

Advanced Circle-Sword Theory

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Introduction:

In the Foundation class, we learned the circular sword blow in its simplest form. We explored how important it is to keep this circular motion within a flat plane and learned several methods of adding power to this sort of blow. So far we have only covered fully circular blows moving in the horizontal plane. We also introduced the use of a Whirlygig as an analogous motion that helps with refining our circular movement. Our next step will be to expand this motion into other planes while tying blows together.

THE FIGURE 8 [this is where it all starts to come together!]

The figure 8 pattern, with some additions, establishes the sword paths and follow-throughs that connect all the sword blows together.

- The **downward figure 8** with a **weight on a string**.
- Notice how torso rotation flattens out the angle.
- The **downward figure 8** with the **sword**.
- Body rotation helps with flexibility issue
[EVALUATE]

- The **upward figure 8** with the **weight on a string**.
- Notice how torso rotation flattens out the angle.
- The **upward figure 8** with the **sword**.
- Body rotation helps with flexibility issue
[EVALUATE]

ADDING SOME POWER

Adding dropping power to the downward figure 8

- The downward figure 8 again with the weight on a string.
- Dropping the weight by relaxing the knees to add power
[EVALUATE]

- The improved downward figure 8, now using the sword.
[EVALUATE]

Adding rising power to the upward figure 8

- The upward figure 8 again with the weight on a string.
- Rising the weight by straightening the knees some to add power.
[EVALUATE]

- The improved upward figure 8, now using the sword.
[EVALUATE]

ADDING SOME UNPREDICTABILITY:

- Doubling through on the downward diagonal. (weight then sword)
[practice]
- Doubling through on the upward diagonal. (weight then sword)
[practice]
- Doubling upward on the same side. (weight then sword)
[practice]
- Doubling downward on the same side. (weight then sword)
[practice]

Now practice the downward figure 8 occasionally doubling through and occasionally doubling on a side. Remember to use dropping weight for extra power. Use body rotation to allow for more flexibility and to flatten the angles. (weight then sword)
[EVALUATE]

Now practice the upward figure 8 occasionally doubling through and occasionally doubling on a side. Remember to use dropping weight for extra power. Use body rotation to allow for more flexibility and to flatten the angles. (weight then sword)
[EVALUATE]

[ALLOW TIME TO GET FULLY COMFORTABLE WITH THIS]

[from here on out....Demonstrate with sword only]

ADDING MORE UNPREDICTABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY (sword only)

Learning how to transition from upward to downward figure 8s and everything in between.

Hitting your Target! (The easiest direction change)

- If your sword stops on target, you can restart it by circling in any direction. Remember this is the “Long Point” position. You can:
 - pull it through and start a cut at any angle
 - or reverse its direction and start a cut at any angle
 - pull the sword back into any of the guard positions
 - pull the sword back into any of the thrust positions
 - thrust from where the sword is
 - you can also change the angle of this thrust as you implement it... “winding”

Launching a cut from this Long Point position can be practiced with the whirly-gig by having someone hold your weight in the extended position, then release and step back as you begin your circle. Notice how you pull it away from its stopped position and into its circular cut.

Reversing from a Guard: (a very natural set of changes, but a little slow)

As your sword comes across with the cut, let it end in a ward, then send it back in the direction it came from. Thus:

Cuts, end in a Guard on the opposite side and become a cut in the other direction, either horizontally or diagonally.

From the right:

(Horizontal Return)

- Any cut **from the right**, to end in **High-Left**, is returned as a *horizontal* cut towards **High-Right**.
- Any cut **from the right**, to end in **Low-Left**, is returned as a *horizontal* cut towards **Low-Right**.

(Diagonal Return)

- Any cut **from the right**, to end in **High-Left**, is returned as a *diagonal* cut towards **Low-Right** (becomes a downward figure-8)
- Any cut **from the right**, to end in **Low-Left**, is returned as a *diagonal* cut towards **High-Right** (becomes an upward figure-8)

From the Left:

(Horizontal Return)

- Any cut **from the left**, to end in **High-Right**, is returned as a *horizontal* cut towards **High-Left**
- Any cut **from the left**, to end in **Low-Right**, is returned as a *horizontal* cut towards **Low-Left**

(Diagonal Return)

- Any cut **from the left**, to end in **High-Right**, is returned as a *diagonal* cut towards **Low-Left** (becomes a downward figure-8)
- Any cut **from the left**, to end in **Low-Right**, is returned as a *diagonal* cut towards **High-Left** (becomes an upward figure-8)

[EVALUATE]

From upward to downward by dragging down after skip:
(could skip on their shield/head...but works without hitting too)

After skipping upward diagonal (like preparing to double on a side), while the sword is at its highest 'float point', drag it down into a down-ward crossing diagonal.

[EVALUATE]

The horizontal transition: (a very fast, if difficult, transition)

(allows a change from up to down and visa versa, while all strikes come from one side)

- Going from a diagonal downward circle to a horizontal circle in the same direction then to a horizontal upward circle in the same direction (resulting in 3 blows from the same side, each at a different angle)
- Same thing, but going from upward to downward.
- This works in either direction.

[EVALUATE]

Now that we have experienced fluid movement through all the lines of attack, via Circle-Theory, it is time to briefly reexamine our basic Guards and see how we can move the hand from one Guard to another.

We have postponed the coverage of this concept until after practicing the figure-8s to simplify the learning process and to avoid creating a mental block against fluid movement. Still, understanding these movements, broken down into stopping spots, allows additional flexibility in blow choice and timing.

When the sword's momentum is brought to a near halt, arriving at one of the Guards, the hand can then be moved to one of the other Guards and blows launched from this new spot. In executing our figure 8's we have already been doing this. Here are some of these changes of Guard broken out for examination.

Changes of Guard:

Start by cutting from **High-Right** to **Low-Left**.

After arriving in **Low-Left**, lift the hand to **High-Left** then cut towards Low-Right

After arriving in **Low-Right**, lift the hand to **High-Right** then cut towards Low-Left

-repeat-

[Notice how this creates a **downward figure8** pattern!]

Start by cutting from **Low-Right** to **High-Left**.

After arriving in **High-Left**, lower the hand to **Low-Left** then cut towards High-Right

After arriving in **High-Right**, Lower the hand to **Low-Right** then cut towards High-Left

-repeat-

[Notice how this creates a **upward figure8** pattern!]

Begin by cutting from **High-Right** to **Low-Left**.

After Arriving in **Low-Left**, move the hand to **High-Right** (around the back) and cut towards **Low-Left** again.

-repeat-

[Notice how this creates a **full circle shot** along the **downward diagonal**...right to left]

Begin by cutting from **Low-Right** to **High-Left**.

After Arriving in **High-Left**, move the hand to **Low-Right** (around the back) and cut towards **High-Left** again.

-repeat-

[Notice how this creates a **full circle shot** along the **upward diagonal**...right to left]

Begin by cutting from **High-Left** to **Low-Right**.

After arriving in **Low-Right**, move the hand to **High-Left** and cut towards **Low-Right** again.

-repeat-

[Notice how this creates a **full circle shot** along the **downward diagonal**...left to right]

Begin by cutting from **Low-Left** to **High-Right**.

After arriving in **High-Right**, move the hand to **Low-Left** and cut towards **High-Right** again.

-repeat-

[Notice how this creates a **full circle shot** along the **upward diagonal**...left to right]

Begin by cutting from **High-Right** to **High-Left**.

After arriving in **High-Left**, move the hand to **High-Right** and cut towards High-Left again.

-repeat-

[Notice how this creates a **full circle shot** **horizontally**...right to left]

Begin by cutting from **High-Left** to **High-Right**.

After arriving in **High-Right**, move the hand to **High-Left** and cut towards High-Right again.

-repeat-

[Notice how this creates a **full circle shot** **horizontally**...left to right]

Students should explore this further to obtain full flexibility in their blow vocabulary.

At this point, you have the rudimentary core of the circular style in its complete form. This can be refined and new aspects of it can be explored, but for now you need to take some time to practice this pattern with all of its changes of orientation, doubling techniques, and retuning angles from Guards.

[20 minute practice break]

[question/answer period]

A MORE COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF CIRCLES [explain] [demonstrate]

(read text then demonstrate)

Circular blows are made up of circles of the **Hand, Wrist, Elbow, Shoulder, and Torso**. Circles earlier on this list have greater speed and versatility but less power and acceleration...thereby requiring greater strength or more circular travel time. Circles later on this list have just the opposite characteristics. The weaker circles usually must travel for more of the circle to generate sufficient power. Stronger circles can travel less far around and still hit hard enough.

Chart of Circles and their Attributes:

Circle	Average Circle needed	Speed	Power
Circle of the Hand	Not powerful on its own	Very Fast	Weakest
Circle of the Wrist	Needs a full circle	Fast	Weak
Circle of the Elbow	½ Circle	Medium Speed	Medium
Circle of the Shoulder	¼ Circle	Slow	Powerful
Circle of the Torso	Does not work alone	Slowest	Very Powerful

(Start **demonstarting** each circle)

- Circle of the hand

The Circle of the Hand cannot move through a full circle by itself, but can add power and speed to other circles.

- Circle of the Wrist

This is a very flexible full circle but needs lots of travel time.

- Circle of the Elbow

This is a less flexible but more powerful circle.

- Circle of the Shoulder

This is a flexible (if predictable) circle with a lot of power.

Blows generated with the circle of the **shoulder** often look like **short chops**. Understanding the circular nature of even these “chopping blows,” allows one to follow through or redirect their subtly circular nature into follow-throughs or redirections.

- Circle of the Torso

The Circle of the Torso is powerful but too slow to hit with enough percussion on its own. It is useful in supporting and adding power to other circles. Notice that, if the feet remain planted, the circle of the body is limited to about a half circle. Because it is so slow, there is little harm in accelerating it at full speed and letting it wind up and stop at its natural stopping point. Since it then has to return the other way, take advantage this to speed your return (or wrap) or add power to an offside shot.

How Circles are Really Combined:

In reality, most blows involve a little of all these circles to greater or lesser degrees. Examine how they can support each other, sometimes one giving way to another in a linked chain. By adding circles together (especially using the circle of the torso to support other circles), a great deal of power can be added to blows. A blow can start with the circle of the torso, use a bit of circle of the hand, move to circle of the shoulder or elbow, then end with a return or new blow coming out of the circle of the wrist.

How Circles can change from one to Another:

When one circle stops, another circle can take over to create the follow-through... a good example of this is a short chop from the circle of the shoulder stopping at the target, but the momentum of the sword being carried through as a follow-through or new blow as a circle of the wrist. Most bodies can comfortably withstand the sudden stop of a circle involving only its own parts... it is the added weight and leverage of the weapon that must be allowed to continue its motion smoothly to avoid strain.

A Final word on using Varied Circles:

By Varying which circles (wrist, elbow, etc.) are used, how flat or squeezed your angle is, and the placement of the center of that circle, all variety of blows can be understood in the terms of this circular pattern... taking advantage of being connected to the other blows by way of follow-throughs and returns.

NOTE:(hand comes closer to body on returns and extends out on attacks)

[take a few minutes to play around with this]

A follow-through or return for every blow....A SPECIAL CASE:

(Most follow-throughs are already covered, but here is a special case)

- The “**high guard snap**” (a special case of the down diagonal from the right)
 - Lifting the elbow above the head on the return allows a smooth follow-through from this otherwise awkward position.
(instructor can catch and hold sword tip to get the student to rotate up the elbow correctly)
 - Turning the torso to the right can emphasize its upward-figure-8 properties and allow a return that is an upward diagonal from the left.

Caution: The High-Guard-Snap is a blow that can be very hazardous to the health of your sword-elbow! If you use it, train it extensively in the air with full follow-through.

[EVALUATE]

APPLYING THE FIGURE 8 TO HITTING THINGS (with returns)

When you sword hits things, like your opponent for instance, it has an effect on the natural trajectory of your cut. Below is a list of the ways this effect can be integrated into your Full-

Circle theory. These approaches are broken into two categories.

[explain, then have each person try each one against a sword]

Blows that hit and pull through the target:

- Penetrating blows with **follow through** to strike **again at the same angle** from the same side. This can be done from each angle of attack, including near-vertical. A skipping shot can be used to make the first shot the feint and the second a faster solid shot to the same target.
- Penetrating blows with follow through to end in a Ward opposite it. New blows thrown from this Ward. This can be done in each angle of attack, including the near-verticals)

Blows that stop in the target:

In reality, a blow that halts all blade movement as it stops in the target (at longpoint) can be spun in any direction, resulting in a circular blow in any angle of attack. A couple of the most common blows of this sort are listed below:

- Penetrating blows that **stop in the target and reverse** to opposite angle.
(the 'rick-rack'though at any angle)
- Up and down **tear-drop** returns from hits, doubling on a side to hit again at same angle. Once again, a skipping shot can be used as a form of preparatory feint. This is like using just one side of the figure-8.
- For off-side shots... **Pendulum** reverse behind the head to repeat offside shot.

Further refine shots:

That first shot... (yes, I've been fudging this essential element all the way until now!)

A sword attached to the outside of a circle...**drags tangent** to the circle before centrifugal force extends it to the perpendicular. This is an essential element of all “first shots”, wherein the sword is starting from a still position. It can be over come by using the circle of the hand at the beginning of the shot to get the swords mass perpendicular to the circle earlier (triggering). This is especially effective for rotationally based shots like a high-guard snap.

Alternatively, the tangent drag can be accentuated to achieve a better angle of strike at the end of the shot. In this sort of shot, the hand moves forward while the circle of the body drags the sword along tangent to the circle (actually, while the body is rotating, lead with the elbow, then extend the hand, creating a circle of the elbow in the plane of the blow.). This prolongs the tangent drag of the sword as it is moving mostly in a straight line forward (pommel first) despite of being powered by the circle of the body and elbow. At the very end, add the circle of the hand to suddenly swing the tip out perpendicular to the circle. This is still a circular blow and can be followed through easily with the circle of the wrist and combined into all your other

circular transitions. These shots allow you to “insert” the striking end of your sword into the opening, without dragging the entire plane of the sword through your opponents defensive lines. (eg. Thorin)

Start of blow with a weight on a string. Dragging the hand through a slot before the tip comes out. (Paul concept)

Consider targeting along the angles of a heater or the “corners” of a round” (Thorin concept)

Extended with nowhere to go?

An ideal starting position for starting a blow is opposite where you want to hit on a circular plane.

With “circle-of-the-wrist” shots, this means having your tip on, or near your opponent to begin with so that you can get a full rotation before striking.

How can you get your sword in this starting position without alerting your opponent as to your intentions?

Some ways to get that point out there:

- Weak, set-up blows.
- Blows that linger on the point of impact
- Changing guards
- False thrusts
- Feeling out taps

Although these shots look like purely circle of the wrist shots, you will find that you can add quite a bit of support from the circle of the body.

You will also need the circle of the hand to get the sword perpendicular to the circle fairly early (effective for those with strong grips). An alternative is to add a little pull towards yourself with the hand, before the circle of the hand and other rotations begin. This little pull starts the sword in motion tangent to the circle first, putting less strain on the hand.

Look to the subtle refinements of technique to find the needed blow power on difficult shots. Each little thing adds to the total power delivered.

CONTINUING YOUR OWN DISCOVERY OF FIGURE 8s

Although an attempt has been made to be comprehensive, there are still other subtle transitions available in the circular blow pattern. (consider things that pass to or from the High-Center ward, for instance). There is advantage to continuing your study of the circular sword patterns to learn these subtleties.

- **Be comfortable with your sword anywhere on the familiar track of the figure 8.**
- **Tracing blows backwards from target to find new “trick shots”**

A DISCUSSION OF ANOTHER WAY OF THROWING A CIRCULAR SHOT

There is another element that can be introduced to the circular method of throwing blows. This method involves rotating your weapon around its center of balance (usually a point 4 to 8 inches in front of your hand. To do this, your hand will have to trade places with a point 4 to 8 inches beyond that center of balance, making the sword rotate 180 degrees, but with the point of rotation being at the center of balance rather than at your hand or wrist. This results in most of the mass of the weapon being nullified which would result in a much lighter hit, though this can be mitigated by the shot being much much faster...since it doesn't have to fight the mass of the weapon. A little body rotation and using hand triggering helps with this method.

The most common example of this sort of bow is a typical high-guard snap, where the sword not only rotates at the wrist, but the hand moves to your left (switching around the center of balance) as the sword makes its rotation. This shot has to make up for the loss of mass with speed.

A very useful variation is in turning a thrust into a cut. The hand and sword is moving forward in the thrust. Trigger the hand and wrist to start a 360 degree rotation of the sword, but allow the hand to continue forward to its destination point, 4 to 8 inches past the sword's center of balance, causing its rotation to pivot around this center of balance point instead of your hand. This allows an relaxed fast shot that can be easily re-directed (to the leg for instance).

In some ways this method seems to run counter to the principles of swinging the mass of your weapon, and I think the the swinging method is still to be preferred in the majority of cases (especially in tying multiple blows together and tying blocks to blows), but this other technique is certainly useful on some occasions.

SWORD BLOCKING [demonstrate and practice]

Core concepts:

Blocks should be **perpendicular** to the oncoming weapon. Notably, **attacks** should be **parallel** to the opponents lines of defense.

Useful visualizations:

- Hanging and Vertical blocks. (relates to guards also)



(Hanging)



(Realistic Hanging)



(Vertical)



(Realistic Vertical)

- The “Cone/Umbrella”
- The “Cylinder”
- High cylinder
- Low cylinder

Static defense vs. active defense [demonstrate these]

- **Static** (already blocked by your guard position)

Advantages:

- Limits your opponent’s options for attack.
- Always “on”

Disadvantages:

- Forces your opponent to reach into the “hard to block” zones for their attack.
- Allows your opponent to size up your defensive preferences and repost options.

- **Active** (moving to the blocking position while being attacked)

Advantages:

- Encourages your opponent to strike at the “easy to block targets”
- Keeps the exact nature of your block, and potential repost from it, a surprise.

Disadvantages:

- You are “open” until you move to block.
- If caught unaware, you will be hit

Examples of Static blocking are everywhere. Look at any fighter on the field and you can see what parts of their target area are covered from immediate attack. In truth we all use at least some Static blocking by how we carry our equipment.

My recommendation, however is to not over-do the Static blocking. Don't try and always cover every target area. Instead, use Active blocks to deal with known openings.

Active sword-blocks can have several variants:

- **Striking** at the blow.
 1. Clearly can be done as part of the figure8 pattern

[Practice]

[evaluate]

- **Receiving** the blow on the sword by moving it into its path.
 - Locate blocks on the figure8
 - Blocking with the flat
 - Ceding blocks (catching the blow early and letting it push your sword onto a figure 8)
 - Face the block (support with body rotation)
 - Find the repost from the block.
 - Turning blocks into blows

[practice]

[evaluate]

Some Useful Active Sword-Blocks: (demonstate and drill if time permits)

- Attack the opponents blade with a blow of your own, downward diagonals work well for this.
- Same as above, but catch their sword from underneath, sweeping it over your head and down with the downward diagonal

- Hanging block on the left leads to snap (part of the downward figure 8)
- High-Right Guard, used to block.. can be followed by any blow or thrust from this guard
- Outside hanging guard on the right leads to offside
- Inside hanging guard on the right leads to scorpion thrust or upward figure 8 blow from right

Conclusion to Blocking:

Start thinking of your opponent's attacks as an *opportunity* to use one of your block-to-blow techniques. An opponent is best defended when they are in their guard, ready to receive your attack. They are more vulnerable when they have committed to a particular defense, and more vulnerable still when they are executing an attack. This becomes the key to being "in the zone" in your fighting. Everything your opponent does, even attacking you, is viewed as a useful opportunity for you.

SOME TRICKY STUFF and afterthoughts

If you've drilled the circular use of the sword until its no longer in your conscious thoughts, here are some things you could be thinking about instead:

- Combining a shot with a falling advance
- Making short the Distance (against pole-weapons)
- Partial blow to reverse (body rotation... not arm)
- Thrust to cut
- Cut to thrust
- Smooth acceleration shots
- Throwing into the 'wake' behind their attack (while blocking with the shield)
- Jumping with shots (rising force or falling force)
- Using the circle of the body to power an offside shot and shield hook at the same time
- "crossing" your opponents sword to close distance safely
- Giving the sword hand a view of the target
- Hiding from their sword hand when blocking

CONCLUSION:

We have now explored a complete system of swordwork based on the principle of the circle. By understanding each movement as a part of a circular pattern, we get many benefits:

- The ability to strike with powerful shots from a great variety of starting positions and circumstances.
- Instinctual transitions from one blow to another creating easy, “on-the-fly”, combination shots.
- The ability to strike from many angles and combinations, resulting in sophisticated “trick-shots.”
- Protecting our joints from sudden stops and over-extensions, resulting in fighting longevity and faster blows.
- The integration of the block with the sword-blow, resulting in fluid block-to-blow combinations. Reposts.

Most importantly, once fully understood, this is a **simple** system. It is based on a concept for which we all have a natural, almost instinctual, feel. No longer are we distracted, during the fight, with trying to remember a host of special and mutually exclusive techniques. Everything done with the sword stems from one unifying principle. Just swing that weight around! Have fun with this. Explore. Create. Develop your own personal and unique understanding of its subtleties. Build for yourself the perfect toolbox. Drill it until it recedes from thought like the alphabet. Then work on becoming a craftsman. An artist. A Poet. Free from mind cluttering technique, explore the true heart of combat... the conversation and interplay of wills.

Thank You.

Things that can be gone over if there is time:

Thoughts on successfully hitting one's opponent:

One can make a successful hit without being blocked by:

- Throwing your shot at a visible opening faster than your opponent can move to block it.
- As above but into an opening that they don't realize is vulnerable (such as a slot shot between sword and shield)
- Throwing your blow during a lapse in the opponents attention. (These moments can be created by manipulating the timing and range of the fight. Note that complicated maneuvers like feints will fail if thrown during a same lapse of attention on their part.)
- Feinting such that your opponent commits to blocking a pretend shot, then hitting into the resulting opening (usually thrown opposite the feint. Conversion from cut to thrust and from thrust to cut are other examples as well.)
- Throwing a shot at a seemingly closed target but in such a way that it evades the simple block (wraps are an example of this)
- Throwing a shot at an open target but in such a way that it will evade the *likely* block that will be used to close that target (wraps can be an example of this as well. Also, throwing a higher angle shot than looks immediately necessary etc.)
- Creating an opening/preventing the shield block while throwing your blow. (eg. Shield-Hook and Shield-Press)
- Throwing a series of blows until your opponent fails to block one (Being able to hit a great variety of places smoothly from the completion of any blow is a great advantage in this [circle theory essential here]. A series of blows can end in one of the above mentioned methods as well. Putting a trick at the end of a series of blows greatly increases the chance your opponent will fail to see the trick coming.)

- Manipulating your opponent into an awkward and exposed position before throwing.(eg. Making them miss a shot. eg. Sword blocking in such a way that pushes their sword through and into an awkward finishing position...can even follow up such a bind by shield pressing their sword.)
- Throwing your shot as “repost”, immediately after blocking their shot. Some fighters are briefly more vulnerable after completing a blow. More advanced fighters return to a covered position necessitating the subtler timing in the next item.
- Throwing your shot at a target that becomes available as your opponent is in the *process* of attacking (eg. They passively defend their head in IronChicken with their sword. They throw a blow. You Throw your blow at their head where their sword used to be defending...while simultaneously blocking or evading their blow.)

Footwork:

- Lean forward and back

(Skim the feet near the ground/ knee-foot alignment/ Knees always bent...bend more if trouble)

- Advance (shuffle) (also as supporting a sword blow)
- Retreat (shuffle)
- Full step-through retreat (lead with the head)
- Full step-through advance (exposes left leg)

(scalloping steps with wide stances or on uneven ground)

- Half step-through advance
- Circling with sword side in towards opponent
(backwards and forwards)
- Deny the right (can be preceded by an advance)
- Deny the left (can be preceded by an advance)
- Lunge left
- Lunge right (short)
- Lunge right (long) (with cheater step)

- Jumping up
- Jumping onto
- Slippery surfaces (reducing friction on sole of foot by weight shift first)
- Running bent kneed (like Samauri in Kurasawa films)
- Knee walking (forward and turns) (from Aikido)
- Loading the feet for movement
 - weight over foot, then release pressure
 - outward pressure on both feet (outside of knee placement) release for movement.