactly how the dagger is used.

Note that Cavalcabo’s first word about the cape is never to throw it at your opponent. On this point, he is quite adamant.

Although the text does not mention how the cape is held, given its usage, it is reasonable to assume that Cavalcabo intends the cape to be wrapped around the forearm rather than allowed to flow free.

See these topics in the treatise:
- The play of the sword and cape, both with the point and the edge
- To wait for the sword and cape
- Which kind of weapons are most advantageous, sword and cape or sword and dagger
Against a Left-handed Fencer

The strategy for facing a left-handed swordsman remains the same: invite or provoke the opponent into striking first and disordering himself or herself, so that you can safely counter-attack. Reverse all the directions and advice given elsewhere for fighting a right-handed swordsman. When looking at what Cavalcabo says in detail, this advice falls down in several particulars.

Cavalcabo suggests that it is best to match or copy the guard used by the left-handed swordsman rather than wait in *quarte* or attack from *tierce*. For instance, if the left-handed opponent is standing the left-hand version of *quarte*, you should stand in a right-handed guard of *quarte*. In this way, your weapon is on the same side of the direct line between your sword and your opponent's sword. If your left-handed opponent stands in the left-handed version of the guard of *seconde*, you should stand in the right-handed version of the same guard for the same reason.

Although the guards and parry actions may be reversed, it appears that for the right-handed fencer, the idea of stepping to the left is retained. For example, you may stand against your left-handed opponent in the guard of *tierce*, inviting an attack to your left shoulder, and parry the invited attack with your sword in *quarte*. If the idea of reversing all directives against a left-handed fencer held true, you should step to the right in this parry action. However, Cavalcabo says that in this case you continue to step to the left, control the opponent's blade with your dagger and make your counter-attack or riposte.

Cavalcabo directs that you move around your opponent to the right, to his or her outside line. This helps make sense of the advice he gives. It allows you to parry in *quarte* from *premiere*, *seconde* or *tierce* guard using Actions 2 or 3 above to capture the left-handed opponent's blade, stepping to your left to create an opening for your counter-attack.

Any of the drills and exercises above may be modified to address a left-handed opponent.

See these topics in the treatise:
- How one must conduct oneself in fencing against left-landers
Further Study

Primary Sources

*Note: translations of Cavalcabo are included as primary sources. Text without ISBN information are available on the internet.*

Cavalcabo, G. *Treatise or Instruction for Fencing.*
- *Nobilissimo discorso intorno il schermo*, c.1580, manuscript (Italian)
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Brantôme (Pierre de Bourdeille). *Discours sur les duels de Brantôme*. 1887


Daessy, H. *Archives des Maîtres d'Armes de Paris*. 1888

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